



THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING METHOD ON STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH LESSON

(İŞBİRLİKLİ ÖĞRENME YÖNTEMİNİN ÖĞRENCİLERİN BAŞARILARINA VE İNGİLİZCE DERSİNE YÖNELİK TUTUMLARINA ETKİSİ)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of cooperative learning method on 8th grade students' academic achievement and attitudes towards English lesson. The research was carried out in 2010–2011 teaching year in an elementary school in Niğde, Turkey. Totally 66 students in two different classes in the 8th grade of this school participated in the study. The pre/post-test control group research model was used in this study. The data obtained in the study were analysed by SPSS 17.0 package programme. The arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for each group. In order to test the significance between the groups, the independent samples t-test was used. The significance level was taken as .05 in the research. The results of the research showed a significant difference between the attitude scores of the experiment group and the control group. On the other hand, it was also found out that cooperative learning method was more effective in the positive development of the students' academic achievement levels. At the end of the research, it was revealed that the students who were educated by cooperative learning method were more successful and had higher attitude levels towards the lesson than the students who were educated by the instruction based on student textbooks.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, English teaching, academic achievement, attitude towards lesson.

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, işbirlikli öğrenme yönteminin ilköğretim 8. sınıf öğrencilerinin İngilizce dersindeki akademik başarıları ve derse yönelik tutumları üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktır. Araştırma 2010–2011 eğitim-öğretim yılında Niğde ilinde bir ilköğretim okulunda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmaya, bu okulun iki sınıfından toplam 66 sekizinci sınıf öğrencisi katılmıştır. Bu çalışmada, ön test-son test kontrol gruplu araştırma modeli kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada elde edilen veriler SPSS 17.0 paket programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Her grup için aritmetik ortalama ve standart sapma değerleri hesaplanmış olup, gruplar arasındaki anlamlılığı test etmek için ise bağımsız gruplar t-testi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada anlamlılık düzeyi .05 olarak alınmıştır. Araştırmanın sonucunda, kontrol grubu ile deney grubu öğrencilerinin derse yönelik tutumları arasında önemli farklılıklar bulunmuştur. Bunun yanında, işbirlikli öğrenme yönteminin öğrencilerin akademik başarıları üzerinde anlamlı ve olumlu gelişmeler sağladığı kaydedilmiştir. Araştırma sonunda, işbirlikli öğrenme yöntemine dayalı olarak yapılan öğretimin öğrencilerin akademik başarı ve İngilizce dersine yönelik tutum düzeylerinin, öğrenci kılavuz kitaplarına dayalı olarak öğretim yapılan sınıfın akademik başarısından ve derse yönelik tutumlarından daha yüksek olduğu saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İşbirlikli öğrenme, İngilizce öğretimi, akademik başarı, derse yönelik tutum.

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INTRODUCTION

As the ongoing discussions are continuing on the effective learning of students at school, many methods which support effective learning and participation of students in the teaching-learning process have come into existence in the related literature. One of these effective methods in the literature can be defined as cooperative learning (Baş, 2009). Cooperative learning method is one of the most widely used contemporary learning methods. According to Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994), cooperative learning is a paradigm shift in teaching and learning. Cooperative learning relates to several aspects of the paradigm shift. As with learner autonomy, the use of group activities places students at the centre of attention, offering them one means of taking on more rights and responsibilities in their own learning. Process is also emphasised, as students do not just show each other their answers; they explain to one another how they arrived at the answers (Slavin, 1995). Additionally, cooperative learning acknowledges the place of affect in education, highlighting the importance of positive interdependence, the feeling among group members that the group sinks or swims together (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Cooperative learning has been around for a long time (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1986, 1999). However, the application of cooperative learning to classroom teaching finds its roots in the 1970s when Israel and the United States began to design and study cooperative learning models for classroom context (Kessler, 1992; Baş, 2009). According to Olsen and Kagan (1992), cooperative learning is a group learning activity that occurs in a social context with interaction between group members. Cooperative learning can be defined as “small groups of learners working together as a team to solve problems, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal” (Artz & Newman, 1990, p. 448). Meanwhile, the related literature offers a variety of definitions for cooperative learning, but some features are common to all of them (Kessler, 1992). However, cooperative learning is also broadly defined as an approach to organise classroom activities so that students are able to learn from and interact with one another as well as from the teacher and the environment around them (Olsen & Kagan, 1992).

