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Undergraduate ELT Mexican Students' perceptions about Group work: A classroom observation study

By

**Fany Sandra Campech Pérez
Margarita Rodríguez Guerrero**

**Mtra. Ma. T. Fátima Encinas Prudencio
Thesis Director**

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classroom observation study*

This investigation has been read by the members of the Committee of

Fany Sandra Campech Pérez
Margarita Rodríguez Guerrero

And is considered worthy of approval in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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Mtra. Ma. T. Fátima Encinas Prudencio
Thesis Director

Mtro. Leonel Ojeda Ruiz
Committee Member

Mtra. Gisela Cuatlapantzin Pichón
Committee Member

Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla, Pue.
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Finally, we are grateful to the teachers that allowed us to observe their classes and the students who answered the questionnaires. Thank you for your great support and cooperation when we collected data for our project.

Dedications

I want to thank to God and the Juquila's Virgin, for all the things you have given me during this beautiful life; especially to my family, my love and my friends.

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Dedications

*Let us be grateful to people who make us happy;
they are the charming gardeners
who make our souls blossom. (Marcel Proust)*

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Abstract

This study attempted to understand the characteristics of group work in English classes in a pre-service English Language Teaching program, also to know what the students' perceptions are about it. A mix-method approach was used to analyze these students' results in a questionnaire and a classroom observation.

The results indicated that during group work activities in the three observed classes, often students worked collaboratively. It was observed that 90% of the teams were assembled by the teacher and 100% of the teams were formed by male and female. As well as, 90% of the assignments were clear and appropriated to the students' level; so the environment was harmoniously. We observed a good participation, and good outcomes at the end of the activities. Lastly, the role of the teacher took an important part for getting a well group work results, due to the role of the teacher in collaborative language learning is a facilitator who must move around the class helping students and groups as needs arise. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001)

In addition, this study indicated students preferred to work with someone else because they thought it was easier and during the observation students showed a positive attitude and active participation. Moreover, students thought that using group work techniques in classrooms benefited them in different ways. The results also indicated that interaction among the students needed to be promoted in order to learn collaboratively (Cohen, 1994).

This project also provides the basis of a larger research since this study was about students' perceptions and it could be interesting to carry out this in teachers' perceptions; what they

think about it, why or why not they use it; if they like it, what advantages or disadvantages have using group work.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Education throughout life is based on four pillars: learning to be, learning to do, learning to know and learning to live together. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has highlighted one of the four pillars that it proposes and describes as the foundation of education: learning to live together, by developing an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values and, on this basis, creating a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future, would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way.

Thus, when people work together, they develop attitudes and different skills of communication, collaboration and critical thinking

Collaborative learning demonstrably helps students learn better, more thoroughly more deeply, more efficiently than learning alone. In the long run, collaborative learning teaches students to work together effectively, when the stakes are relatively low, so that they can work together affectively later on when the stakes are high. With collaboratively learning, they learn to construct knowledge as it is constructed in the knowledge communities, they hope to join after attending colleges and universities and the most important in collaboratively learning students learn the craft of interdependence (Bruffee, 1999 p xii,xiii).

This research is focused on “Group work” concept as collaborative learning.

Group work is defined as students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a task that has been clearly assigned. Moreover, students are expected to carry out their task without direct and immediate supervision of the teacher. Group work is not the same as ability grouping, in which the teachers divide up the class by academic criteria so that they can instruct a more heterogeneous group. It should be distinguished from small groups that teachers compose for intensive instruction, such as the flexible grouping procedures often used in individualized reading instruction (Cohen, 1994 pp.1-2).

The aim of the present paper was to investigate the attitudes students show when they work in teams. This paper also attempted to describe how students work in group work activities and to analyze the main characteristics of group work.

The following parts of this research will be explained: first, the interest of the topic, second the methodology for the research, third the significance of the study, the context of the research as well as the location of the research, the aims for it and the research questions.

1.1 Interest on the topic

The interest on this topic arose because there is little research on group work at least in our context and it is not often promoted in ELT classrooms. Generally, in our experience a number of teachers do not promote group work activities inside classroom either because they do not like it, or they do not know how to use it and how to apply it. There is a common belief among teachers and students in this context that only two or three students do the task and the rest of the group do not. Similarly, often students do not know how to work and deal with other people, sometimes they think working in teams refers to dividing the task avoiding collaborative work and participation. Consequently, many students prefer to work alone.

Furthermore, we had different ideas about the possible results, while one of us thought students would have a very positive attitude towards group work the other did not.

1.2 Methodology

This is a classroom observation study with qualitative and quantitative components. It was based on an observational study of group work activities, students' attitudes toward group work and its characteristics. The participants were undergraduate ELT students from 22 to 25 years old in a public university. In addition, two instruments were applied: an observational format and a questionnaire.

1.3 Significance of the study

The importance of this research is students as future English teachers learn to work with others in order to use and promote group work activities in the classrooms. At the same time, students will reflect on the benefits of this technique and will hopefully realize what are the attitudes students show when they work in teams. Additionally, ELT undergraduate students may understand the characteristics of group work in order to improve the use of the technique. This project could contribute to the field of teaching because today, teachers often tend not to foster students' communication skills and thus, students tend to lose attention and motivation.

1.4 Location of the research

The research was carried out in a public university which has a pre-service teaching program in foreign languages. The place is suitable for the investigation because of the prestige, the quality, and it has well – known educational teachers in the pedagogy and linguistics area. It also allows the research to work in a real context where students will be English teachers.

1.5 The aims

The principal aims of this research study are:

- To explore students' attitudes in group work activities
- To describe how students work in group work activities
- To analyze what are the characteristics of group work

1.6 Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of group work in English classes in a pre-service English Language Teaching program?
2. What are students' perceptions of group work?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of communities of practice and communities of learning; and the literature review related to working with others, group work, cooperative learning, and collaborative learning, as well as, the role of these in ELT classrooms and their characteristics. Finally, some studies on these issues are discussed.

2.1 Communities of practice and communities of learning

Wenger (2007) in his book *communities of practice* emphasizes a social theory of learning which is the foundation of his title. On the one hand, communities of practice are a kind of community created overtime where participants interact with each other and with the world by sharing the same conditions so that they learn and acquire new knowledge. Communities of practices are everywhere, are an integral part of our lives and are all those we belong to now, those we belonged to in the past, and those we would like to belong to in the future.

Furthermore, Barton & Tusting (2005) state a community of practice is that people typically come together in groupings to carry out activities in everyday life, in the workplace and in education; and where members interact each other in many ways. So learning means engagement in a community of learning and participation becomes the fundamental process of learning.

We all belong to communities of practices, at home, at work, at school, in our hobbies, etc. and when we interact and make relationships with members of these communities we learn from them and they learn from us, so the learning is a mutual, reciprocal constant practice. Communities of practice are not just social contexts but also give structure and meaning to

what the participants do and include language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, criteria, procedures and regulations which make explicit for a variety of purposes; as well as, there are implicit relations and tacit conventions (Wenger, 2007, p.6)

Engaging a person in a community of practice involves the whole person, all what we say and what we do, what we aspire to and what we settle for, what we know and what we can manifest; all these aspects are developed, negotiated and shared.(ibid)

On the other hand, the social theory establishes social participation as its primary focus. Owing to the fact we are social beings, we are in active participation not only in certain activities or with certain people, but also in practice of social communities by constructing identities in relation to the communities (Wenger, 2007, p. 4).

