

Classroom Research: What do ELT Teacher Trainees Experience When Performing Collaborative Group-Work Tasks?

(Received January 18, 2017-Approved March, 26, 2017)

Şule Çelik Korkmaz¹

Abstract

This classroom research firstly examines strengths and weaknesses of performing cooperative group work tasks within the context of “Teaching English to Young Learners” course by dwelling on the most exigent problems to offer solutions to provide learners more qualified educational experiences and have more empowered pre-service learners. This study was conducted with 75 teacher trainees enrolled in Uludag University Faculty of Education ELT Department in Turkey. The data were collected via both quantitative and qualitative instruments such as open-ended and semi-structured questionnaires in addition to semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that the problems were mostly related to equal work sharing, and conflict among group members. Finally, suggested solutions were offered in the light of the interview results.

Key Words: Teacher education, teacher trainees, teaching English to young learners, group work, cooperative tasks.

Introduction

Traditional activities in teacher education such as following transmission product-oriented theories have fallen short of the mark due to the prevalence of constructivist, process-oriented theories of learning, teaching, and teacher learning which follow critical pedagogy, post-method and sociocultural perspectives (Crandall, 2000; Craig, 2010; Jadidi & Bagheri, 2014). However, innovative methods have been mired in challenges (Craig, 2010) as a result of the new curriculum and education/teaching methods (Hamano, 2008). Thus, teacher trainees (TTs) should be provided opportunities to practice what they have learnt to enable them to apply ideal philosophies in the reality of teaching (Gordon, 2007; Maaranen & Krokfors, 2008; Pierce & Kalkman, 2003) and to become autonomous and critically reflective participants rather than being recipients of predetermined and prescribed knowledge to shape their individual professional experiences (Jadidi & Bagheri, 2014).

Ministry of National Education in Turkey enacted educational reform in 1997 and teaching a foreign language which was previously starting in the 6th grade was lowered to the 4th grade with this legislation (MoNE, 1997). Concurrent with this curriculum change, the teacher education program in Turkey was revised and a new course “Teaching English to Young Learners” (TEYL) which was a one-term course including two hours of theory was introduced to equip pre-service learners with the

¹ Dr. Şule Çelik Korkmaz, Uludag University, Education Faculty, Department of English Language Teaching, scelik@uludag.edu.tr

course “Teaching English to Young Learners” (TEYL) which was a one-term course including two hours of theory was introduced to equip pre-service learners with the required knowledge and skills to be able to teach elementary school learners in the most appropriate way (Gürsoy et al., 2013). Despite generic learning which focuses on knowledge that is formulated and contextualized within traditional higher education programs of study, context-specific learning places emphasis on ‘learning by doing’ (Rossin & Hyland, 2003). In pursuit of training more competent teachers, the course that was given only theoretically became a two-term course including two hours of theory and two hours of practice. As stated by Özen Baykent (2015, p. 525,526), “All the practices in the field of education logically anticipate the presence of educational theories. A kind of theory lies behind all educational practices.” Because the revised program necessitates teacher educators to seek the opportunities for finding more efficient ways in educating TTs to bridge the gap between theory and practice, it becomes urgent that TTs be trained by actively practising what they have been taught to construct their knowledge through bringing together university-based theory and school-based practice.

In addition, young learners are believed to be taught through activities which should involve “doing” and performing tasks (Haznedar & Uysal, 2010); thus, TTs need to be trained through task-based learning. Moreover, ‘collaborative group work’ is considered as one of the most effective ways to deal with the changing structure of good teaching and practices from generation to generation (Askell-Williams, Murray-Harvey & Lawson, 2005). Hence, performing cooperative group work tasks as an innovative technique would enable TTs to think, discuss, synthesize and apply their perceived knowledge gained in the TEYL course.

Cooperative Group Work Tasks

The concept ‘task’ was defined differently depending on various contexts of use and it was studied from different perspectives (Ellis, 2000; Klapper, 2003; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Virjo, Holmberg-Marttila & Mattila, 2001). From the viewpoint of this study, a task could be defined as ‘a set of goal-directed and purpose-driven activities, performed by an individual or a working group, transforming inputs into outputs (Killich et al., 1999, p. 325). Moreover, ‘task’ has been an umbrella term for a variety of different pair work and group work task types, whose purposes can be broadly classified under ‘independent collaboration’ and/or ‘communication’ (Bruton, 2002). Thus, it is not misguided to state that tasks are actually communal pair /group work or peer work (Bruton, 2005).

The literature established a connection between cooperative learning (CL) and some prominent hypotheses and theories such as the Input Hypothesis, the Interaction Hypothesis, The Output Hypothesis, Sociocultural Theory, Individual Differences, and Learner Autonomy (for further see Jacops, 2002). For instance, the Input Hypothesis

assumes that SLA is driven by comprehensible input by emphasizing that input from group mates may be more likely to be comprehensible as group members' language levels may be roughly equal (Krashen & Terrel, 1983). However, it becomes questionable if peers provide imperfect input which leads to members to acquire each other's errors. In this case, group work shifts dependency from the teacher to the most knowledgeable person within the group, so what is learnt might be wrong for the other group members (Woolfolk, 1998).