The use of small groups that work towards common instructional goals is the core component of cooperative learning method. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), two of the leading authorities in the field, cooperative learning exists when students work together to accomplish shared learning goals. The most important feature of cooperative learning is that individuals study in small groups by helping each other to learn to achieve a mutual goal. However, not every study group can be stated as a cooperative learning group (Saban, 1994). Because placing socially unskilled students in a group and telling them to cooperate do not guarantee that they have the ability to do so

effectively (Sharan & Sharan, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1991, 1994; Slavin, 1991; Açıkgöz, 1992; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994; Saban, 1994). Cooperative groups are long-term, heterogeneous cooperative learning groups with stable membership (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Thus, in order to provide a suitable condition for cooperative learning in the classroom, some basic principles should be taken into consideration. In this regard, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994) list these principles as follows: (i) positive interdependence: Each group member's efforts are required and unavoidable for group success, students should know they sink or swim together, (ii) face-to-face interaction: Orally explaining how to solve problems, helping each other learn, and checking for understanding, (iii) individual and group accountability: Each individual contributes to the group's achievement goals. From a motivational perspective, "cooperative goal structure creates a situation in which the only way group members can attain their personal goals is if the group is successful" (Slavin, 1990, p.14).

In this regard, from these three important principles mentioned just above, cooperative learning groups contrast with traditional learning group in many ways. The differences between cooperative learning groups and traditional learning group are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Cooperative Learning Groups and Traditional Learning Group

Cooperative Learning Groups	Traditional Learning Group
Positive interdependence with structured goals	No positive interdependence
A clear accountability for their individual's share of the group's work	No accountability for the individual share of the group's work
Heterogeneous ability grouping	Homogeneous ability groups
Sharing of leadership roles	Few being appointed or put in charge of the group
Sharing of the appointed learning tasks	Each seldom responsible for others' learning
Aiming to develop each member's learning to the maximum	Focusing only on accomplishing the assignments
Teaching of collaborate skills	Assuming that students already have the required skills
Teachers observation of students' teamwork	Little teacher observation
Structuring of the procedures and time for the processing	Rare structuring of procedures and time for the processing

(Johnson & Johnson, 1986, p. 9)

On the other hand, as Sharan (1995) states there are significant differences in the teachers' role in conducting cooperative classrooms and traditional classrooms. Yet it means that in cooperative learning classrooms, teachers' role is not decreased in conduct of classroom learning. According to Johnson, Johnson and Stanne (2000), cooperative learning is actually a generic term that refers to numerous methods for organising and conducting classroom instruction. There are a number of teaching techniques built on the notion of cooperative learning such as (i) learning together and alone (Johnson and Johnson, 1990), (ii) student teams achievement divisions (Slavin, 1990), (iii) teams-games-tournament (DeVries & Edwards, 1973), (iv) jigsaw technique (Aronson et al., 1978) and (v) group investigation technique (Sharan & Sharan, 1990). In this context, research on cooperative learning has been conducted in many ways and has shown the benefits for the learners.

There are studies in the related literature which underline the many benefits of cooperative learning for social and personal development. In cooperative learning, the gains and benefits for students are multi-dimensional. It is highly likely that the students improve interpersonal skills in cooperative settings and that the low-achievers build up better self-esteem within a setting in which responsibilities are shared (Joyce, Weil & Showers, 1992). The other benefits of cooperative learning can be stated as; social development (Johnson & Johnson, 1986), pro-social behaviours (Kagan, 1992) including increased liking for students (Slavin, 1977), reduced racial stereotyping and discrimination (Cohen, 1980), increased self-esteem (Slavin, 1983), increased self-direction (Johnson et al., 1976), increased self-expectations (Kagan, 1986), increased sense of intellectual competence (Kagan, 1990), and increased liking for class (Slavin, 1983). Besides these, when cooperative learning is planned carefully and structured it has benefits for academic achievement. Hundreds of studies have compared cooperative learning to various control methods on a broad range of outcome measures, but by far the most frequent objective of this research is to determine the effects of cooperative learning on student achievement. Studies for the effects of academic achievement of cooperative learning have taken place in every major subject, at all grade levels, and in all types of educational settings in many countries (Pressley et al., 2003). In this sense, studies in the literature show that cooperative learning has a positive effect on academic achievement since hundreds of achievement related studies report that cooperative learning promotes higher achievement than competitive or individualistic learning across all age level, subject areas, and all tasks (Olsen & Kagan, 1992). Tsai (1998), for example, conducted a research in order to examine the effects of cooperative learning on teaching English to senior high school students. She found out that the students in the experimental group, where cooperative learning method was employed, outperformed the students in the control group in their language skills. In this sense as Slavin (1995) states, cooperative