What is more, a social theory of learning is not exclusively on academic enterprise, we do not just focus or spend all day on academic investigations but also it is relevant to our daily actions because learning takes place in all relationships, communities or organizations we belong. In order to ensure good results in the process of learning and knowing, the social theories integrates the components necessary to achieve this process; which are meaning, practice, social structure and identity, all these elements are deeply related (Wenger, 2005, p. 11-13).

Meaning is in all experiences of everyday life and the interactive relations of people with their environment. When we experiment a new situation, we produce new meanings that extend, redirect, dismiss, reinterpret, modify or confirm what we knew or said. Therefore, during those experiences we are constantly in practice, practices refer to all we do, all actions engage with the world; and this theory highlights that we learn doing things by

ourselves because it involves action and thinking. Moreover, it is not the same, to watch how people do things than experiment on your own (Wenger, 2005, p.52-53).

What is more, our learning is also influenced by the context in which we develop. We belong to a community where there is a mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise; all members do things together and share styles, stories, actions, discourses, historical events, tools and artifacts in order to negotiate meaningful new learning. Lastly, identity is concerned with the social formation of the person, learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context our communities (Barton & Tusting, 2005).

To put it another way, our identity up to now was influenced or changed by all we have lived and experimented because along our lives we have been in touch with different contexts and different people, for instance, school. We used to think and act in one way in elementary school and in another totally different in university.

Communities of learning

Learning as a community presents ideas about how children can learn in a community organized to foster their learning. It is focused on what we have learned by participating in a school where parents and teachers engage collaboratively with children. In this perspective, a community of learning is engaging children and adults in learning activities in a collaborative way with varying but coordinated responsibilities to foster children's learning. Adults are responsible for guiding the whole process and for supporting children changing, participation in their shared attempt (Rogoff, 2001 p. 7).

There are many ways that a community of learning could be arranged, fitting the different circumstances, values, and interests of the participants. In view of Rogoff (2001, p. 33) “learning together shows that children and adults learn by participating within a community of learners. Their experiences will speak to all those interested in school improvement and in how people learn through engaging together in activities of mutual interest”.

In view of Cooper and Boyd (1994, in Brody and Davidson, 1998, p. 5) there is a regarding in how and why teachers, students, administrators, and staff developers should collaborate, that is to develop a sense of collegiality in the interest of restructuring schools as learning communities. Besides this, in learning communities there is the expressed value and goal that every child and adult learns; members have access to information, research and training so they can learn continuously.

2.2 Working with others

Work together generally generates a successful learning. Recently, learning with others has had a great influence in educational issues. It has been demonstrated that students learn more when they interact and participate with others by sharing ideas and experiences (Delors, 2013). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) establishes four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be; which have emphasized the need for people to return to education in order to deal with new situations, arising in their personal and working lives.

However, there is an outstanding chance in the traditional pattern of life which requires a better understanding of other people, interchanging peace and harmony in the world. Thus, the Commission has paid more attention to one of the four pillars because it can be the

foundations of education: learning to live together. As mentioned before, learning to live together refers to developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence - carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts -in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace (Delors, 2013, p. 37).

In educational settings especially inside classrooms, it is important that students learn to work with their classmates and that teachers promote activities that allow students develop social behavior, values and positive and meaningful learning. For a successful classroom management, working in teams can be a useful technique to keep students in constant communication and participation where everybody can maintain an active practice. This technique is mainly called Group work, but there are two more versions of the same technique: cooperative learning and collaborative learning. However, all of them are educational activities in which human relationships are the key to welfare, achievement and mastery. And although they may disagree about terms and methods or principles and assumptions, their long-range goals are strikingly similar (Bruffee, 1999).

In addition, peer interaction facilitates children's learning and problem-solving and cognitive development. Other possible benefits of collaboration are its impact on children's social development or communication skills. Likewise, in classroom situations the continue role of the teacher in structuring and managing group work maybe of prime importance (Faulkner, Littleton and Woodhead, 1998, p. 171).

The three terms will be briefly described below, in order to clarify the differences and similarities and avoid confusion. Moreover, this research has a great emphasis on Group

work because it is more suitable for educational innovation and classroom organization. The concept is often found in language teaching and language learning areas.

2.2.1 Group work

Group work is used as a means for learning at all levels in most educational systems, from compulsory education to higher education. The overarching purpose of group work in educational practice is to serve as an incentive for learning (Hammar, 2014).

Cohen (1994) and Andueza (1983) agree group work is defined as students working together in a group small enough so everybody can participate and interact in a task that has been clearly assigned. Meanwhile, group work is also called collaborative learning in which students work together face to face in heterogeneous groups, carrying out a task and at the same time they share ideas and experiences, contribute knowledge and develop different skills of communication, critical, and thinking.

Group work is also defined as “pupils working together as a group or a team,” (Blatchford et al., 2003, p. 155 in Hammar, 2014). It is important to bear in mind that group work is not just one activity, but several activities with different conditions. This implies that group work may change characteristics several times during a group work session and/or during a group’s lifetime, thus suggesting that certain working modes may be better suited for different parts of a group’s work and vice versa (Hammar, 2014).

Working as a group, on the other hand, causes learning benefits from collaboration with other group members. Working as a group is often referred to as “real group work” or “meaningful group work,” and denotes group work in which students utilizes the group members’ skills and work together to achieve a common goal. Moreover, working as a

group presupposes collaboration, and that all group members will be involved in and working on a common task to produce a joint outcome (ibid).

In addition, group work in any language learning setting takes an important role: as an effective technique for achieving intellectual and social learning goals, solving problems and improving students' relationships and interaction; as a strategy for keeping students involved in their works and managing instruction for students with a wide range of academic skills. Most of the activities in language classrooms include individual participation where one student tries to answer while the rest of the class listens. Here there are some limitations which demonstrate only one student keeps an active practice and there is no evidence that students are learning just by listening without doing it by themselves. For these reasons group work can be more effective in classes since it allows everybody to be able to participate by talking, thinking, and discussing together (Cohen, 1994).

To familiarize students with group work activities, teachers can start orienting students to new roles and helping them to develop collaborative learning skills since the first day of class (Barkley, Cross & Major, 2005, p.29). One of the activities that help students to introduce and greet themselves is a *social icebreaker*, which provides students the opportunity to get to know each other and interact. They also develop feelings of comfort and show a positive attitude during the learning.

Barkley et al. (2005, p.43) state that forming groups is really important in collaborative learning due to the fact that they are a basic structure to share social interest in a variety of ways for multiple purposes. When teachers form groups they must consider: *Group type, group size and group membership*. Firstly, the variation in type depends on the goal, the

activity and the length of time students will work together. According to Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991 in Barkley et al., 2005, p.43) groups can be formal, informal or base. On the one hand, informal groups are created to respond a question, brainstorm ideas or participate in some other endeavor that serves as a break out to a longer class. On the other hand formal groups achieve more complex goals such as writing a report or developing a presentation. Lastly, Based groups intend to accomplish a long-term project where learners work on a variety of tasks.