Furthermore, performing cooperative tasks is related to the social pedagogical aspects of learning because two or more students are encouraged or required to work together to complete assigned tasks (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Watson, 1992) as CL provides learners a sense of importance and individual worth (Macaro, 1997). Because TTs tend to persuade others to accept their ideas so as to reach consensus, they develop critical thinking when critically analyzing and synthesizing the others' ideas (Dikici & Yavuzer, 2006). Moreover, when TTs take charge of their own learning progress in and out of class environments through different tasks, it becomes a crucial step in the development of learner autonomy and skills of self-reliance. To put it differently, group activities enable students to be away from dependence on teachers to enhance "learner autonomy" through cooperative learning which directs learners to have a role in planning, controlling, and evaluating their own learning. Thus, teacher education methodologies should promote the improvement of cooperative learning skills to prepare TTs for the use of these skills in their future classrooms by getting insight and instruction on how to use CL during teacher education process (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2010; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Gillies, 2007; Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Sarwar & Hussain 2010; Veenman et al., 2002).

The study of Gabriel, Peiria and Allington (2011) can be accepted as a scientific evidence to support the significance of CL for teachers. The study was conducted with 30 4th-grade elementary school teachers from different states of the US who adopt different educational philosophies and use variety of methods, materials, and programs to investigate what factors influence their development. The study revealed three important factors for the development of exemplary teachers, namely engaging in professional development programs, collaboration with the colleagues in discussion and reflection about classroom decisions, and a sense of engaged autonomy. It is quite clear that CL is very crucial to become exemplary and effective teachers. Thus, CL should be integrated in teacher education programs.

Despite being a very prominent aspect of being an effective teacher, there is a dearth of research aiming to improve TTs' cooperative learning skills through group work in the literature. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the following studies are striking as they reveal strengths and weaknesses of group work in detail to increase the quality of teacher education programs.

For instance, de Jong, Cullity, Haig, Sharp, Spiers and Wren (2011) conducted

a study in a teacher education program at Edith Cowan University to investigate 307 K-7 preservice teachers' perceptions of group-based learning via a thirty-item survey, focus group interviews, and action research including observations, discussion and field notes. The study showed that group based learning promotes preservice teachers' learning via advancing their skills, capabilities and understanding; developing social and learning networks and employability and interpersonal skills; sharing knowledge and ideas with others; and facilitating learning through collaboration. On the other hand, the study reported some challenges in organizing and sustaining a community of learners: 'roles, expectations of GBL'; 'group selection and structure'; 'equity and fairness'; and 'conflict resolution'.

In addition, Erdamar and Demirel (2010) investigated the ideas of 245 of 3rd and 4th grade preservice students of Gazi University, Faculty of Vocational Education who were attending variety of teaching programs related to the positive and negative aspects of group work to use group work more effectively. The data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews. The overall results revealed that some of the participants found group work effective due to the fact that group work enables TTs to have the ability to talk in front of a group; attain the experience of teaching; allow for participation, improve the sense of responsibility, increase sharing and helping, and to support the interaction among individuals. On the other hand, more than half of them thought that group work was not effective owing to the following problems: lack of comprehensive knowledge of some of the TTs, taking over the same work by a few students not by every group member, lack of some TTs' presentation skills, difficulty in reaching consensus among group members, having limited time to prepare the tasks, not being guided by lecturers adequately enough during the group work. Finally, the study indicated the importance of the way of carrying out group work and suggested that students' sense of responsibility should be improved, evaluation should be made individually as they do not want to get the same score as a group, hard topics should be taught by the instructors not by prospective teachers, and distribution of the tasks in the group should be made by instructors.

As seen, the way of conducting group work appeared as an important issue to perform group work effectively. Thus, it is important to provide scaffolding to TTs. Although it was not conducted with TTs, the study conducted by Krifflick and Mullan (2007) was very effective to indicate the effects of providing scaffolding to learners to perform group work more effectively. The study which was carried out with 103 Health Behaviour Change students attending at the University of Wollongong /Australia aimed at developing a scaffolded approach to group work by investigating the participants' perspectives via a subject review questionnaire and a focus group discussion. The findings revealed at first the students' dissatisfaction of group-based learning as follows; the scheduling of meeting times, the equitable completion of tasks, the belief that the language skills of international students impede the group effort, and

assessing their individual achievements at a lower standard owing to these combined factors. However, following the completion of the structured tutorial sessions in which the students became aware of the components of group work with tutors through introductory activity, a template for peer assessment and a template for student evaluation of the group work, most of them considered group work activity positive and even 'essential' as it further developed their social, personal and career oriented skills such as intrapersonal relationships, communication, organisational and management skills. They were also more conscious about some drawbacks of performing group work tasks and more motivated to overcome these problems to contribute to the group's outcomes. It was also reported that task clarity, involvement in the assessment and having prior knowledge related to the expected outcomes of the group work helped students to avoid and resolve some potential group work problems.

In the literature, by taking negative and positive aspects of group work into account, some valuable suggestions were provided to increase the value of group work. The positive relationships among group members motivate them to conform to group norms in order to achieve group cohesion (Roseth, Johnson & Johnson, 2008). To build group cohesion and cooperation, members of a group should be accountable to each other (Rossin & Hyland, 2003). Therefore, each student within a group needs to make sure that all group members understand the learning task, participate actively, and contribute equally to be productive and successful as a group (Lotan, 2004). The relationship between grouping and learning depends on the size of group and tasks which may vary by curriculum tasks (Kutnick et al., 2005). Learning will be more efficient when teacher educators carefully consider the relationship between grouping size, interaction type and learning tasks. When the case is group size, the small group of 4-6 pupils was the most common whereas the others such as whole classes, individuals, dyads, and triads were rare (Kutnick et al., 2002). Thus, it is obvious that TTs have powerful learning experiences when making decisions about how to work together on different types of group tasks, planning process and products together (Sharan, 2002).