learning not only promotes academic achievement, but it also promotes social and personal development, and language learning. The cooperative group processes especially can provide opportunities for frequent and extended interaction in the target language amongst students. What is more, it is known that cooperative learning is effective in developing students' upper level mental abilities, communicative skills, achievement, retention, recall, transfer, motivation, and attitude; also, it is more preferable inasmuch as it is inexpensive and practical (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Kagan, 1990).

As there are many benefits of cooperative learning on the positive development of students, cooperative learning has some limitations to implement. Most of the limitations of cooperative learning come from not being able to implement the cooperative structure carefully. If the teacher just puts the students into groups to learn and does not structure the positive interdependence and individual accountability, then it will not be unusual to find groups where one person does most (or all) of the work and the others sign off as if they have learnt it or have done the work. Or it might be easy to have a bossy student who does not allow the others to take part or other group dynamic problems that might come from not setting the ground rules for behaviour and carefully crafting the group dynamics (Kagan, 1992). Another limitation of cooperative learning lies in the differences of opinion regarding encouraging conflict or achieving consensus amongst group members (Tsai, 1998). There is an underlying establishment in cooperative learning to encourage consensus and thereby arousing unnecessary peer pressure to suppress individual differences and comply with the decisions of the group (DiPardo & Freeman, 1988).

There are many studies (Açıkgöz, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994; McGuire, 1992; Erdem, 1993; Gömleksiz, 1993; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Pala, 1995; Sünbül, 1995; Delen, 1997; Wei, 1997; Oral, 2000; Özkal, 2000; Liang, 2002; Slavin, 2003; Gömleksiz & Onur, 2005; Bilgin, 2006; Çelebi, 2006; Aslandağ-Soylu, 2008; Baş, 2009; Çokparlamış, 2010; Köse et al., 2010) carried out on cooperative learning both in Turkey and abroad which compares the effects of cooperative learning with traditional learning methods. However, this study focuses on the effects of cooperative learning in comparison with instruction based on student textbooks which were created on the basis of the new Elementary English Curriculum (MEB, 2006). Meanwhile, instruction based on student textbooks is an instruction way which teacher follows the textbooks and makes students do the activities in these textbooks. Students mostly study individually and group activities are very limited in this way. However, these group activities are not cooperative since there is no positive interdependence amongst the students in the groups of study. From this perspective, this research can be stated to have a significant value. In this sense, previous literature does not reveal any study which focuses on the comparison of the effects of cooperative learning and instruction based on student textbooks. It is

hoped that this empirical study can provide a close link between cooperative learning and language learning and, at the same time, propose guidelines for EFL teachers who wish to implement cooperative learning to enhance their students' language learning as well as development of attitude towards learning English as a foreign language. On the other hand, by carrying out this study, the researcher hopes that cooperative learning can receive more attention and enjoy more popularity amongst EFL teachers at all grade levels, so that English education in Turkey can actually equip students with communicative competence.

This study was designed to assess the effects of cooperative learning on eighth grade students' academic achievement and attitudes towards English lesson. The questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. Is there a significant difference between the achievement levels of the students in the experimental group and the students in the control group in terms of the usage of cooperative learning method?
2. Is there a significant difference between the attitude levels of the students in the experimental group and the students in the control group towards the lesson in terms of the usage of the cooperative learning method?