Secondly, group size depends on the type of group, the nature of the assignment, the duration of the task, and to some extent the physical setting. Generally, it is suggested that the group must be small enough so that students can participate and build confidence in one another, yet large enough to have sufficient diversity and the necessary resources to accomplish the learning task. Finally, group membership refers to the way to constitute groups and to select group members. There are basically three methods for assigning group membership: *Random* is the ideal for most informal groups organized for short-term assignment, and it is also useful for breaking up longer-term formal or base groups to create variety. Random grouping gives students opportunities to work with most or all of their classmates; *Students selection* allows students to choose their partners or group members. Students may feel more comfortable and be more motivated to work together if they are permitted to choose their own group members (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999 in Barkley et al., 2005, p.47). However, student choice tends to create groups based on friendship, leaving some students feel like outsiders and risking that students stray off task; and *Instructor determined* can be based on students interests or students characteristics.

When planning an activity, it takes time to think of all the stages that we have to follow, so that “*collaborative learning techniques*” can help teachers to make more effective lesson plans. According to Barkley (2005), collaborative learning techniques are organized into five categories and each one has their own techniques of general learning activities:

Discussion, Reciprocal Peer Teaching, Problem Solving, Graphic Information Organizing and collaborative writing. In Discussion techniques students’ interaction and exchange is achieved primarily through spoken words. Reciprocal peer teaching techniques engage students purposefully help each other master subject matter content and develop discipline-based skills. In problem solving techniques, students focus on practicing problem-solving strategies. Graphic information organizing techniques use visual tools to organize and display information. Lastly, Collaborative writing techniques help students write in order to learn important course content and skills. (ibid)

2.2.2 Cooperative learning

Learning can be built on cooperation through negotiation with others in communities of knowledgeable peers. Firstly, cooperative learning is a body of literature and research that has examined the effects of cooperation in education (Kessler, 1992, p.1). Thus, cooperative learning or cooperation in education refers to a method of instruction that organizes students to work in groups toward a common goal or outcome or share a common problem or task in such a way that they can only succeed in completing the work through behavior that demonstrates interdependence while holding individual contributions and efforts accountable (Brody & Davidson, 1998, p.8).

Similarly, Kessler (1992) claims cooperative learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and it is motivated to increase the learning of others. He also proposes cooperative learning as a within-class grouping of students, usually of differing levels of second language proficiency, who learn to work together on specific tasks or projects in such a way that all students in group benefit from the interactive experience.

In ELT, cooperative learning is a resource for language acquisition and academic achievement. The environment of a cooperative classroom fosters a communicative classroom and is organized for collaborative purpose, student interest, and previous experience (Kessler, 1992). Moreover, cooperative learning also offers some benefits which are focused on student -student interaction, through interdependence and motivation.

McGroarty (1989 in Kessler, 1992 p. 2-3) points six primary benefits for students acquiring English:

- 1.- Increase language practice through interaction.
- 2.- Use the first language to support cognitive development and increase second language skills.
- 3.- Integrate language with content-based instructions.
- 4.- Include material to stimulate language as well as concept learning.
- 5.- Freedom for teachers to master new professional skills, especially in communication.
- 6.- Students take a more active role in their learning.

2.2.3 Collaborative learning

Engaging students in active learning is a relevant issue in today's classrooms. In order to promote active learning teachers are incorporating collaborative learning in their classes, as a technique to develop different skills of communication in a socio-cultural environment. According to the Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics Dictionary, collaborative learning is an approach to teach and learn in which classrooms are organized so that students work together in small co-operative teams. It increases student's learning since: it is less threatening for many students; it increases the amount of student participation in the classroom; it produces the need for competitiveness; and it reduces the teachers' dominance in the classroom.

Bruffee (1999) claims collaborative learning demonstrably helps students learn better, more thoroughly, more deeply, more efficiently than learning alone. In the long run, collaborative learning encourages teachers and students to promote students work together effectively, when the stakes are relatively low, so that they can work together affectively later on when the stakes are high. With collaborative learning, students learn to construct knowledge as it is constructed in the knowledge communities, they hope to join after attending colleges and universities and the most important in collaborative learning students learn the craft of interdependence.

Likewise, Barkley, Cross and Major (2005) deem collaborative learning offers students opportunities to learn valuable interpersonal and teamwork skills and dispositions by participating in task-oriented learning groups; thus, even beyond enhancing the learning of content or subject matter, collaborative learning develops important skills that prepare

students for careers. They also emphasize collaborative learning in ELT as an interactive learning group and it occurs when students create knowledge, it assumes that people make meaning together and that learning in social context makes positive contributions to students' education.

The terms collaborative and cooperative have similar meanings; there is considerable debate and discussion as to whether they mean the same thing when applied to group learning. Some authors use the terms cooperative and collaborative interchangeably to mean students working independently on a common learning task. However, others insist on a clear epistemological distinction (Bruffee, 1999).

Smith (1996, in Barkley et al., 2005, p.5) establishes that cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's "learning". To put in another way, learners act for a particular purpose being helpful by doing what a teacher asks them to do. Mathews (1996, in Barkley et al., 2005, p.6) points out that collaborative learning occurs when students and faculty work together to create knowledge. It is a pedagogy that has at its center in the assumption that people make meaning together and the process enriches and enlarges them. That means that collaborative learning is an effective technique supported by professional people in order to provide meaningful knowledge to learners in the classroom.

2.3 Research on this issue

In recent years, there has been an increasing importance in group work and some experts in language teaching have focused their attention on it. This has been the reason for worthy research whose contributions have influenced teachers' beliefs and, consequently, their

performance. Well known researchers on children's cooperative learning are Elizabeth Cohen, David and Roger Johnson, Shlomo Sharan, Robert Slavin, and others. Furthermore, major research on educational collaboration among college and university students was done by William Schwartz, Warren Bennis and Hebert Shepard, Kurt Lewin, and other group work practitioners. Most studies of teamwork in the social structures of business and industry, and many studies of cooperation among school children where dependence upon adults is necessary and clear-cut, tend to ignore differences in social maturity and educational needs (Bruffee, 1999).

Research on cooperative learning tends to be looking for the degree to which the mutual influence of peers serves the interest of classroom efficiency measured in the amount of subject matter students learn and the speed with which they learn it. It is relevant to mention the example of "*The discipline of teams*" by Katzenbach and Smith (1992) who concludes that workers are more productive when they work together than when they are isolated from one another.

Finally, successful research on group work would ask questions such as: do students learn something about how human beings construct knowledge together in classroom and out, when they work independently on specific issues? Does short-term classroom collaboration give students confidence to construct it in the future on their own or with other groups of people? Can students who learn collaboratively in one setting teach their peer to learn collaboratively in other settings? (Brody & Davidson, 1998)

2.4 Chapter conclusion

To conclude this literature review and support all the information above, we carried out an observational study; which will be described in the following chapter. It involves the place where the study was carried out, the participants who were observed, the instruments that were applied, and the procedure of the study will be described.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents specific information about the setting, the participants, the instruments and the procedure used in this research. This is a classroom observation study focused on a qualitative and quantitative methodology in order to analyze the characteristics of group work.