To sum up, it is suggested that teacher educators must reach consensus on the basic guidelines for the design of successful programs, and they must be wide-open about the many problems involved to be solved (Sharan, 2002). Therefore, it is crucial to conduct classroom research to solve problems faced within the class to have better procedure for the courses in teacher education programs. As seen in the aforementioned studies, performing cooperative group work tasks revealed both advantages and disadvantages. Similar to those researchers, the significant questions in the researcher's mind are that how TTs will implement cooperative group work tasks when teaching to YLs in the realms of their future classes unless they do not scrutinize its weaknesses and strengths and how teacher educators will use this method effectively with TTs without investigating its strengths and weaknesses to train TTs more

effectively. Thus, the researcher, as an instructor of TEYLs course, aimed at exploring whether the TTs who were taking this course and who were required to perform a variety of TEYL tasks cooperatively had similar experiences with the participants of the aforementioned studies.

Methodology

The Context of the Study

The study was carried out in the four-hour TEYL course which is a compulsory course placed in the fifth and sixth terms of an eight-term English language teaching (ELT) teacher education program in Turkey with two hours of theory and two hours of practice. The objectives of the course are to make students be aware of the characteristics of child ELT learners; have knowledge about a variety of appropriate ways and techniques to teach young learners; understand how to develop a critical understanding of TEYLs; develop their own criteria about their own beliefs and attitudes to teach children; and gain knowledge about how to implement theoretical information into practice with various classroom activities.

The methodology of the instructor for the theoretical part was lecturing which is defined as an effective way for introducing a new topic, giving background information, and motivating students to learn more on their own (Woolfolk, 1998). Discussion part was also included to let TTs ask for clarification, express their own opinions to broaden the perspectives regarding the particular subjects in the course. The students were required to read, synthesize and be prepared to discuss the reading assignments in class for the theoretical part of the course.

On the other hand, the instructor organized the practice part of the lesson around a task-based approach. In accordance with this purpose, the instructor created 10 tasks; each of which was derived from different chapters of the book by Moon (2000), the main input of the course, and from various related articles accompanied by the book. Depending on the class size, the instructor decides whether to provide learners opportunities to prefer their study types (individual / pair work / group work) so as to perform each TEYL task. In some academic terms, the classes might become too crowded to enable learners to choose their own study types due to limited time to allocate equal time to each learner, pair or group. In that case, all learners are required to work with groups to manage course time appropriately. However, the class size was appropriate in the term in which the study was conducted; thus, the researcher let the learners prefer their study types to perform each task. Hence, the tasks were performed in a variety of study types; some TTs worked individually, some in pairs, and some in groups.

Moreover, each week the learners, were required to be prepared out-of the classroom for the target task regarding the subject lectured and discussed in the theoretical course. Therefore, TTs find opportunities to practice what they have learnt in the theoretical part of the lesson. They were evaluated through on-going assessment based

on their products (totally 10 weekly tasks; each of which is evaluated over 10) and the total score they got over 100 is considered as their midterm exam grade. Since each group submits one product, all group members receive the same grade without considering individual contribution. In addition, they have overall assessment at the end of the term through final exam to check each TT's knowledge about TEYL.

Research Design

The present study is a classroom research with an action research design as it provides not only descriptive and interpretive accounts of the classroom but also change and improvement in what happens in the classroom (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Conducting action research as the design of classroom-based research is very prominent for both instructors and TTs. In that, teachers could reflect on what they do to develop and improve teaching and bridge the gap between theory and practice. Moreover, TTs are exposed to action research earlier to be prepared to use it in their future classrooms (Odhiambo, 2010).

The study followed a mixed methods research paradigm. Qualitative data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, while quantitative data were gathered through an 11-item five-point Likert-scale structured questionnaire to triangulate the results by examining the convergence, inconsistency or contradiction of the evidence obtained from these two different research methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene, 2008). The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What strengths and weaknesses do TTs experience when performing TEYL tasks as a group?
2. What are the most/the least important difficulties experienced when performing cooperative group work tasks? What might be the solutions for the most exigent problems?

The Participants of the Study

There were 125 TTs who were taking TEYL course from the researcher in the Faculty of Education ELT Department at Uludag University, Bursa/ Turkey. Spriggs (2010) suggested that learners should be informed about the scope of the research in order to show respect for them and enable them to express their ideas about whether or not they want to participate in the study.

With this purpose in mind, the researcher explained her desire to conduct this classroom research in collaboration with them to provide future TTs with better TEYL course methodology. Thus, among 125 TTs, 75 of them who preferred working in groups to perform TEYL tasks became volunteers to be involved in this study (12 of them were male). The participants who preferred working alone and working in pairs were not considered within the scope of this study. Moreover, seven volunteer students

were conducted a semi- structured interview to deepen the findings obtained from the questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three different data collection instruments were used in the present study. These are respectively an open-ended questionnaire, an 11-item five Likert-type structured questionnaire, and a semi- structured interview with the TTs.

Because the related literature revealed some strengths and weaknesses of group work, the participants were asked to express their positive and negative views and experiences with regard to performing TEYL tasks as a group by answering the following questions to create an item pool for the structured questionnaire;

1. What are the advantages of performing TEYL tasks as a group?
2. What are the disadvantages of performing TEYL tasks as a group?