METHODOLOGY

A pre- and post-test experiment with random assignment of classes to experimental and control groups was employed (Dugard & Toldman, 1995) to examine the effects of the treatment process in the study. In this design, which uses two groups, one group is given the treatment and the results are gathered at the end. The control group receives no treatment, over the same period of time, but undergoes exactly the same tests (Karasar, 2005). Both groups were employed a pre-test and pre-attitude scale prior to the experimental process. The subjects were given an academic achievement test and an attitude scale towards English lesson as a pre-test. Meanwhile, both the academic achievement test and attitude scale were employed to both groups after the experimental process as a post-test. A small number of homogenous subjects provided us with information over a period of five weeks.

Subjects

The subjects of the study consisted of 66 eighth grade elementary school students [35 boys (53%) and 31 girls (47%)] with a mean age of 13.5 years in two classes selected from an elementary school in an urban area in Nigde, Turkey. The classes were selected randomly from this elementary school. One group (8-A class) was randomly assigned to the experimental group ($n=33$), while the other group (8-B class) formed the control group ($n=33$) of the study. All the students in the groups were from the same socio-

cultural and economic background. Their parents had similar jobs, financial incomes and educational background. The demographic information for these students was taken from the school administration.

Instruments

Academic Achievement Test

In order to collect data related to academic achievement of the students an academic achievement test was developed by the researcher. This test was used to measure the students' academic achievement in the "reading for entertainment" unit. There were 50 questions (each item scored 2 points; total score 100 points) in the test. The item and test statistics of the achievement test were computed for reliability and validity. The reliability of the academic achievement test was done by the KR₂₀ reliability analysis method (Demircioğlu, 2008; Tan, 2008). This method measures the extent to which items within one form of the test have as much in common with one another as do the items in that one form with corresponding in an equivalent form. The strength of this estimate of reliability depends on the extent to which the entire test represents a single, fairly consistent measure of a concept (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2003). In this regard, the reliability value of the test was found as .90, the test difficulty value (P_j) was found to be .57, and the test discrimination value (r_{jx}) was found to be .45. Hence, it was revealed that the test was reliable. It was used with students in both the experiment and the control groups. The academic achievement test had a reliability of .90, an average level of test discrimination (.45) and an average level of test difficulty (.57). In the light of the data gathered for the academic achievement test, it can be said that the test had a high level of reliability, a medium level of difficulty and a high level of test discrimination.

English Lesson Attitude Scale

In this research, the "Elementary English lesson attitude scale" was used in order to measure students' attitudes towards English lesson. The scale was arranged by having done the reliability and validity studies and used to evaluate the attitudes of elementary school students towards English lesson by the researchers. The attitude scale test is a three-point Likert type scale (which was used to differentiate orientations from 1 as low and 3 as high) reliability and validity of which have been analysed by Cronbach's Alpha test, including 27 items that measure students' attitudes towards English lesson. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the attitude scale was found as .92. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Sampling adequacy result was found as .884 and the Bartlett test result was found as 10134,161 ($p=.000$). These results show that there is a strong correlation amongst the items. In light of the data, it can be

said that the attitude scale test is both reliable and valid to be used in this research.

Procedures

In the experimental group, cooperative learning method was applied. Whereas, in the control group instruction based student textbooks was used in the process of the study. The design of the study can be described as in Table 2 given below.

Table 2. Experimental Design Used in the Study

Groups	Pre-test	Experimental Design	Post-test
Experimental	T ₁ ₁₂	Cooperative learning	T ₂ ₁₂
Control	T ₁ ₁₂	Instruction based on student textbooks	T ₂ ₁₂

T₁ → academic achievement test

T₂ → English attitude scale

One can see the tests and scales applied on the subjects of the study in Table 2 given above. The academic achievement test and the English lesson attitude scale were applied on the subjects of the study for two times before and after the experimental process.

The instructional treatment was conducted over five weeks in the first term of 2010-2011 teaching year in an elementary school in Nigde, Turkey. The 8th grade students from two classes of this school were enrolled in the study. The classes were selected randomly from the other eighth classes of this elementary school. Firstly, the academic achievement test and English attitude scale were performed as a pre-test. In the next step, the “reading for entertainment” unit of the Elementary 8th Grade English Curriculum (MEB, 2006) was taught to the control group by using the instruction based on the activities in student textbooks and to the experiment group by using cooperative learning method.

