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## Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi

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# Attitudes of Student Teachers Towards A Collaborative and Student-Centered Learning in an EFL Teacher Education Setting<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

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**Abstract.** The aim of this study is to investigate the attitudes of ELT student teachers towards collaborative and student centered way of teaching the Language Acquisition course in a Turkish ELT teacher education program. Data was collected by means of pre- and post-questionnaires and two sets of interview. The results showed that student-teachers have positive attitudes towards the course and found collaborative learning activities more motivating in comparison with the teacher centered teaching. They indicated that peer collaboration helped them to retain what they had learned in this course and enabled them to make use what they learned in other courses.

**Key Words:** Collaborative teaching and EFL teacher training.

**Özet.** Bu bir İngiliz Dili ve Eğitimi programında işbirlikçi öğrenci merkezli eğitimin Dil Edinimi dersinde kullanılması sonucunda öğrencilerin bu tekniğe karşı geliştirdikleri tutumları araştırmak için yapılmıştır.

Veri bir ön-anket bir de son-anket kullanılarak ve her iki anket uygulamasından takiben yüz yüze görüşme yapılarak toplanmıştır. Sonuç olarak öğretmen adaylarının bu derse karşı olumlu tutumlar geliştirmiş olduklarını ve işbirlikçi eğitim faaliyetlerini öğretmen merkezli öğretime göre daha

güdüleyici bulduklarını göstermektedir. Öğrenciler, bu ders süresince arkadaşlarıyla işbirliği yaparak öğrenmenin bilgilerin daha kalıcı olmasına yardımcı olduğunu ve bu bilgileri diğer derslerde kullanabilmelerini sağladığını belirtmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İşbirlikçi eğitim, öğrenci merkezli eğitim ve öğretmen eğitimi.

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### Introduction

Recent decades have seen a shift towards communicative approaches to language teaching with an increase in the interest in investigation of communication, namely, discourse analysis, pragmatics, sociolinguistics (Benson 2001; Macaro 1997). These developments have led the EFL classroom to be seen as a social context where both language skills and communication in the language are developed (Kasper 2001). This, consequently, requires teachers to create an interactive environment in the classroom. Drawing on Vygotskian (1978) sociocultural perspective, collaborative learning has provided new and important insights about foreign/second language learning (Macaro, 1997; Donato, 1994; Little, 2000). Vygotsky's theory argues that knowledge as a social entity is built up through collaborative and interactive processes between learners in social environments. Following Vygotsky, van Lier argues that there is an interaction between the cognitive side of the learning process and the interactional side of the learning process, during which learning takes place. van Lier (1996) underlines that there are mechanisms through which, social interaction can foster cognitive growth. This is particularly crucial in language learning. Therefore, even participating in a discussion as a listener to understand complex concepts can also contribute to learning. Macaro (1997) has pointed out that during collaborative learning "... interaction need not always involve actual verbal participation but just attentive listening to others' interaction and some kind of mental formulation of L2 output" (p.143).

As Macaro puts it, it is not always possible to distinguish active silence from inattentiveness. Here, active participation as well as collaboration is also regarded as a contributory factor in the learning process.

Drawing on his sociocultural theory, Vygotsky proposed the concept of *the Zone of Proximal Development*. According to Vygotsky (1978),

... an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement (p.90).

In other words, the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is what a person can do with the aid of others but not alone. According to Vygotsky (1978, 1986), there are two developmental levels in the learner. The first of these are referred to as the actual developmental level and the second one is referred to as the potential level of development. The former is what a learner can do by him/herself, the latter is what he/she can do with the aid of an adult or a more capable peer. Thus, the term ZPD is used frequently together with the concept of scaffolding. According to Guerrero and Villamil (2000) scaffolding refers to "those supportive behaviors by which an expert can help a novice learner achieve higher levels of regulation" (p.51). In educational psychology the term scaffolding is extended so that it refers to educators, caretakers, or peers who help a person in solving a problem.