3.1 Setting

This research was carried out in a pre-service English teaching program of a university of Puebla (*BUAP*). This project was focused on the Teaching Program, one of the two programs that this faculty offers. This setting was selected because students of this faculty will become teachers and they must promote group work by improving their teaching techniques.

3.2 Subjects

The participants who we considered to carry out this research were pre-service students from an advanced English level. They were males and females, all registered into the last semester of the program. Their ages ranged from 22 to 25 years old and they were in three different groups. The groups were of 25 to 30 students and each class was about two hours long.

The three English classes that we observed were taught by teachers who promoted group work and who allowed us to observe their classes. We asked eight teachers if we could observe their classes. Two said they did not use group work, one asked us to come back

later and two others accepted our observation but did not use group work in their classes. Permission to observe each class was given by the teachers, and students also gave their consent to be observed. For our purposes, we will refer to these groups as Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3.

3.3 Instruments

The instruments employed for this research were a classroom observation form (Appendix A) and a questionnaire (Appendix B). The classroom observation form focused on different types of group work activities: Assembled group, environment, assignment, task, work shared, gender, the way of working as well as group work characteristics. The design was based on Wragg (1997), it included an objective, a context, a chart where the observers marked the aspects with a tick (/) and at the bottom of the page, they answered an open question.

We designed the questionnaire (Appendix B) which was evaluated by the thesis supervisor, based on Cohen (1997) and a focus group of five students at the language faculty. It consisted of ten items addressed to under-graduate students of an English teaching program; seven of them were multiple choice and three of these students needed to write a short explanation to support their answer; the other three were charts where the answers were ticked and there was a place to write any observation. The questionnaire intends to elicit information about the students' perceptions about group work.

3.4 Procedure

First of all, we designed the observation form based on Wragg (1997); it was revised by the thesis supervisor who suggested making some changes in order to improve it, after this, it

was redesigned and piloted in two groups at the language faculty. However, during the piloting we observed other important aspects which were added to the instrument.

Secondly, we started with the design of the questionnaire, it was based on Cohen (1994). The thesis' supervisor checked it and suggested a focus group to find other variables that affect working in teams according to students' opinions to design a better questionnaire.

Then, we carried out the focus group with five students at the language faculty and what we learned was that there were other factors that influence someone who works in teams well and it helped us to extend our perspective about the topic. Third, we asked for permission to observe three classes, and to apply the questionnaire to sixty students from different groups.

After, the application of the instruments was carried out and finally, the three observation forms were analyzed individually in order to collect data about the activities interaction by group work and their characteristics in ELT classrooms. In addition, the results for the fifty questionnaires were analyzed and the data was put into graphs in order to describe some conclusions about group work.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the observations carried out in three ELT classes and the questionnaires administered to fifty above undergraduate students in the language faculty, are presented and discussed. Specific observations and conclusions about these results are also provided. For a better organization, the results are divided in two parts: In the first section, the analysis of group work characteristics, describing at the same time the results of the three classes' observation and in the second section, the results about students' perceptions of group work are described. After, the questionnaires were scored, the data was processed in Excel.

4.1 Group work characteristics

In order to explain the results obtained from the first instrument used to collect data, a table which presents the compiled data from the three classes' observation was designed. The findings are reported in the figure below.

		Class 1	Class 2	Class3
Working	Separately			
	Collaboratively	X	X	X
Assembled Group	Free choices			X
	Teacher directed	X	X	
Environment	Harmoniously	X		X
	Boring/Tedious		X	
Assignment	Clear	X	X	
	Confusing			X
Task	Appropriated	X	X	X
	Beyond			
Work Shared	All members		X	X

	Some of them	X		
	One Child			
Gender Group	Singles Sex			
	Mixed	X	X	X

As the table shows, the first class carried out more collaborative class work around 90%.

Firstly, the group formation was carried out. In this case the teacher was who assigned the teams and students agreed with the teacher's decision. Furthermore, the groups were mixed in order to avoid preference. During the group work activities, the environment was harmonious because there was a positive interaction between teacher-students and especially the teacher showed she had confidence in the students and the students' response was favorable. The assignment was clear and at the end of the activities the outcomes were successful. In addition, the task was appropriated for the students' level and caught their interest. In the process of doing the task, we observed that most of the students contributed and shared ideas.

As well as in the first class, the second one indicated there was successful collaborative work which lasted 80% of the class. Students showed a positive and active participation. The organization of the teams was also directed by the teacher, and the students accepted willingly. Moreover, the teams were formed by males and females. The assignment and the task seemed also clear and appropriated to the students' level, however at the beginning we perceived a little boring and tedious environment because it involved a lot of thinking, students had to be creative and everybody had to participate. Nevertheless, at the end students achieved the task with a meaningful learning and presented their outcomes, so the environment changed and everybody had fun. Thereby, all the students contributed to the task and the work was shared.

Finally, the students of the third class we observed worked collaboratively about 95 % of the time. Unlike the first and the second class, students had the opportunity to choose their teammates and students felt more comfortable. In addition in the group's assembling there were mixed groups. In this case, the environment was enjoyable because the task was amusing. Thus, the task was appropriated to the topic, but at the beginning the assignment was a little confusing because the instructions were not clear, and teacher had to repeat them; immediately students responded successfully. Besides, the students participated actively in the task.

4.2 Teacher role

Another aspect that was observed with the observation form was the role of the teacher, the way the teacher monitored the teams. In the first class, the teacher walked all the time around the classroom in order to help and solve students' doubts, she used to come close to each team to check the students' work. Moreover, the teacher was friendly, kind, patient, and confident and with a good sense of humor, so that students felt motivated.

In the second class, the teacher did not monitor the teams because she spent her time evaluating students' homework. Nevertheless, when students' had doubts, the teacher came up to the team. Also, the teacher was a little serious but friendly at the same time.

In the third and last class teacher walked all the time around the classroom monitoring and helping students to achieve the task. He showed a positive and friendly attitude, students enjoyed the activity and at the same time they reviewed the lesson.

Additionally, the teacher of the second class mentioned that working in teams involves students' personality, students' differences, students' learning styles and they learn to be

tolerant and respectful as well as to learn to ask and thank. Besides, to learn from others, to accept others' ideas, and finally to learn to live together.