After the topics to be studied were selected, the researcher developed related activities for the procedure. It was crucial to develop appropriate techniques and provide necessary materials that reflect the principles of cooperative learning (Kagan, 1990; Sharan & Sharan, 1990; Slavin, 1990; Açıkgöz, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Drawing on relevant research, all activities were developed by the researcher himself. Lesson plans for the procedure were based on Slavin’s (1990, 1994) suggestions on teaching for a deeper learning.

In the control group, instruction based on student textbooks was used. The instruction in the control group was based on the activities in student textbook prepared in connection with the Elementary 8th Grade English Curriculum (MEB, 2006). During the lesson, though occasionally, the teacher asked questions to the students based on activities (vocabulary, grammar and speaking) in order to encourage participation of the students in the learning process. The teacher also made presentations based on the reading, listening and grammar passages in the textbooks. At the end of the instruction, the teacher asked some questions about the related passages and let the students do the activities given in the textbooks. The teacher made the students do the activities in the student textbooks while standing in front of the class and received the answers and gave them feedback, recorded subject notes on the board, and gave daily homework to the students. Most of the times in these lessons passed as the students were doing the activities in student textbooks, taking short notes and answering teacher questions. The teacher gave the students necessary time to do the activities in the textbooks.

In the experimental group, the students were taught with cooperative learning method developed for “reading for entertainment” unit. The student teams achievement divisions (STAD) technique of cooperative learning was employed in the experimental group of the study. So, the instruction programme for the experimental group was prepared as suggested by Slavin (1990). This technique was built upon the idea to motivate students to encourage and help each other master the skills presented by the teacher (Slavin, 1990, 1994). In this technique, teacher presents a lesson to students who are arranged to heterogeneous groups of four or five. Afterwards, students are asked to study the unit(s) with their teams until all team members master the unit(s). Students study the unit(s) with their teams until they are sure that all members of the group understand the necessary knowledge and concepts in the related unit(s). Lastly, all students take individual tests on the unit(s), at which they may not help their team-mates. Students' scores are compared to their own past averages and marks are added to the group according to their own earlier performance. All students are evaluated individually about the unit(s), the progress marks are summed up, and then the group marks are achieved. The marks are summed to form team score, and when team scores reach certain criteria they may earn some certificates and awards. Thus, students in the groups compete with the other groups in the class instead of their team-mates. In the experimental process of this study, the teacher presented the necessary instructions about cooperative learning and let the students work together. To form the experimental groups, the students were appointed to the groups according to their academic achievement scores by considering their former marks in English lesson so it was ascertained that each group became heterogeneous in nature. After the groups of five were formed, desks were relocated so that the classroom organisation became

convenient for cooperative learning. After sharing the tasks, the teacher clarified what was expected from the students. During the team study the students' task was to study the presented material and help their team-mates learn the material. Students were given both the worksheets and answers so they would be able to practice the skill taught and assess their team-mates. Each team was given two worksheets in order to study them together. Meanwhile, the teacher served both as a designer and a facilitator in the learning process. The teacher formed the groups, prepared cooperative activities and materials as a designer and he walked around the class and helped the students who needed as a facilitator during the process.

All the students in the groups (experimental and control groups) were exposed to the same content for the same duration in the study. Duration of the lessons was for 45-minute periods. Each group received an equal amount of instruction for five weeks period. According to Manson and Bramble (1997), the longer the time spent the greater the probability that something could influence the subjects' environment that in turn would affect the results. Because of this, the duration of five weeks was deemed appropriate to see the effects of the experimental treatment without incurring the difficulties described by Manson and Bramble (1997). Both the experimental and the control groups were taught by the researcher himself.

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data obtained from the study, "academic achievement test" and "the Elementary English course attitude scale" were used. The statistical analyses were made via SPSS 17.0. In this study, statistical techniques such as mean (\bar{X}), standard deviation (Std. Dv.) and the independent samples t-test were used in the analyses of the data. The p value was held as .05 in the study.