The language of the questions was English, but the TTs were free to use their native language (Turkish) to write their answers, as the researcher did not want the language to be a handicap for the participants to share their ideas. Second, because the researcher aimed at finding out the most exigent problems of performing cooperative tasks, the participants were given 11-item five-point Likert-type structured questionnaire developed by the researcher whose items were formed by taking the results of the open-ended questionnaire with regard to the disadvantages of cooperative group work into account. The reason for not including the points related to the advantages of cooperative learning is to develop facilitative solutions for the most striking problems which might increase TTs' positive experiences when performing cooperative group work tasks. Third, a semi-structured interview was conducted with seven participants to have triangulation and to delve into the results obtained from the questionnaire. They were asked to share their experiences, feelings and ideas about performing their tasks as a group in addition to their suggestions for the most prominent problems revealed from the questionnaire.

Data analysis procedure included two steps depending on two different data. The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire and the extracts of the interviews were analyzed through content analysis of the participants' manuscripts by identifying common ideas and experiences. The negative and positive recurrent points deriving from the open ended questionnaire were reported separately in table 1 to be used as the items in the structured questionnaire. The interview results were transcribed and content-analyzed to support, to counter check, and to discuss the findings derived from the questionnaire. On the other hand, the quantitative data obtained from the structured questionnaire developed by the researcher were analyzed through SPSS by using the method of descriptive statistics to yield frequencies, means and std. deviations for the analysis of each item in the questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alfa

coefficient was found 0.75 which is acceptable. Therefore, the structured questionnaire could be said to have acceptable internal consistency.

Results

The results were organized under two subheadings. The first part revealed the findings of the open-ended questionnaire related to the advantages and disadvantages of performing TEYLs tasks as a group (see Table 1). The second part indicated the findings of the structured questionnaire regarding the most/the least important difficulties of performing TEYL tasks as a group (see Table 2), which was supported by the interview results.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages the tts experienced when performing cooperative TEYL tasks

Advantages of performing tasks in groups	Disadvantages of performing tasks in groups
We can finish the tasks in a short time.	Conflict among group members might make difficult to reach consensus about the task especially when each member gets different points from the theoretical course.
It provides a rich project due to the different experiences of the students.	It might not be certain to understand who contributes more in the completion of the task.
Sharing the work makes the task easy and more enjoyable.	Undeserving group members can get the same grade.
We can create different ideas while brainstorming the issue.	There might be decreased motivation due to inequality in the distribution of the work among group members.
We feel more confident.	It is sometimes difficult to get together.
It reveals team spirit and a person becomes less self-centered.	Innovative ideas might not be chosen to be performed due to their being more demanding.
It is less costly due to economical sharing such as buying materials and printing.	Unbalanced between the number of the group members and the difficulty level of the tasks.
It becomes easy to prepare materials and to create different contexts.	One of or some of the group members want(s) to be a star and begin(s) to show off.
It helps us become more sociable, so friends develop relationships.	A very detailed person cannot be practical and might slow down the completion of the task.
We learn how to be patient and broad-minded.	Disagreements among the group members might damage the friendship.
We learn how to cooperate and share.	It requires making a sacrifice when working with another person.
It develops empathy.	
It develops classroom interaction.	
We learn how to be disciplined.	

Advantages and Disadvantages the TTs Experienced When Performing Cooperative TEYL Tasks

Content analysis results of the open ended questionnaire revealed some recurrent themes with regard to the negative and positive aspects of performing TEYL tasks in groups. As seen in Table 1, group work provides various advantages to TTs. For instance, it enables them to be more sociable and cooperative and it saves their time, energy and money as they finish the tasks in a more creative and fruitful way by spending less money on the materials and prints they are going to use when presenting their

tasks. Furthermore, they learn how to be patient and tolerant to the other members' ideas by empathizing and being broad minded.

Table 1 also presents the recurrent themes with regard to the disadvantages of performing tasks in groups which were used to develop an item pool for the structured questionnaire. The following section reported the drawbacks of performing cooperative TEYL tasks with suggested solutions.

The Most/the Least Important Difficulties the TTs Experienced When Performing Cooperative TEYL Tasks and Suggested Solutions for the most exigent ones.

The statistical results of the structured questionnaire indicated the most shared problems the participants experienced when working with other TTs (see table 2). Because the results showed high agreement on most items, 'agree' and 'certainly agree' scores were calculated together in the text despite the presentation of the results in table 2 as 5-point likert scale.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics addressing the TTs' ideas about group work problems.

Items	Certainly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Certainly Agree %	\bar{X}	SD
1- It is difficult to get together	12.6	12.6	8	34.5	32.2	3.60	1.38
2- Conflict among group members might make difficult to reach consensus about the completion of the tasks	5.7	11.5	14.9	40.2	27.6	3.72	1.15
3- A very detailed person cannot be practical and might slow down the completion of the tasks.	5.7	11.5	16.1	35.6	31.3	3.74	1.18
4- It might not be certain who contributed more in the completion of the tasks.	2.3	9.2	16.1	43.7	28.7	3.87	1.00
5- Getting the same grade with undeserving group members decreases my motivation as a deserver one.	4.6	9.2	16.1	40.2	29.9	3.81	1.10
6- Indifferent group members tend to finish the tasks imprecisely as they content with imperfect products.	1.1	11.5	12.6	56.3	18.4	3.79	0.91
7- Inequality in the distribution of the work in the group decreases my motivation.	4.6	16.1	8	41.4	29.9	3.75	1.18
8- One or some of the group members want (s) to be a star and begin(s) to show off.	14.9	26.4	19.5	18.4	20.7	3.03	1.37
9- There might be mismatch between the task difficulty and the number of group members dealing with the task.	11.5	18.4	16.1	32.2	21.8	3.34	1.31
10- Conflict among group members might damage the friendship.	6.9	13.8	11.5	26.4	41.4	3.81	1.29
11- It requires making a sacrifice when working another person.	5.7	2.3	6.9	42.5	42.5	4.13	1.04

Table 2 showed that the most agreed point (item 11; $M = 4.13$) is about making a sacrifice when working with another person. Most of the participants (85%) agreed that every work including cooperation requires one person or the other to make a sacrifice. The following extracts indicated the reasons for making a sacrifice.