These two concepts; ZPD and scaffolding play an important role in the sociocultural theory, as learning is seen as "a social act, embedded in a specific cultural environment" (Guerrero and Villamil, 2000, p.52). Language learners can improve their linguistic skills and metalinguistic knowledge when they work in collaboration with their peers who are more knowledgeable than they are. Guerrero and Villamil (2000) claim that social interaction initiates and shapes the development of "higher forms of thinking and the acquisition of certain complex skills" (p.52). However, social interaction is not solely enough for such development; hence interaction should be within the ZPD framework through scaffolding. In that manner, collaborative learning empowers social interaction and some of its techniques enables scaffolding and the ZPD.

The notion of collaborative learning has already received acceptance, and some studies have already been carried out in the field of SLA (see Macaro 1997; Nassaji and Swain 2000). However, its application does not seem to have been extended to the investigation of the teaching of content courses such as the ELT Methodology and the Language Acquisition courses in the field of teacher education. The present study is an attempt to extend Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning within the framework of collaborative learning in the Language Acquisition course in the ELT Teacher Education Department Uludağ University, Bursa, Turkey. It

endeavors to explore the feasibility of such an application by investigating the attitudes of student teachers towards content and the application of collaborative learning in the process of the delivery of the Language Acquisition course.

### **Collaborative Learning**

In collaborative learning, the teacher's traditional role of being the person who dominates interaction in the classroom changes into creating an interactive environment by sharing responsibility (Bassano and Christison 1995; Macaro 1997). In collaborative learning, the teacher does not direct the class but rather "encourages learners to become partners in the process" (Macaro, 1997, p. 21). Macaro (1997) describes collaborative learning as

...when learners are encouraged to achieve common learning goals by working together rather than with the teacher and when they demonstrate that they value and respect each other's language input. Then the teacher's role becomes one of facilitating these goals (p.134).

Through collaborative learning, Macaro (1997) argues that learners are empowered because they take the responsibility and control of their learning. This will, in return, contribute to the learning process itself.

By engaging in interaction in English with equal peers, less capable peers, more capable peers and assistance from the teacher will support the learners' intrinsic motivation and they will become more self-determined to make use of their own resources to learn more (van Lier 1996, p.193). The fact that this engagement in interaction at various levels can contribute to learners' linguistic skills to a great extent is quite a crucial point in an EFL environment such as Turkey where learners are not given much chance to practice. Duff (1988) points out that collaborative work gives learners more opportunity to practice the language. In addition, Macaro (1997) also argues that it is not only verbal interaction, which counts in collaborative learning. He adds other features of collaborative learning, which facilitate language learning. According to him, learners' passive participation as a listener in a discussion could be involved in the definition of collaborative learning. That is, collaborative learning is not only about verbal interaction but creating a setting where some complex thought process are activated, which may or may not be verbalized. Consequently, ideas born out of these thought processes are potential materials to be shared. In this sense, collaborative work does not allow learners to isolate themselves. On the contrary, it enables them to become independent. The developmental levels of

collaborative learning skills are explained in four stages (Bassano and Christison 1995: 27). Essentially, learners first need to develop awareness about the existence of collaborative learning and try to understand its crucial role in their individual development. Gradually, learners will develop an understanding about some necessary skills for becoming an effective member of the group they are in. Following this, despite still being self-conscious, they are now willing to practice the language. This self-consciousness makes this stage the most difficult one. Finally, following a considerable amount of practice, they will become less self-conscious, which will allow them to use their interactive skills more comfortably in group work.

Ur (1996) points out that a class coming from a teacher-centered background may hesitate to involve in such an activity, however, she points out that it is important to persist in following the initial disheartening experience since learners will eventually get used to it through practice (see Bassano and Christison 1995).

Little (2000) points out that learner-directed group work can promote learner autonomy by supporting one another while learning. In the process of performance of the task, it assigns learners different discourse roles just as it happens in real life. These roles are negotiated in this process. This is done by developing a shared understanding of the task and how it is going to be completed. This, Little (2000) says, requires an explanation and justification of the task. While explanation of the task leads analytical thinking, justifying the steps of performing the task and its role as a whole requires learners to develop a more holistic way of thinking (Little 2000).