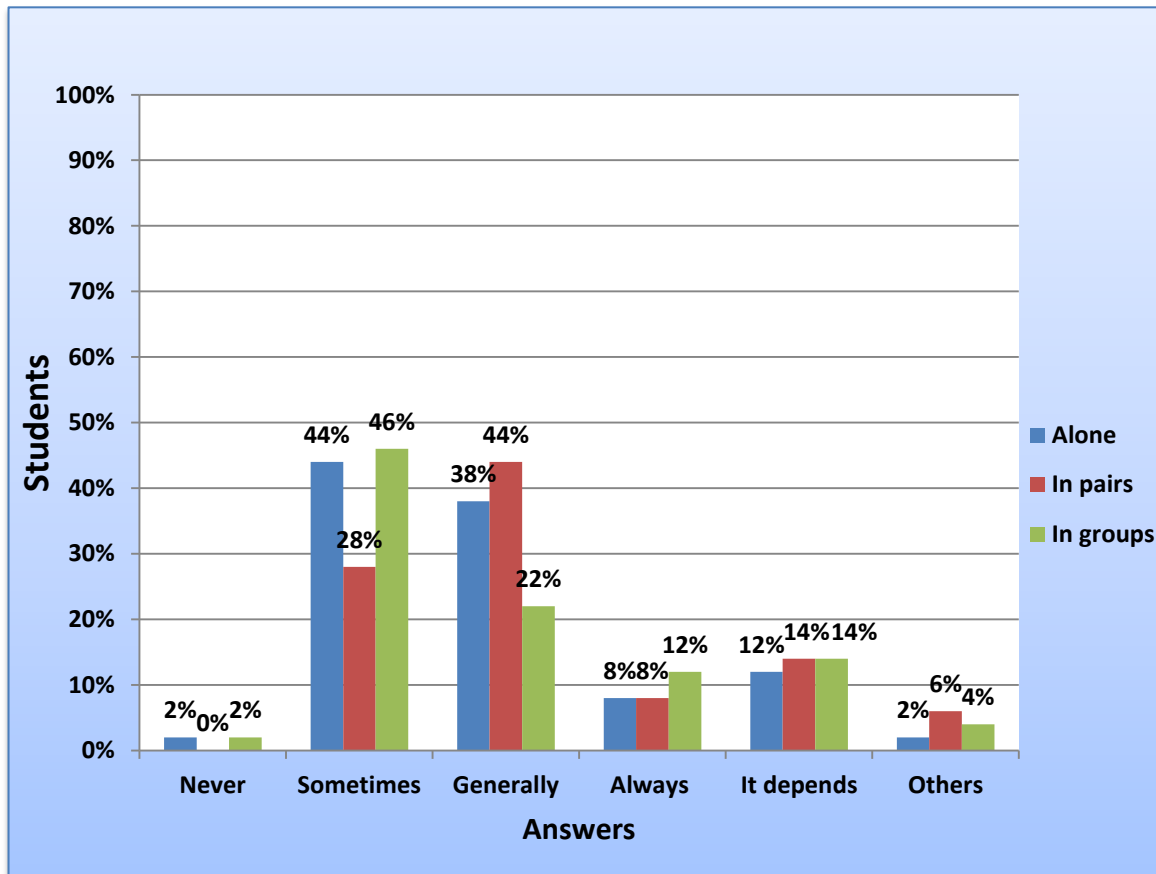
Richards and Rodgers (2001) claim that the role of the teacher in collaborative language learning differs notably from the role of the teacher in traditional teacher-fronted lesson, because the teacher now is a facilitator who must move around the class helping students and groups as needs arise. Harel (1992, in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) states that during class time, the teacher interacts, teaches, refocuses, questions, clarifies, supports, expands, emphasizes. Depending on what problems evolve, teacher gives feedback, extends the activity, encourages thinking, manages conflict and supplies resources. This could be observed in the three classes since the teachers always showed academic support and they solved students' doubts.

4.3 Results

ELT Students' perceptions of group work

The questionnaires applied to ELT students were analyzed to understand students' perceptions of group work, the following figures present the results in detail.

Figure 1. Students' preferences regarding group work in classes



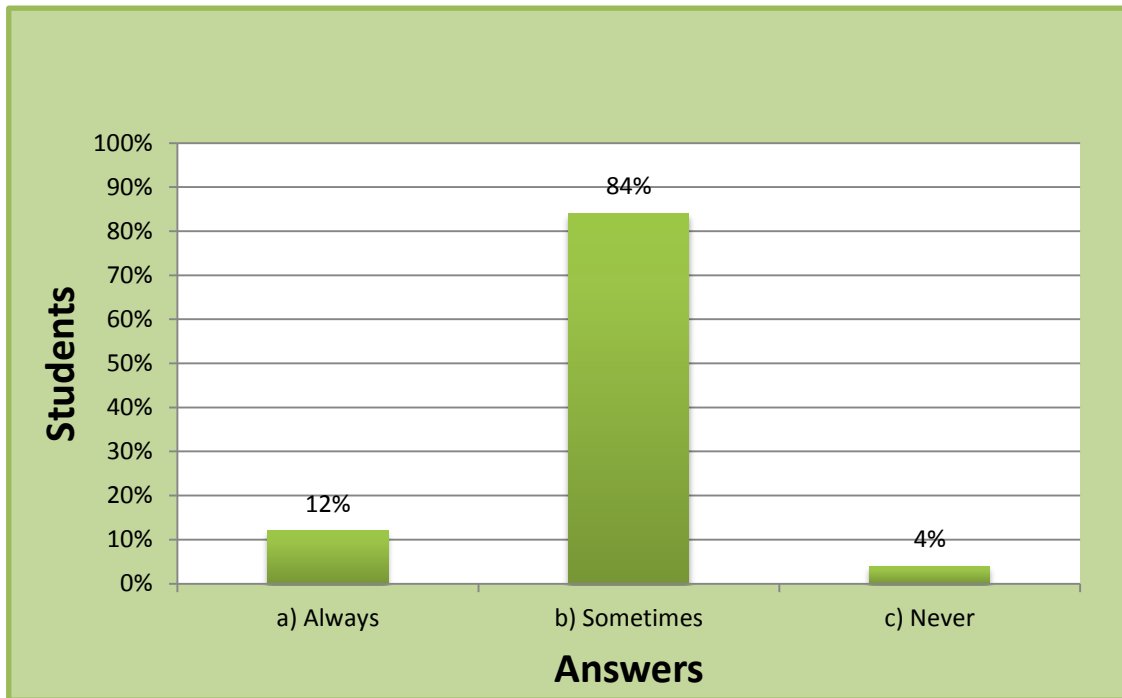
The data provided in Fig. 1 shows the percentages of the ways in which undergraduate Minerva students prefer to work in classes. There are three options: a) Alone, b) In pairs and c) In groups. As shown above, 44% of the students claimed that they sometimes prefer to work alone, 38% of them generally prefer to work alone, 12% said that working alone depends on the time, the task, the interest and the people, whereas 8% of them answered they always prefer to work alone and the remaining 2% argued they would never work alone. Up to 2% of the participants did not answer.

In a second place, 44% of the students generally prefer to work in pairs, 28% of them sometimes like to work in pairs, up to 14% pointed out working in pairs depends on relationships between them, while 8% of the subjects claimed they always prefer to work with someone else and 6% did not answer. None of the participants responded they never work in pairs.

Lastly, 46% of the participants sometimes prefer to work in groups, 22% of them generally like to work in groups. Up to 14% of the subjects argued working in teams depend on who work with, good relationships, interest on the task etc., whereas, 12% always prefer to work with others, and 2 % replied they never work in teams. 4 % of students did not answer.

According to the results, it can be inferred that often students work in the three ways, it depends on the activity and the topic. Some students argued working alone is better because it allows them to organize and create their own work and knowledge. Others stated it was better working alone because some students were irresponsible, not all members of the group participated, and the students' personality affected, some are shy, negative and intolerant. However, participants claimed working in pairs is a good way to share points of view, facilitate work, and analyze, integrate, and conclude ideas. Meanwhile, they pointed out working in teams helped them to develop skills to work with someone else. They also stated it made the class more dynamic and interesting, by listening to others' ideas, discussing different points of view, learning from others, and achieving the learning goals of the task easier and faster.