I4: *...Every group member cannot contribute to the completion of the group tasks equally. For instance, I know that one of my friends has enough knowledge about the subject but he cannot transfer his knowledge easily. He is too introvert, shy, and anxious; thus, he mostly keeps in the background. I think that we should complement each other and mostly I tend to help him and do what he should do. In short, in one sense I am making a sacrifice... ”.*

I7: *”...Sometimes I feel alone in the group. Sometimes some group members misunderstand the given task and some members do not perform their own responsibilities. This lays a burden on me and 1 or 2 other responsible members provide support as best as they can. Thus, we become overfatigued and feel more stressful as we have to allocate much more time... ”.*

I5: *“ ... In fact if you work with others, you always make a sacrifice. For instance, I mostly have to delay or cancel my personal plans to be able to arrange our meeting to do the tasks. In addition, every person has different personality traits and the level of responsibility. I did many things that I normally never do... ”.*

As seen, each interviewee considered making a sacrifice not only in terms of having different personality traits and responsibility level but also in terms of timing and their personal plans. With regard to group work, it is noted that the participants mostly had problems about the unequal distribution of work among group members (item 4, $M = 3.87$). 72.4 % of the participants thought that it was difficult to understand who contributed more in the completion of the task. Accordingly, the second most important problem was about getting the same grade as a group (item 5, $M = 3.81$). To the extent that, 70.1 % of them agreed that their motivation decreased when they got the same grade with undeserving group members. The following extracts show how the interviewees were affected negatively from the aforementioned problems.

I4: *“... For better or worse, we can complete the tasks. However, I am depressed and get angry when I cannot show how much contribution I personally provide although I do much more than others. I know the truth; thus, I become intolerant and reluctant to do the following tasks... ”*

I1: *“...Every person does not progress at the same rate due to having different perception level. Moreover, not everyone has the same level of commitment. Only a few members work through the tasks. I am very responsible person; thus, I sleep with a clear conscience. I can observe my own progress and I believe that I will be a competent teacher but I am very worried about*

those who are not developing themselves as prospective teachers. They are so unconscious and indifferent. I think that they will experience difficulties when they become real teachers..."

I7: *"...Each group member must make an effort to find required items and to do what is needed. Of course we expect every member to contribute intentionally without warning and losing time to assign equal work to each member. Unfortunately, the situation is not as expected..."*

Due to the fact that the inequity and unfair distribution of work among group members is appeared as one of the most exigent problems of collaborative group work, the researcher decided to solve this problem by discussing the possible solutions with the interviewees so as to increase their motivation. The following quotations summarize their suggestions.

I5: *"...Actually, group work has many advantages except for the presence of those who get lost in the shuffle. This problem could be solved if the instructor requires us to submit personal report. Thus, the teacher can identify who contributes the most and the least ..."*

I7: *"...Group members can evaluate each other but no one knows, only the teacher, what they write about each other..."*

I6: *"...Awareness should be created with regard to what an effective group work means. Firstly, every TT should understand that group work requires individual responsibility although it seems difficult to display the behaviour which has not been developed so far. To that end, teacher educator would explain what group work really means by focusing on its requirements. Secondly, the task of every group member could be displayed on the group chart and each member could get an individual mark based on his/her performance. Thus, the group could complete the task with equal individual contribution..."*

I4: *"...During first weeks we were experiencing more problems. But later we found the solution of most of our problems by distributing equal work to each group member. We achieved this via cooperation but for those who cannot achieve, the instructor should direct them to guarantee equal contribution before submitting the final product..."*

I7: *"...We are university students and prospective teachers so that we should know how to develop personal discipline and we can read supplementary resources to get ideas about achieving autonomy. If we take our own responsibility for our professional development, it will not be necessary to be controlled by the others in the groups. Thus, instead of giving responsibility to each other, each member should increase his/her awareness about the importance of performing the tasks on our future job by being more autonomous..."*

As seen, TTs suggested the following solutions to provide equal work sharing among group members: blind peer evaluation besides the evaluation of the teacher educator, equal work sharing among group members, and developing autonomy as an individual TT.

They also complain about indifferent people within groups (item 6, $M = 3.79$) who tended to finish the tasks imprecisely. 74.7 % of them agreed that indifferent members were contented with imperfect product; on the other hand, 66.9 % of the participants agreed that the presence of a very detailed person in the group (item 3, $M = 3.74$) might slow down the completion of the task. The extracts below indicate the effects of their differences on their feelings and the completion of the tasks.

I4: *"...Dominant characters can motivate the weak ones. Those who are very detailed and dominant can give different roles to the others..."*

I6: *"...One day when we were preparing one of our tasks, one of our friends who was very detailed was dwelled on the gender of the character we are going to use to create a meaningful context for our activity by always asking the same question (Should the character be a girl or a boy?). It was not an important aspect of the task but we lost a lot of time just to convince her of thinking about the same issue although there were many other things to do. Thus, it took longer period of time to complete that task..."*

I7: *"...We are different in terms of our abilities and personality traits. Some of us are good at analytical thinking thus can evaluate the steps to be taken to complete the target task whereas some others are good at art and crafts thus they can prepare more attractive and interesting materials to perform the task. It is clear that some people are naturally more skilled at one or the other. In addition, some of us have analytic thinking while the others have holistic thinking. Thus, when we have conflict, we might have sensitivity and disappointment and sometimes we might become very angry because we come together not to have a chat but to perform tasks. As we get grade from our group task, we might be aggressive..."*

In addition, they had problems about the emotional results of having conflict among group members (item10, $M = 3.68$). More than half of the students (67.8 %) agreed that disagreements among the group members might damage the friendship. The same percentage of the students (67.8 %) stated that conflict among group members might make it difficult to reach consensus about the task especially when each member in the group gets different points from the theoretical course.