Macaro (1997) explains the pupils, that he observed over a long period of time, gradually felt that collaborative learning helped them to learn. The majority of pupils agreed that "it helped the learning process by helping them to remember" (p. 135). They also indicated that it helped them because "it led to a better understanding of language, getting more ideas from the small group situation than a whole class (p. 135). What Macaro (1997) reports appear to show such a high level of understanding and awareness as one of the pupils said, "Helping your partner helps you to learn" (p. 135). In Little's words through collaborative activities we make what we know (implicit knowledge) explicit (p.36). This appears to indicate that collaborative learning can also help learners to develop some kind of high level awareness about learning and ability to reflect, which they can benefit from all through their lives.

In ELT teacher education in an EFL environment, the idea of enabling student teachers to gain such kind of awareness and autonomy is of course even more crucial as the student teacher will be teaching the next generation of teachers of English. The present study draws on a holistic view of teacher education. From this perspective, it argues that "the student teacher must adopt the role of autonomous learner researcher" (Richards, 1990, p.15). In this sense, the role of the teacher educator is as follows:

... he or she must guide the student teacher in the process of generating and testing hypotheses and in using the knowledge so acquired as a basis for further development (Richards, 1990, p.15).

Drawing on the microperspective, the aim of the Language Acquisition course, in question here, is to enable the student teachers to develop an awareness and autonomy about language acquisition and learning through collaborative learning techniques (see Richards, 1990; Freeman and Richards, 1993). It is hypothesized that collaborative learning will enable student teachers to develop this kind of awareness and autonomy.

Students in Turkey seem to be guided either by their teachers or by the circumstances or both to become listeners not participants in the classroom. Classes in the state schools are usually unrealistically large as Turkey has a young population. Teachers do appear to prefer doing activities to involve students in the teaching-learning process, due to large classes and test-based education system. They seem to prefer more of a teacher-centred approach. It seems that this reinforces the idea on students that they are only responsible for doing the multiple choice tests not anything else in the process of learning. That is, they have been given the impression that they are responsible from the product of learning which is the exam, not the process of learning itself.

The student teachers who participated in our study were the products of such an exemplified educational context. Our aim was to involve them in the process of learning by means of peer collaboration . Some resistance was anticipated from them initially as they typically did not seem to expect to be given the responsibility of learning. The following section gives an account of how collaborative learning techniques were applied.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Classroom Application**

The lessons started with the teacher's initiating questions to activate students' schema to concentrate on the subject of discussion topic. She

points out the important aspects and asks students to express their ideas. During the first stage students comment generally on what they have read prior to coming to the class. The next stage of the lesson was devoted to groupwork designed as jigsaw activities. Students were involved in jigsaw activities to analyze and synthesize their thoughts about a topic, share ideas, teach each other, discuss on problematic issues and reflect on each other's thoughts. Initially, expert groups were formed where each group is given a different topic of discussion. In these groups, it is the members' responsibility to teach each other and learn from one another. They are asked to learn everything equally with the other members. These group discussions were guided by teacher's questions to enable students to keep in track. In addition, the teacher joined group discussions asked and answer questions. Teacher's involvement in the groups helped scaffolding and enabled students to work within their "Zone of Proximal Development". Scaffolding was done by other group members as well.

Next, after expert groups were finished with their discussions, learned their topic from one another, discussed in detail the teacher mixes all groups. New groups were formed so that a member of each expert group would form the second group. In these groups each expert talks about his/her discussion topic, help others learn and understand, and answer their questions. This peer teaching continues until each expert finishes.

After group work, whole class discussions were made so that everyone shares their ideas, opinions, concerns, questions with the rest of the class. The teacher always joined these discussions as a member of the class. During these class discussions the student teachers found opportunities to think about the issues they discussed in their groups, developed critical opinions on the topic, referred to their previous experiences, and helped each other to better understand the material.