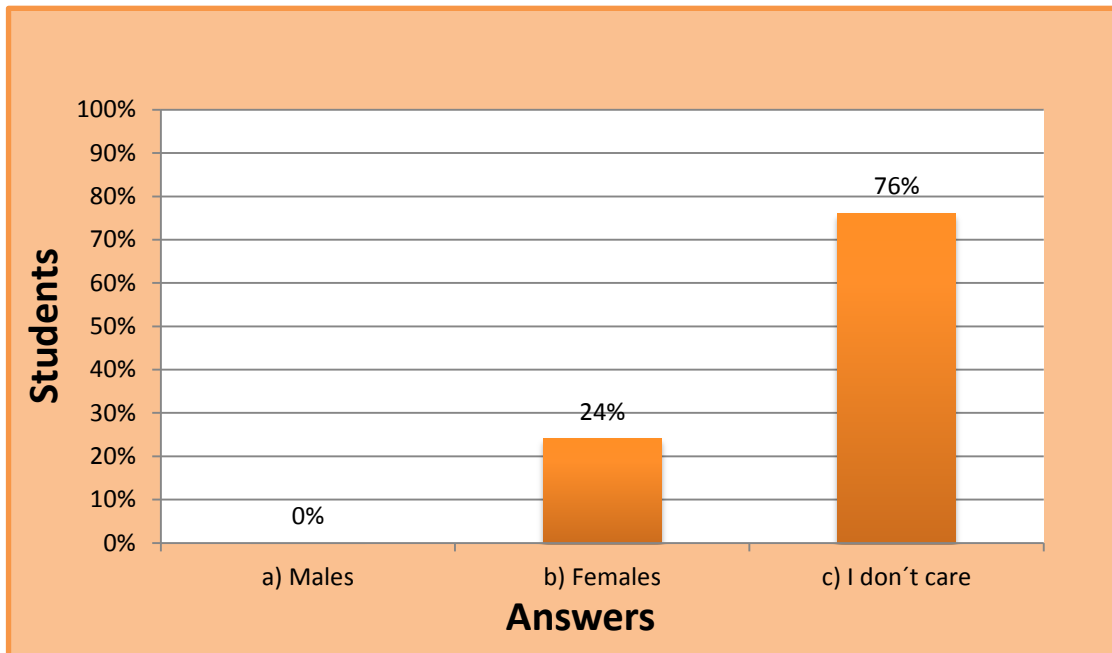
Figure 2. Students' opinions regarding collaborative work in teams.



We asked undergraduate Minerva students about collaborative work in teams. The results were the following: 84% of them reported that there was sometimes collaborative work when they work in teams, while 12% stated there was always collaborative work when they work in teams. Lastly 4% answered there was never collaborative work.

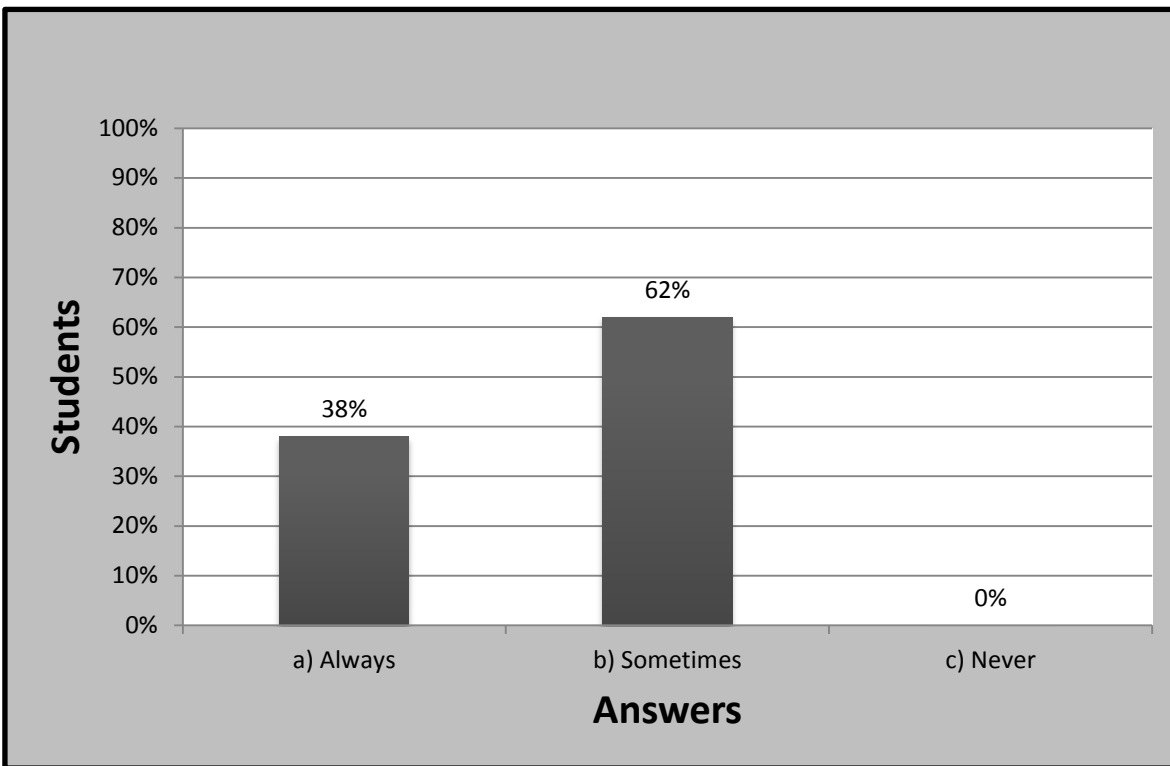
According to students' answers, collaborative work was affected by lack of some students' enthusiasm, interest, laziness and responsibility. So, often students work separately and there was a lack of communication.

Figure 3. Students' preferences regarding who they prefer to work with.