I4: *"... If only 3 or 4 people among 7 members take over responsibility for completing the tasks, we have more mental and physical fatigue than the others. Thus, we start to gossip about each other. This decreases our motivation to work as a group..."*

I5: “... two different views of the two dominant people within the group might create a conflict among group members, which damages our friendship most of the time. In fact, I can see someone for what one really is. I can read people easily anymore...”.

I2: “... We formed a group with close friends. Thus, we mostly might lose our sense of responsibility. We cannot achieve being professional. We get crossed easily with each other and it becomes difficult to trust each other. Moreover, as we give harsh criticism, we experience more conflict and less success...”.

The aforementioned problems which might hinder reaching consensus about the planning, preparing and completing the tasks might damage the friendship among group members and decrease the level of benefit TTs could get from collaborative group work as understood by the quotation below:

I1: “... Working as an individual is the easiest way, because throughout the period, I had difficulties in groups. Some participants didn't participate. Some ideas were not appropriate for the tasks, but when I disagreed with them, they misunderstood and they did not accept being criticized. Especially, one of my group friends made me crazy and I felt depressed. Individual study gives you a chance to be free and improve yourself as a teacher...”.

The statements above signify the difficulty of reaching consensus as a group and how this situation affects one of the group members' feelings in a negative way.

Finally, the results revealed the mismatch between the task difficulty and the number of group members dealing with the task (item 9, $M = 3.34$). The statements of TTs as to this issue were as follows:

I3: “...if we are required to prepare hand-made materials to be used in the activities during class presentation, we had better work with our friends to be more creative and to save our time...”.

I7: “...When I become a teacher, I will be alone in the classroom. Thus, I prefer working alone when performing some of the tasks such as teacher talk and teacher support...”.

I5: “...Paper works such as preparing a lesson plan, visual presentation of a class rule, preparing an assessment profile are generally prepared by an individual teacher. Therefore, it is not necessary to work in groups for these tasks. We can complete them as an individual...”.

As seen, TTs preferred working as a group for demanding tasks which required more time such as art and craft materials and different perspectives for the task completion whereas they preferred working individually for the tasks which required paper work.

Discussion and Conclusion

Lecturing what is theoretically appropriate is not a sufficient and an effective method for educating ELT TTs as they need to be provided opportunity to extend their learning via performing various theory-driven tasks. In pursuit of providing TTs the most effective methodology to bridge the gap between theory and practice, this study revealed that there are various points teacher educators should consider due to the complexity and diversity of teaching and teaching methodologies in addition to students' differences.

This study only aimed at exploring cooperative group work problems experienced by the TTs within TEYL course 1 as a classroom research to hear their voices and to let them announce their problems to find out solutions. The study revealed some group work problems which were in line with the studies conducted by Erdamar and Demirel (2010), de Jong *et al.* (2011), and Krifflick and Mullan (2007). Among those problems, the reason for having *conflict among group members* might occur due to the fact that the participants cannot internalize the importance of “cooperative study” and promote “learner autonomy”. Therefore, before performing the tasks, learners should firstly be educated as suggested in the study of Krifflick and Mullan (2007) to work in harmony, to keep them focused on the task completion, and to become more autonomous learners to be able to learn interdependently (Sancar, 2001; Schellens, Van Keer, Valcke & De Wever, 2007). Furthermore, via improving their autonomy, TTs do not need to make a sacrifice when working with another person, which they mentioned as one of the group work problems. In addition, they must be taught the social skills such as making eye-contact as an important part of improving listening skills, complimenting others to value the participation of every group member to group success, clarification through brainstorming or getting help and asking questions appropriately (for more details, see, e.g., Mercendetti, 2010) to increase the quality of cooperation and to solve the problems regarding conflict among group members especially within groups with 4 or 5 members. Moreover, as suggested by Veenman *et al.* (2002), the numbers of the group members could be decreased into 3 or 4 to obtain more meaningful face-to-face interaction and to be able to work together as they are expected to.

Similar to the participants of the study conducted by Erdamar and Demirel (2010), the participants of the study complained about unfair distribution of work among group members. With regard to the problem of *work sharing* within the group, individual accountability which is also mentioned by Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1998) would be a fair solution in addition to the suggestions of Pierce and Kalkman (2003) who stated that each TT could develop his/her ideas by himself/herself before combining his/her thoughts with others in collaborative groups. To put it differently, the wisdom of the group reaches consensus on the final synthesis, but the students' grades are based on the piece of work they contribute individually to the group product outcome (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). As suggested by Erdamar and Demirel (2010), distribu-

tion of the tasks in the group should be made by instructors. With this purpose in mind, teacher educators might create a checklist indicating the contribution of each group member to keep track of an individual's contribution to the completion of group task and to assess more fairly both the quality and quantity of individual contribution. Thus, nobody can become indifferent within groups as they will get back what they put in.