Considering that these students were educated in a traditional system, where the teacher lectures and students take notes and memorize, this student-centered approach was new for them. Thus, current study attempted to investigate these student teachers opinions about collaborative learning and techniques.

Moreover, since Language Acquisition course was the first of their theoretical courses at the university the researchers also investigated student teachers' awareness about the course content and find out their expectations from the course.

The study attempts to answer two research questions. They are:

- What are the attitudes of student teachers toward the course content?
- To what extent are student teachers satisfied by the classroom teaching methodologies of such a theoretical course?

### **Subjects**

117 second-year student teachers at an ELT Department in Bursa Turkey contributed to the study. The subjects were from an EFL context coming from a traditional teacher centered background.

### **Data Collection**

Data triangulation is used in the current study. Data was collected in four parts via: an initial survey, a questionnaire, and two sets of interviews. Initial survey was given at the beginning of the term in order to investigate student teachers awareness about the course content and find out their expectations. The questionnaire and one set of interviews were given at the end of the term. The purpose was to find out if student teachers' expectations were met, if they were satisfied with the collaborative teaching techniques and if they were happy with their success from the course. Lastly, a follow-up interview was conducted at the end of the next term to investigate if these students were able retain their knowledge they gathered from the Language Acquisition course and if they were able to transfer their knowledge to other related courses.

Prior to data collection in the first lesson of the term, student teachers were given a short explanation about how this course would be implemented. Following this, the initial survey was given to 117 second-year student teachers to find out to what extent they had an awareness about the content of the course. At the end of the term, a second questionnaire was administered. Following this, 20 students (five from each class) were interviewed. The interviews were carried out in Turkish, in order to prevent any language barriers.

In order to gather information about the extent these initial perceptions of the students of the course and expectations from this course have changed during the semester, the second questionnaire was administered during the last week of the semester. The items aimed to gather information about two main aspects. The first group of questions comprised two questions on students's perceptions towards course content. The second group of questions is about teaching techniques used in this course. Questions were

supplied with a five-level scale from 1 = entirely agree to 5 = I do not agree at all. Later, for the purposes of analysis this five point scale was condensed into a three-level scale; namely, 1 = agree, 2 = neutral (uncertain), 3 =disagree. Within a few days following the administration of the questionnaire, 20 student teachers were interviewed.

An analysis of the initial survey the questionnaire and the interviews will be presented below. Results of the analysis of the initial interviews will be integrated into these findings.

## Data Analysis

### The Analysis of the Initial Survey

The initial data was collected to see to what extent the student teachers were aware of the course content and how they perceived this new course. The student teachers were asked the following questions:

- What do you think you will learn in this course?
- What would you like to learn in this course?

**Table 1.** Results of the Analysis of the First Question: What do you think you will learn in this course?

Category	No. of st. Teachers	%
Lang. and intellectual develop.	71	61
Language teaching methodology	21	18
Language acquisition	18	15
Not related	7	6
Total	117	100

The analysis has revealed that student teachers have very different expectations from this course. Their main concern seems to be language and intellectual development. As seen in the above table, 61 % of student teachers expect that they will improve various language skills and/or they will learn about different aspects of life for their intellectual development. An example of such expectations is (Language mistakes were kept as in the original): “*I think I'm going to learn how to use English efficiently in this lesson. And to speak English fluently*”. The majority appears to think that this is a course in which they can improve their speaking skills.

Some student teachers appear to be relatively more aware of the course. 18% wrote that they thought they would learn how to teach and become knowledgeable about teaching methodologies. Here is an example as such: “*I think that I will learn about teaching or learning a language, especially English*”. 15% of these student teachers guessed the content of the course correctly as seen in the following example: “*I think we will learn how we can learn a language (especially second language)*”. Those student teachers who wrote such statements appear to have awareness about teacher education. In addition, the second example also includes first language learning. It can be argued that this may even indicate a higher degree of awareness by these student teachers about what kind of processes they would go through in a Language Acquisition course. On the other hand, expectations of 6% of student teachers were beside the point such as “*I think I will learn a lot of different things, interesting things in this course (about daily life, world, ...). I’m sure that I’ll improve my speaking and start to think quickly may be this course will extend my point of view*”, such items were categorized as “not related”.