RESULTS

Analysis of the First Research Question

The first research question of the study was "Is there a significant difference between the achievement levels of the students in the experimental group and the students in the control group in terms of the usage of cooperative learning method?" So, before the treatment an independent samples t-test was employed in order to determine whether a statistically significant mean difference existed between the experimental and the control groups with respect to their pre-knowledge and understanding of concepts in "reading for entertainment" unit. The comparison of pre-test results of the students in the experimental and the control groups are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Comparison of Pre-Test Achievement Scores of the Students in the Experiment and the Control Groups

Groups	n	\bar{X}	Std. Dv.	df	t	P
Experimental	33	22.1	11.6	64	-0.523	0.96*
Control	33	22.3	11.9			

* $p > .05$

In Table 3, the pre-test achievement scores of the students in the experimental group and the control group were compared. The average score of the students in the experimental group was found as $\bar{X} = 22.1 \pm 11.6$; and the average pre-test score of the students in the control group was found as $\bar{X} = 22.3 \pm 11.9$. The difference between the students of these two groups was analysed through independent samples t-test. The t-value was found as $[t(64) = -0.523]$ in the study. According to these results, there was no statistically significant difference between the pre-test scores of the students of these two groups at .05 level [$p = 0.96$, $p > .05$]. Prior to study's experimental process, it can be said that pre-learning levels of both groups in "reading for entertainment" unit in English lesson were equal to one another. Meanwhile, the post-test achievement scores of the students in the experimental and the control groups were compared in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Comparison of Post-Test Achievement Scores of the Students in the Experiment and the Control Groups

Groups	n	\bar{X}	Std. Dv.	df	t	p
Experimental	33	70.0	11.8	64	4.94	0.0001*
Control	33	55.2	12.6			

* $p < .05$

In Table 4 above, the average post-test score of the students in the experimental group was found to be $\bar{X} = 70.0 \pm 11.8$ and the average post-test score of the students in the control group was found as $\bar{X} = 55.2 \pm 12.6$. The difference between the two groups was analysed through independent samples t-test. The accounted t-value was found as $[t(64) = 4.94]$ in the study. The students in the experiment group [$\bar{X} = 70.0$] showed significantly better achievement scores compared to the students in the control group [$\bar{X} = 55.2$]. Hence, according to these results it can be said that there was a statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the two groups at .05 level [$p = 0.0001$, $p < .05$]. When one looks at the average scores of the groups, it can be seen that the students in the experiment group reached a higher

achievement level compared to those in the control group. The experimental method, which was cooperative learning, applied was more effective than the instruction based on student textbooks in the control group.

Analysis of the Second Research Question

The second research question of the study was “Is there a significant difference between the attitude levels of the students in the experiment group and the students in the control group towards the lesson in terms of the usage of cooperative learning method?” So, before the treatment an independent samples t-test was employed in order to determine whether a statistically significant mean difference existed between the experimental and the control groups with respect to their pre-attitude towards English lesson. The comparison of pre-test results of the students in the experimental and the control groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of Pre-Test Attitude Scores of the Students in the Experiment and the Control Groups

Groups	n	\bar{X}	Std. Dv.	df	t	p
Experimental	33	1.52	0.508	64	-0.243	0.81*
Control	33	1.55	0.506			

* $p > .05$

In Table 5 given, the pre-test attitude scores of the students in the experiment and the control groups can be seen. The average pre-test attitude score of the students in the experiment group was found as $\bar{X} = 1.52 \pm 0.508$ and the average pre-test attitude score of the students in the control group was found as $\bar{X} = 1.55 \pm 0.506$. The accounted t-value between the average scores of the two groups was found as $[t(64) = -0.243, p = 0.81]$ in the study. The data obtained were not statistically significant at .05 level since the pre-test attitude scores of the students of these two groups were similar.

Table 6. Comparison of Post-Test Attitude Scores of the Students in the Experiment and the Control Groups

Groups	n	\bar{X}	Std. Dv.	df	t	p
Experimental	33	2.73	0.517	64	5.88	0.0001*
Control	33	1.97	0.529			

* $p < .05$

The post-test attitude scores of the students in the experiment group and the control group can be seen in Table 6. The average post-test attitude score

of the students in the experiment group was found as $\bar{X} = 2.73 \pm 0.517$ and the average attitude post-test score of the students in the control group was found as $\bar{X} = 1.97 \pm 0.529$. The t-value obtained from the average scores of the two groups was found as $[t(64) = 5.88]$ which showed the statistically significant difference $[p = 0.0001, p < .05]$ between the groups. In light of the data acquired in the research, it can be said that the students in the experiment group reached higher attitude scores compared to those in the control group. The experimental method applied in the study enabled the students to develop positive attitudes towards English lesson.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