The study was specific to "TEYL course I" within the scope of classroom research, so generalizability of the findings was not considered as a validity issue by the researcher. However, further research could be conducted to explore problems faced by other TTs within other courses in teacher education programs which require collaborative studies in order to get broader perspectives on the issues and to offer more systematic solutions for the emerged problems.

In the light of the results obtained from the present study, some implications might be offered for teacher educators who crave for moving traditional teacher education techniques to more innovative ones to increase the quality of their course procedures. Collaborative task-based approach should be followed as the methodology of teacher education courses which comprise both theory and practice to make what is lectured theoretically more comprehensible and memorable. As suggested in the study of Gabriel et al. (2011), collaboration with teachers in your own grade is the best way of getting support to become exemplary teachers. In line with the study conducted by Dikici and Yavuzer (2006), this study also suggests CL as an essential learning method in training TTs. In that, through CL, TTs are given opportunities to work with their peers to perform the tasks which enable them to help each other to gain a wide range of skills, knowledge and experiences required for their future jobs. However, teacher educators should consider possible negative interpersonal experiences that TTs might have when performing collaborative group tasks and try to manage this process as effective as possible. Thus, the following actions could be taken by them at the beginning of the term to minimize or overcome possible drawbacks of performing collaborative group work tasks:

1. Inform learners about the effectiveness of cooperative task-based learning in developing teacher competences by clarifying objectives of each task.
2. Try to convince learners about the importance of cooperative group work to motivate them more.
3. Conduct debriefing in an open and honest way regarding possible problems that they might experience when performing tasks as groups.
4. Explain the reasons for having such problems by taking the results revealed in this study such as misinterpretation of the tasks, conflict among group members, different personality traits of group members, racing against time, lack of personal autonomy, lack of social skills, lack of social accountability, unequal contribution from group members in the completion of group tasks, the mismatch between the difficulty level of tasks and size of group members.

5. Provide some tips about the ways of developing interpersonal and group work skills to build stronger interpersonal relationships within groups. Favourably, invite an expert in interpersonal communication by allocating course time to train learners in a way that they can develop their social skills and do self-evaluation as to the issue.
6. Give suggestions about how each member can relate himself/herself to the whole group to make them feel sense of belonging.
7. Prepare a checklist to distribute equal work to each group member when performing collaborative group task not to have similar problems experienced in this classroom research.
8. Pre-analyze the difficulty of the tasks by taking the size of group members into account to determine the most appropriate study type for each target task.
9. Let learners understand what learner-centred education really means as opposed to teacher-centred education by stressing the significance of being an autonomous learner who should take his/her own responsibility for their own learning.
10. Explain your criteria to evaluate each group task and invite each group to do self evaluation by taking the defined criteria into account before performing the tasks in the classroom.
11. Allow learners to contact with you when they are in need of your help via electronic media such as e-mail, facebook or the computer module available in the university to scaffold their cooperative work and to better monitor the process.

To sum up, it is hoped that the results of this study bring some insights and suggest ways for the improvement of the teacher education course procedures which integrate theory and practice, particularly for TEYL courses which include similar tasks.

References

- Askell-Williams, H., Murray-Harvey, R. & Lawson, M. J. (2005). Extending teacher education students' mental models of teaching and learning through problem-based learning. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Parramatta, NSW, 28 November.
- Bruton, A. (2002) Point and counterpoint: From tasking purposes to purposing tasks. *ELT Journal*, 56(3), 280-288.
- Bruton, A. (2005). Task-based language teaching: for the state secondary FL classroom? *Language Learning Journal*, 31(2), 55-68.
- Chamberlin-Quinlisk, C. (2010). Cooperative learning as method and model in second-language teacher education. *Intercultural Education*, 21 (3), 243–255.
- Craig, C. (2010). Coming full circle: From teacher reflection to classroom action and

- places in-between. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(4), 423–435.
- Crandall, J. (2000). Language teacher education. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 20, 34-58.
- Creswell, J. V. & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and Conducting Mixed methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- de Jong, T. A., Cullity, M., Haig, Y., Sharp, S., Spiers, S., & Wren, J. (2011). Enabling group-based learning in teacher education: A case study of student experience. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(5), 93-106.
- Dikici, A. & Yavuzer, Y. (2006). The effects of cooperative learning on the abilities of pre-service art teacher candidates to lesson planning in Turkey. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 31(2), 36-44.
- Ellis, R. (2000). Task-based research and language pedagogy. *Language Teaching Research*, 4(3), 193–200.
- Freman, D. & Richards, J. C. (1996). *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gabriel, R & Peiria, J. D. & Allington, R. (2011). Exemplary Teacher Voices on their own development, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92 (8), 37-41
- Gillies, R. M. (2007). *Cooperative Learning: Integrating Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gillies, R. M. & Boyle, M. (2010). Teachers' reflections on cooperative learning: Issues of implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26 (4), 933-940.
- Gordon, M. (2007). *Introduction*. In M. Gordon & T. V. O'Brien (eds.), *Bridging theory and practice in teacher education*, Sense Publisher: Rotterdam/Taipei.
- Gürsoy, E. , Çelik Korkmaz, Ş. & Atak Damar, E. (2013). Foreign language teaching within 4+4+4 education system in Turkey: language teachers' voices. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 53(A), 59-74
- Greene, J.C. (2008). Is mixed methods social inquiry a distinctive methodology? *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. 2(1), 7-22.
- Hamano, T. (2008). Educational reform and teacher education in Vietnam, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 34(4), 397–410.
- Haznedar, B. & Uysal, H.H. (2010) *Embracing theory and practice in teaching languages to young learners*. In B. Haznedar & H.H. Uysal (eds.). *Handbook for Teaching Foreign Languages To Young Learners In Primary Schools* (pp.1-20). Ankara: Anı Publications.
- Jadidi, E., & Bagheri, M. S. (2014). ELT pre-service teacher education: Major trends and shifts. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 7(4), 181-190.
- Johnson, D. & Johnson, R.T. (1999). *Learning Together and Alone*. Fifth ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R. & Holubec, E. (1998). *Cooperation in the Classroom*, Bos-