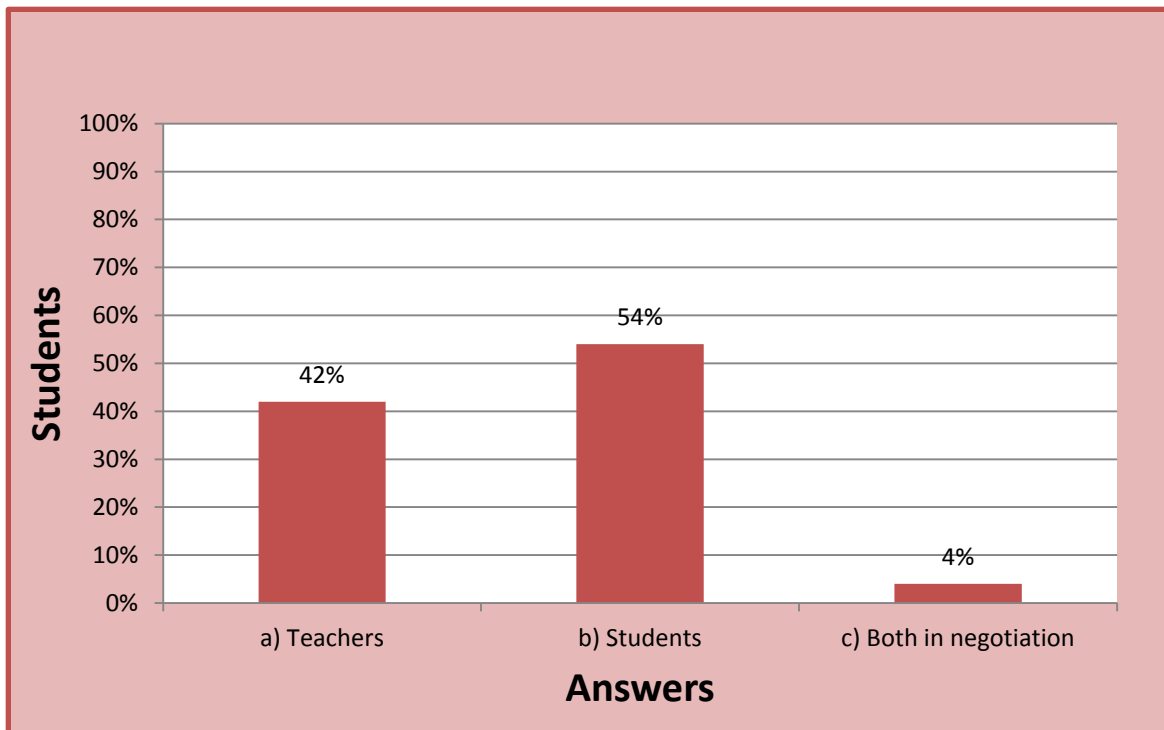
The graph shows the percentage of the undergraduate Minerva students' answers about who they prefer to work with: males, females or whoever. As it can be seen, 76% of the students did not care who they worked with, whereas 24% of students preferred to work only with female students and finally none of students selected they preferred to work with male students.

Figure 4. Group work in class



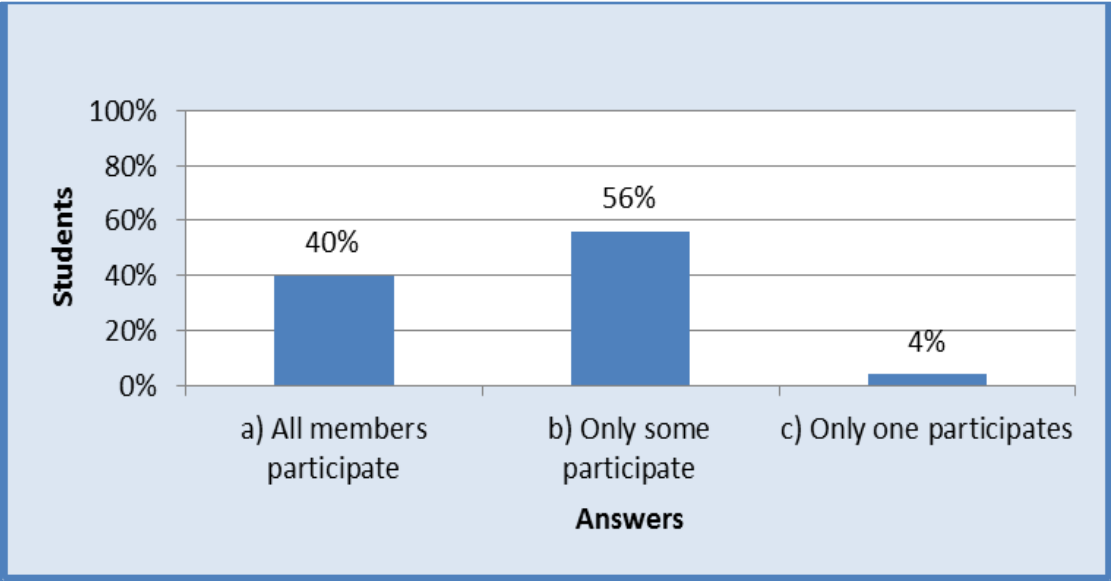
In order to determine if group work is promoted inside the classroom by teachers, in this context, the findings, this study indicates that 62% of students claimed teachers sometimes promote group work in the classroom, while 38% said their teachers always promote group work in their activities in class and none answered that never.

Figure 5. Who makes decisions to organize the group?



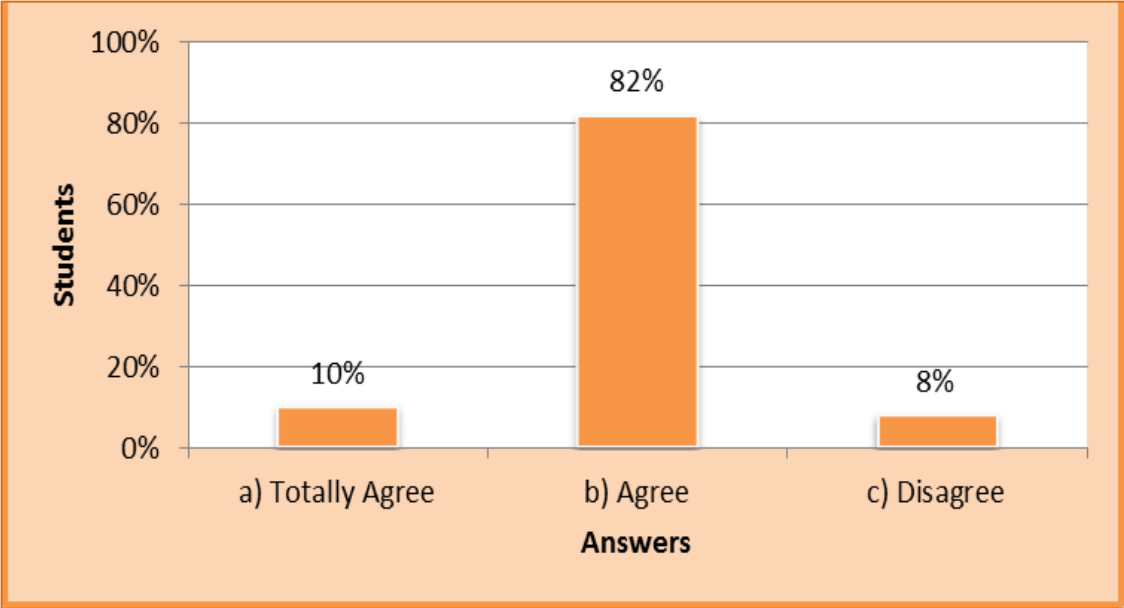
With the results of this graph we can see that 54% of students claim that students were who made the decision about choosing who to work with, whereas 42% of students claim teachers were who made the decision to organize the group and lastly 4% of students indicated both students and teachers in negotiation make the decision to organize the group.

Figure 6. The different team participants' contribution to group work



The results show that according to students' experience generally only some students contribute and participate in the group work activities. Up to 40% of the students have been in teams where all members participate and only 4% where only one participates.