As Wei (1997) stated that low academic achievement and declining motivation and interest amongst most learners have made teaching and learning English a nightmare in schools at all levels so that a possible method to address to the problems of low English proficiency and low motivation in EFL teaching would be the implementation of cooperative learning. From this perspective, the purpose of this study was to assess the effects of cooperative learning on academic achievement and attitudes of eighth grade students towards English lesson and to compare it to that of instruction based on student textbooks. For this reason, experimental and control groups were formed for the study. Whereas student teams achievement divisions (STAD) technique of cooperative learning method developed by Slavin (1990) was applied to the experimental group, instruction based on student textbooks was applied to the control group in the study. As presented in the pre-test findings of English academic achievement test of "reading for entertainment" unit, there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of their academic achievement scores in English lesson. The findings of post-test at the end of the five-week implementation, however, indicate that the experimental group performed better than the control group. The difference acquired between these two groups can be attributed to the responsibilities that the students took in cooperative learning, the active role of the students in the learning process and the interaction and communication amongst the students in the groups. The positive contribution of cooperative learning on students' academic achievement in this research supported the findings reported in the related literature from different countries in every level and field of education (Sharan, 1980; Johnson & Stanne, 1985; Slavin, 1988; Johnson et al., 1990; Sharan & Sharan, 1990; Lazarowitz, 1991; McGuire, 1992; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Lazarowitz, Hertlazarowitz & Baird, 1994; Shachar & Sharan, 1994; Lazarowitz, Baird & Bowlden, 1996; Wei, 1997; Liang, 2002; Slavin, 2003; Wachanga & Mwangi, 2004; George, 2005). Furthermore, the studies (Açıkgöz, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994; Erdem, 1993;

Gömlüksiz, 1993; Pala, 1995; Sünbül, 1995; Delen, 1997; Özer, 1999; Oral, 2000; Özkal, 2000; Sezer & Tokcan, 2003; Gömlüksiz & Onur, 2005; Hevedanlı, Oral & Akbayın, 2005; Bilgin, 2006; Çelebi, 2006; Avşar & Alkış, 2007; Aslandağ-Soylu, 2008; Baş, 2009; Çokparlamış, 2010; Köse et al., 2010) carried out in Turkey also approve the positive effects of cooperative learning on academic achievement and support the findings of this study. For example, Baş (2009) investigated the effects of cooperative learning in an English lesson. He organised his sixth grade classroom and the teaching materials with the principles of cooperative learning method (jigsaw technique). The data revealed that, at the end of treatment of the study carried out by Baş (2009), the students in the experimental group outperformed than the students in the control group where traditional instruction methods were used. In several studies, it is implied that when students teach themselves, the academic success level of students can reach to ninety percent in a cooperative classroom atmosphere (Barth & Demirtaş, 1997).

In terms of the attitude towards English course, there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. As presented in the pre-test findings of English lesson attitude of students, there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of their attitudes towards English lesson. The findings of post-test at the end of the five-week implementation, however, indicate that the experimental group performed better than the control group. In other words, the students who were educated by cooperative learning method had more positive attitudes towards English lesson than those who were educated by the instruction based on student textbooks. Pala (1995), Sünbül (1995), Oral (2000), Liang (2002) and Çelebi (2006) carried out studies by cooperative learning method in learning atmospheres. They explored students' attitudes towards courses by cooperative learning method. In their studies, they found that there was a significant difference in the attitude levels towards the lesson between the groups, which cooperative learning method (experimental group) and the other group for which the instruction based on student textbooks (control group) were used. The students who were educated by cooperative learning method had developed more positive attitudes towards the lesson than the students who were educated by the instruction based on student textbooks. These results resemble to the result of this study. It can be said based on the findings; cooperative learning method was more effective on the development of students' attitudes towards lesson than the instruction based on student textbooks. Baş (2009) investigated the effects of cooperative learning method on learners' attitudes in an English lesson. In his research, it was found that there was significant difference between pre- and post-test results of attitude scale on control and experimental groups. These results in the stated studies also resemble to the result of the current study.