The second question was ‘What would you like to learn in this course?’ Results of the analysis of the answers to this question are very similar to that of the first one; except for “not answered” category.

**Table 2.** Results of the Analysis of the Second Question: What would you like to learn in this course?

Category	No. of st. teachers	%
Lang. and intellectual develop.	67	57
Language teaching methodology	22	19
language acquisition	10	9
not related	16	14
not answered	2	1
Total	117	100

As seen in Table 2, the majority of student teachers (57%) would like to improve their language skills and learn about different things. An example for this category is as follows: “*I would like to improve my English*”. It appears to show that their expectations and their wishes focus on the same issue: Improving their language skills.

Similar to the answers to the first question, the second group would like to learn about language teaching methodology. The percentage is also very

close to that of the first question: 19%. An example as such follows: “*I want to learn how I can teach this subject to the others [people], how I can teach my ideas*”. In this group; the percentage of answers, which does not seem to be related to any aspect of this course is relatively higher (14%). Hence, they cannot be categorized easily. The reason for this appears to be that some students must have perceived this course and the teachers' introduction in a completely different way. The researchers think that it is worth paying attention as they reflect students' lack of awareness about language learning and teaching in general. Such an example is as follows: “*Everything; the problems of people and I want to discuss the people and the social problems of the world*”.

The information gathered from the analysis of the initial survey shows that the majority of student teachers lacked knowledge about the content of Language Acquisition and they did not have any awareness about the place of this course within the training program they are studying. This analysis requires us to ask the following questions: “Will collaborative learning guide these student teachers not only to learn about language acquisition, but to develop an understanding of the field of the study (namely ELT)?

### **Analysis of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is composed of three groups of items. The first group of items attempts to investigate student teachers' perceptions towards course content. The second group of items investigates students' perceptions of the collaborative teaching techniques used in the course. The third group of items aims to find out how students view their success in this course. The results of the analysis of the questionnaire supported the results of the initial survey.

#### ***First Group of Items***

The first group is composed of two questions:

- To what extent has this course met your expectations?
- To what extent are you happy with the course content?

The analysis of the first group of questions revealed that almost half of the student teachers seemed quite content. That is, 48% of the student teachers said that the course content met their expectations highly. Only 10% said that their expectations were met a little. When they were asked to what extent they were satisfied, 35% of the student teachers indicated that they were highly satisfied by the course content while 18% reported that they

were less than satisfied. The majority (47%) said that the content was fairly good. The interview also supports these findings. The student teachers said that they liked the content of the course. The results of the interview will be touched upon in the discussion part.

### ***The Second Group of Items***

The second group of items attempts to elicit information about the extent the student teachers were satisfied with the methodology and the techniques. The questions are:

- To what extent are you content with the teaching techniques (pair and group work, class discussions) used in this course?
- To what extent do you find the course motivating with class and group discussions and activities?
- To what extent can you participate in discussions concerning the course material that you have studied?

Quite a large majority of student teachers, 64% appear to be highly satisfied with the methodology and the techniques (such as pair work) used all through the course, while only 11% of the student teachers said that they were less than satisfied. The answers were also supported by the initial interview.

In the interview, one of the student teachers said that although she was quite satisfied, it took time to get used to the new techniques. This student's comments support Ur's (1996) argument mentioned in the introduction that students who are used to teacher centered teaching may hesitate when involving in collaborative activities. Two other interviewees said that collaborative teaching techniques forced them to prepare for the lesson in advance, which they found very beneficial. Another student argued that she benefited from the discussion sessions so much that it did not matter even if she forgot about the details of the course content in the future. One reason for this can be due to their inadequate language skills. Many student teachers reported having serious problems in understanding texts and difficulties of expressing what they knew in spoken English. Another point, which was stressed in the interview, was that the student teachers were quite happy about the frequent use of the Overhead Projector, which was some kind of novelty for them as not many numbers of OHPs were available for teachers to use. However, it is not clear whether its use supported peer teaching or not. Even if it did, it is impossible for us to measure its effect on peer teaching.