- ton, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Jacobs, J. (2002). *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Principles, and Techniques*, *JF New Paradigm Education*.
- Krashen, S. & Terrel, T. (1983). *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Oxford, Pergamon.
- Klapper, J. (2003). Taking communication to task? A critical review of recent trends in language teaching. *Language Learning Journal*. 27(1), 33-42.
- Erdamar, G. K., & Demirel, H. (2010). Öğretmen adaylarının grup çalışmalarına ilişkin algıları. *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 11(3), 205-223.
- Kriflik, L., & Mullan, J. (2007). Strategies to improve student reaction to group work. *Journal of University Teaching and Practice*, 4(1), 13-27.
- Killich, S.; Luczak, H.; Schlick, C.; Weissenbach, M.; Wiendemaier, S. & Ziegler, J. (1999). Task modeling for cooperative work. *Behaviour and Information Technology*, 18(5), 325-338
- Kutnick, P., Sebba, J., Blatchford, P., Galton, M. & Thorp, J. (2005). The Effects of Pupil Grouping: Literature Review. *Research Report RR688*. The University of Brighton.
- Kutnick, P., Blarchford, P. & Baines, E. (2002). Pupils grouping in primary school classrooms: Sites for learning and social pedagogy? *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(2), 187-206.
- Lotan, R. A. (2004). *Stepping into Groupwork*. In E. G. Cohen, C. M. Brody, & M. Sapon-Shevin (eds.), *Teaching cooperative learning: The challenge for teacher education* (pp.167-182). State University of New York press: Albany.
- Lynch, T. & Maclean, J. (2000). Exploring the benefits of task repetition and recycling for classroom language learning. *Language Teaching Research*. 4(3), 221-250.
- Maaranen, K. & Krokfors, L. (2008) Researching pupils, schools and oneself. Teachers as integrators of theory and practice in initial teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 34(3), 207-222.
- Macaro, E. (1997). *Target Language Collaborative Learning and Autonomy*, Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Mercendetti, D. (2010). *Connecting Social Skills and Cooperative Learning*. *Unpublished Master Thesis*, State University of New York, New York.
- MoNE (1997). Turkish Ministry of National Education English language curriculum for grades 4 and 5 at elementary education. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 4. ve 5. Sınıflar İngilizce dersi programı. *Tebliğler Dergisi*. No: 2481, p.606. Ankara: MEB Yayınlar Dairesi Başkanlığı
- Moon, J. (2000). *Children Learning English*. Oxford: MacMillan Heinemann.
- Nunan, D., & Bailey, K. M. (2009). *Exploring Second Language Classroom Research: A Comprehensive Guide*. Boston, MA: Heinle
- Odhiambo, E. (2010). Classroom research: a tool for preparing TTs to become reflec-

- tive practitioners. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 4(1), 1-14.
- Özen Baykent, U. (2015). *Philosophical investigations for a holistic approach to education: Towards the welfare of mankind*. In Irina Koleva, Recep Efe, Zdravka Blagoeva Kostova, Emin Atasoy (eds.). *Education at the Beginning of the 21st Century* (pp. 524-535). Sofia: St Kliment Ohridski University Press.
- Pierce, J. V. & Kalkman, D. L. (2003). Applying learner-centered principles in teacher education. *Theory into Practice*, 42(2), 127-132.
- Roseth, C. J., Johnson, D. V. & Johnson, R. T. (2008). Promoting early adolescents' achievement and peer relationships: The effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic goal structures. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(2), 223-246.
- Rossin, D. & Hyland, T. (2003). Group work-based learning within higher education: An integral ingredient for the personal and social development of students. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 11(2), 153-162.
- Sharan, Y. (2002). Essential features of a teacher education programme for cooperative learning. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 22(1), 68-74.
- Sancar, I. (2001). Learner autonomy: A profile of teacher trainees in pre-service teacher education. (Unpublished MA thesis). Bursa, Turkey: Uludag University.
- Sarwar, M. & Hussain, S. (2010). Teacher training in Pakistan: Problems and solutions for student teaching preparatory programs. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 46 (2), 179-185.
- Schellens, T., Van Keer, H., Valcke, M & De Wever, B. (2007). Learning in asynchronous discussion groups: A multilevel approach to study the influence of student, group and task characteristics. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 26(1), 55-71.
- Spriggs, M. (2010). Understanding consent in research involving children: The ethical issues. *A Handbook for Human Research Ethics Committees and Researchers*. Melbourne: Children's Bioethics Centre, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.
- Watson, S. B. (1992). The essential elements of cooperative learning. *The American Biology Teacher*, 54(2), 84-86.
- Woolfolk, A. E. (1998). *Educational Psychology*. Seventh ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Veenman, S., van Benthum, N., Bootsma, D., Van Dieren, J. & van Der Kemp, N. (2002). Cooperative learning and teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(1), 87-103.
- Virjo, I. & Holmberg-Marttila, D. & Mattila, K. (2001). Task-based learning (TBL) in undergraduate medical education. *Medical Teacher*, 23(1), 55-58.