The cooperative learning context did not only benefit the low-achievers, it also helped the high-achieving students to explore language learning beyond the limitation of their textbooks (Cheng, 2000). Those high-achievers were encouraged to read English newspapers and storybooks and listen to some English songs during the experimental time span. They were given plenty of opportunities to explain their ideas to their team mates and to lead the discussions. In addition to the language achievements, both the high- and low-achievers in the experimental group expressed positive attitude towards learning English. They seemed rather happy to learn English through cooperative learning because they were able to progress at their own pace and, at the same time, contribute to others' learning in such a supportive and encouraging learning context. In this sense, the most important thing in research was the experimental group students had more fun when they were learning and they also had the chance of socialisation and cooperation which are more important for them in these ages. The researcher also saw that cooperative learning helped the learners develop many skills like intellectual, social, emotional and moral skills which are the skills the learners have to develop at school learning as well as the students had no anxiety while learning. According to Duxbury and Tsai (2010), foreign language anxiety is a universal phenomenon that inhibits students' achievement in ESL and EFL classrooms and it can be reduced through social interaction such as cooperative learning. The results of the study also indicate that the activities used in the treatment provided more opportunities to the students to get involved in the activities than the participants in the classroom conducted by following the requirements of the course book. This study also implies that the students should be provided with adequate grounds for interaction in a social context within the principles of cooperative learning because interaction between group members in a social context is essential for learning as proposed in social constructive theory culture and context are important to understand what occurs in society and to construct knowledge (Derry, 1999). According to Scott and Ytreberg (1990), teachers should group the students together whenever and wherever possible. This does not mean that they have to work in groups all the time, but most students like to have other students around them, and also sitting with others encourages cooperation. Also, working with dialogues with pairs or groups is a useful way to develop the cooperative atmosphere in the classroom. So by this way, students do not afraid of a possible failure, or on the contrary of that, they work out in a fearless and reinforcing atmosphere in the classroom so that learning materialises in a natural way. It is cooperative learning that allows the individual to go beyond the information given to them (Bruner, 1973) and move on to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

As there are only a few studies on the application of cooperative learning method, there is a need to conduct more studies on this issue. This

current study may give insights for teachers about integrating cooperative learning method into elementary English lessons. It is suggested that researchers should study the effects of cooperative learning method on students' academic risk taking, metacognitive skills and motivational levels, vs. with their academic achievement levels and attitudes towards English lesson and/or other lessons.

As a result of this study, in which the effects of cooperative learning method on academic achievement and attitudes of students towards English lesson were examined, the following suggestions can be given depending on the findings obtained in the study.

In light of the gathered data in the study, cooperative learning method was found to be more effective on students' academic achievement levels and attitudes towards the course than the activities instruction based on student textbooks. So, it is suggested teachers should use this strategy in their lessons. Because, after the experimental process of this strategy, students rose their academic achievement and attitudes towards the lesson in a greater extent. Besides these, teachers should give time to students in order to make them interact with their peers in the groups in class than make students only do the activities in student textbooks. Since learning a foreign language requires much more interaction and communication, teachers should use cooperative activities and use the activities based on student textbooks in a lesser extent. Meanwhile, teachers should direct the process of the method effectively so that if they cannot direct the strategy effectively, students can be frustrated and demoralised, they can be bored with the lesson and the strategy can be unsuccessful from the beginning of the process. Because of this situation, seminars and courses should be organised so as to train teachers to use this strategy effectively in their classrooms so that they can create a more positive classroom atmosphere. Also, teacher education programmes should be reorganised to contain both the practice and the theoretical knowledge/framework of cooperative learning method. On the other hand, by cooperative learning method, students have a chance to practise their understanding on the learning material by interacting and communicating with their peers in the groups. So the learning environment should be organised so that students interact face to face with each other and share the responsibility of the learning process. Cooperative learning is a possible teaching method that may address the various needs of the students with mixed levels of English ability in a heterogeneous class. Hence, the Elementary English school curriculum in Turkey should be integrated with the techniques and principles of cooperative learning in order to develop students' communicative competence as well as other social and emotional skills. Lastly, similar researches can be carried out in other lessons and institutions such as high school or university level.

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