Student teachers were also asked whether they found the methodology adopted in the course useful. Similarly, 59%, a significant number of student teachers, found such a methodology highly motivating while 14% said that they found it a little motivating. In addition to this, although the majority was satisfied with the techniques and classroom methodology used, only 21% said that they could participate in the discussions frequently. On the other hand, quite a significant number of student teachers appeared to have trouble with participating in the discussions regularly. These are: 39%, reported that they could sometimes participate and 40% indicated that they could rarely participate. This was further investigated in the interview. The student teachers complained about their inadequate language skills. These results also support the initial questionnaire findings where the majority of the student teachers (57%) said that they needed to improve their language skills. The interpretation of these results will be discussed later.

### ***The Third Group of Items***

The third group of items elicited information about the extent to which student teachers found themselves successful in this course. These questions are:

- To what extent do you find yourselves successful?
- To what extent are you satisfied with your success in this course when considering your general academic success?

According to the results of the analysis, student teachers did not seem very much content with their success. 13% of the student teachers found themselves fairly successful and 29% found themselves hardly successful. When student teachers were asked to consider their general academic success and view their success specifically for the Language Acquisition course, 26% said that they were highly satisfied with their success, 39% said that they were fairly satisfied and 35% said that they were not satisfied. This positive view of the students's self in the Language Acquisition Course where new techniques were used for teaching and learning might be due to the positive effects of the collaborative teaching techniques, which is supported by the follow-up interview in the next section.

### **Analysis of the Follow-up Interview**

The trainees, who were interviewed in the follow-up at the end of the next term, indicated that they were able to transfer their knowledge to courses such as "ELT Methodologies", "Approaches and Techniques in ELT", and partly in the "Linguistics" courses. For example, one student teacher said

that: *"As M said, if it is not everything we had something. When we are studying the Methodology course we say; We have seen this in the Language Acquisition course"*. Another trainee said that *"[the Language Acquisition course] formed a basis for other courses."* They also mentioned that they retained what they learned as a result of collaborative teaching techniques when compared to that gained by traditional methods. For instance, *"I remember more things."* said one trainee, another one indicated that: *"I believe my [knowledge] retained. I remember word by word. For example, I have come across to the term affective domain in some other courses; at least I know that it is something related to feelings."* Another trainee indicated that *"Group work increased participation and this caused us to sustain knowledge. If the teaching style was more towards memorization, may be it wouldn't have been able to what we have learned this much."* It appears that trainees were satisfied that they benefited from collaborative learning. The following section will discuss these results from a wider perspective.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In general, the results indicate that student teachers are happy with collaborative learning techniques, although these were opposite to what they have been used to. The students had seen a major shift in the teaching and learning techniques. They were asked to carry the responsibility of learning and become autonomous learners. This change from teacher directed and controlled lessons to student centered classroom also played a positive role in their motivation towards the course.

The second research question aimed to investigate student teachers' satisfaction by the classroom teaching methodologies of such a theoretical course. Student teachers found collaborative learning activities more motivating. They reported that working in cooperation with one another facilitated their ability to comprehend difficult texts and complicated concepts. The results appear to suggest that students would not resist such kind of change in the course methodology.

In addition, the positive attitudes towards collaborative teaching might be due to the fact that student teachers took the responsibility and control of their learning, when it is the teachers' responsibility in traditional classrooms. An autonomous person is defined by Littlewood (1996), as "one who has an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions" (p. 428). He argues that this capacity consists of two elements: ability and willingness, which also have two components.

Ability depends on knowledge and skills and willingness depends on motivation and confidence. For a true autonomous person all of these four components should be present together.

Thus, the results support the idea that student-centered, cooperative learning and interactive classroom environment would most probably be preferred by the students.

Student teachers' indication during the follow-up interview that they retained knowledge parallels with van Lier's view in which he claimed that cognitive growth is fueled with social interaction that was constructed in group discussions.

Moreover, collaborative teaching techniques created opportunities for student teachers to develop language skills and metalinguistic knowledge as it was declared by student-teachers as a need in the initial survey.

Overall, the analysis of the data showed that student teachers benefited from collaborative learning in two ways: Student teachers have appeared to agree that collaborative learning process helped them to remember topics that they have discussed. Some student teachers underlined the social side of collaboration, which they have found quite motivating. These findings are also supported by those of Macaro's (1997).

The results have other pedagogical implications. A considerable number of our student teachers indicated that they were not terribly pleased with the amount of contribution they had made to the classroom discussions. This could be due to two reasons: First, most of our student teachers feel their language skills are inadequate. As the results of the initial survey indicated the majority of the students expected the course help them improve their language skills. This may partly be due to traditional teaching styles that most of our student teachers were exposed to during their education before entering the university and at the university. As it does not give many opportunities to practise their spoken english. Outside the classroom chances for them to practice is almost none.

All in all the results suggest that collaborative techniques are still more beneficial than traditional methods in improving language skills despite lack of participation to some extent by a number of student teachers. Since it creates a reason for interaction, it can also support developing social skills in interaction. Student teachers reported to have retained what they had learned for a longer period of time. The students had to take the responsibility of learning in their hands, which made them to develop positive attitudes towards the course and collaborative learning itself.

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\*\*\* *An earlier version of this study, which was entitled "Raising ELT Trainees' Awareness through Collaborative Learning", was presented at the 35<sup>th</sup> TESOL Convention, St. Louis, 2001.*

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## **Attitudes of Student Teachers Towards A Collaborative and Student-Centered Learning in an EFL Teacher Education Setting**

### **Summary**

The aim of this study is to investigate the attitudes of ELT student-teachers towards collaborative and student centered way of teaching the Language Acquisition course in a Turkish ELT teacher education program.

The notion of collaborative learning has already received acceptance, and some studies have already been carried out in the field of SLA (see Bassano and Christison 1995; Macaro 1997; Nassaji and Swain 2000). However, its application does not seem to have been extended to the investigation of the teaching of content courses such as the ELT Methodology and the Language Acquisition courses in the field of teacher education. The present study is an attempt to extend Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning within the framework of collaborative learning in the Language Acquisition course in the ELT Teacher Education Department Uludağ University, Bursa, Turkey. It endeavors to explore the feasibility of such an application by investigating the attitudes of student teachers towards content and the application of collaborative learning in the process of the delivery of the Language Acquisition course.

The aim of the Language Acquisition course, in question here, is to enable the student teachers to develop an awareness and autonomy about language acquisition and learning through collaborative learning techniques (see Richards, 1990; Freeman and

Richards, 1993). It is hypothesized that collaborative learning will enable student teachers to develop this kind of awareness and autonomy.

Students in Turkey seem to be guided either by their teachers or by the circumstances or both to become listeners not participants in the classroom. Classes in the state schools are usually unrealistically large as Turkey has a young population. Teachers do appear to prefer doing activities to involve students in the teaching-learning process, due to large classes and test-based education system. They seem to prefer more of a teacher-centred approach. It seems that this reinforces the idea on students that they are only

responsible for doing the multiple choice tests not anything else in the process of learning. That is, they have been given the impression that they are responsible from the product of learning which is the exam, not the process of learning itself.

The student teachers who participated in our study were the products of such an exemplified educational context. Our aim was to involve them in the process of learning by means of peer collaboration. Some resistance was anticipated from them initially as they typically did not seem to expect to be given the responsibility of learning. The following section gives an account of how collaborative learning techniques were applied.

Data was collected by means of pre- and post-questionnaires and two sets of interview. The results showed that student-teachers have positive attitudes towards the course and found collaborative learning activities more motivating in comparison with the teacher centered teaching. They indicated that peer collaboration helped them to retain what they had learned in this course and enabled them to make use what they learned in other courses.