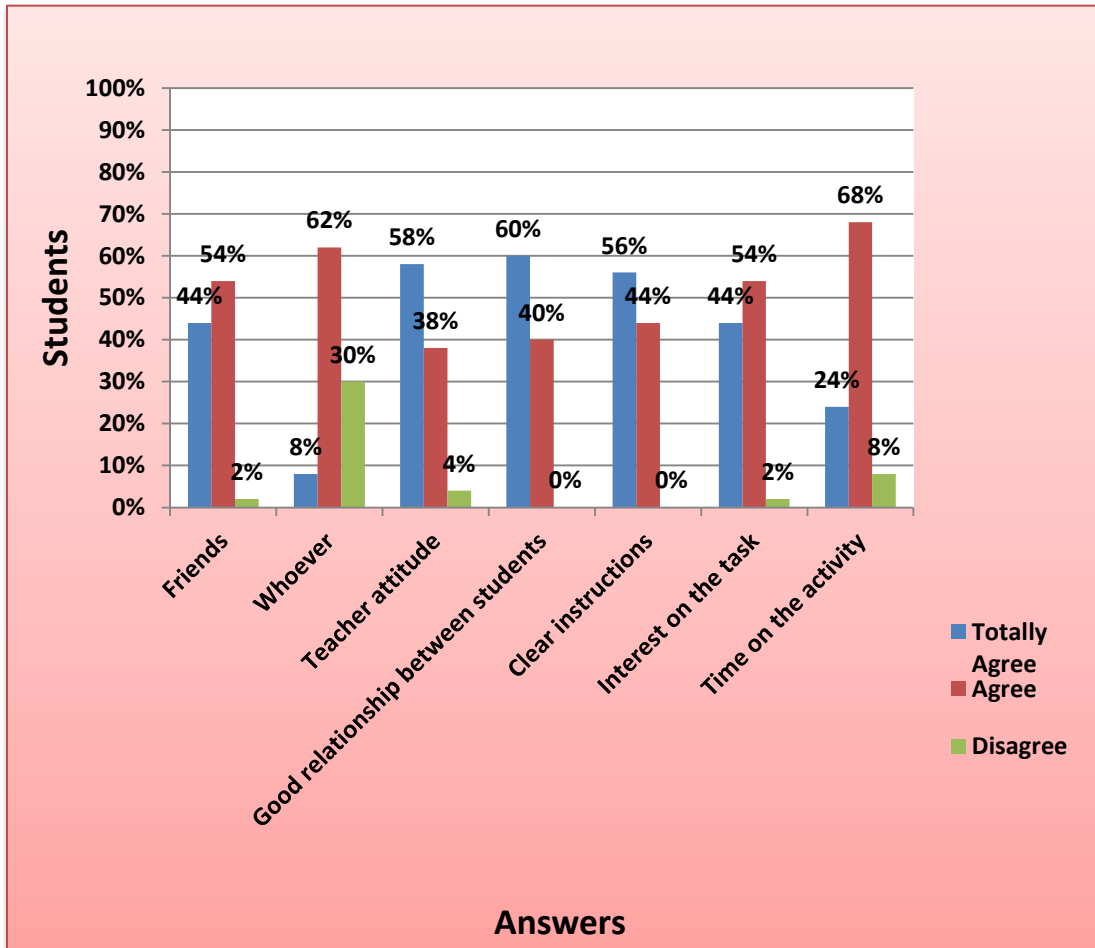
Figure 7. Students' opinions on team work and English level.



As the figure shows, there seems to be more agreement. That is, most students think working in teams really helped them to improve their language level. This is a positive aspect of group work, since it benefits students in different ways such as learning to share ideas, clarify doubts, learn something new and to meet new classmates which is explained in depth in Figure 9. According to Cohen (1994) group work can be more effective in a language learning setting since it allows students to participate by talking, thinking, and discussing. The students, in this study, think group work benefits their English acquisition because it increases language practice through interaction, the first language is used as support and thus, they improve their second language skills. They have a more active role in their learning. In general, students think working in teams helps them to develop skills of communication and collaboration in a socio-cultural environment.

Up to 82% the students agreed that working in teams really helped them in their learning, 10% of them strongly agreed that group work facilitates their learning, and only 8% disagree.

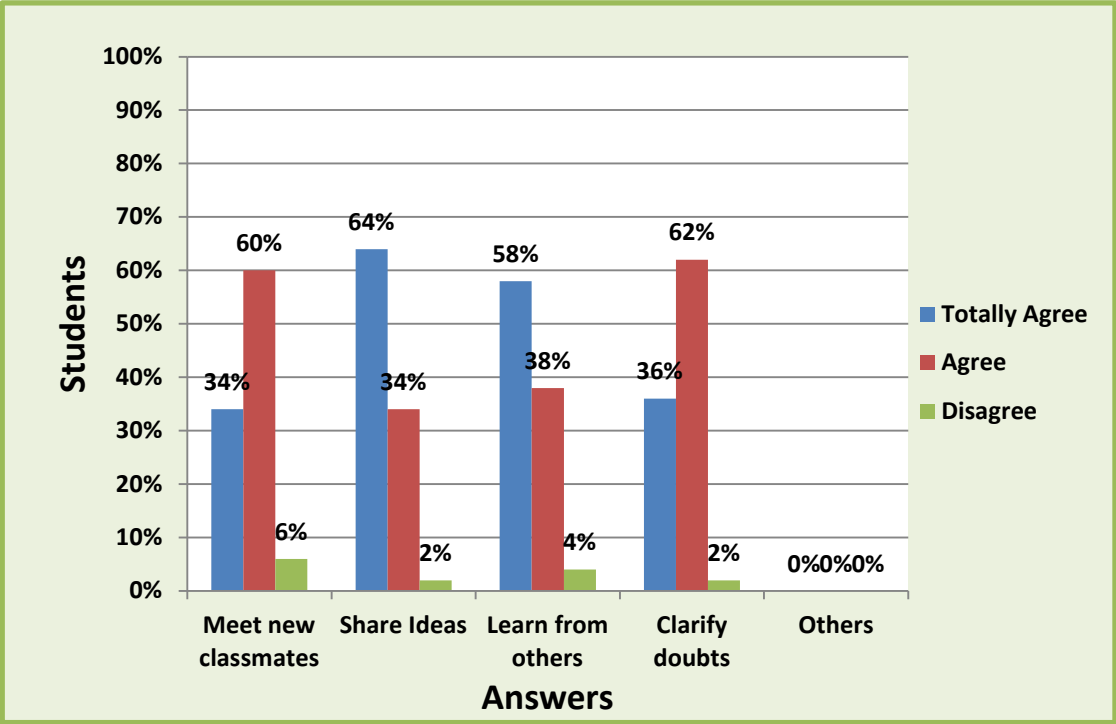
Figure 8. Factors that influence students work in teams



As can be seen, students clearly perceived the importance of factors that influenced their participation in group work activities. It was found that 54% of students claim working with their friend helps them work well. While 44% strongly agree with this fact, thus it can be implied that in order to learn they had to feel comfortable. Up to 62% of participants agreed that working with different students influences their participation in group work. Only 8% totally agree and the remaining 30% disagree with this fact. The students also all thought the teacher attitude was very important; they thought teachers should show a positive and respectful attitude; they must be motivators, guides and facilitators during the

group work activities. And as shown in the figure 8, to 58% of the students agree with this fact, up to 38% agree and only 4% disagree. Students reported they needed to have a good relationship with their classmates and as the results indicated 60% of the students strongly agreed with this, up to 40% agree, and nobody disagreed. However, not only the students behavior and the teacher’s attitude were considered basic to carry out a group work activity well but the task also had an important role and as the graph shows that students thought that in order to work in teams well the task must be clear and purposeful as well as interesting and appropriate for the English level.

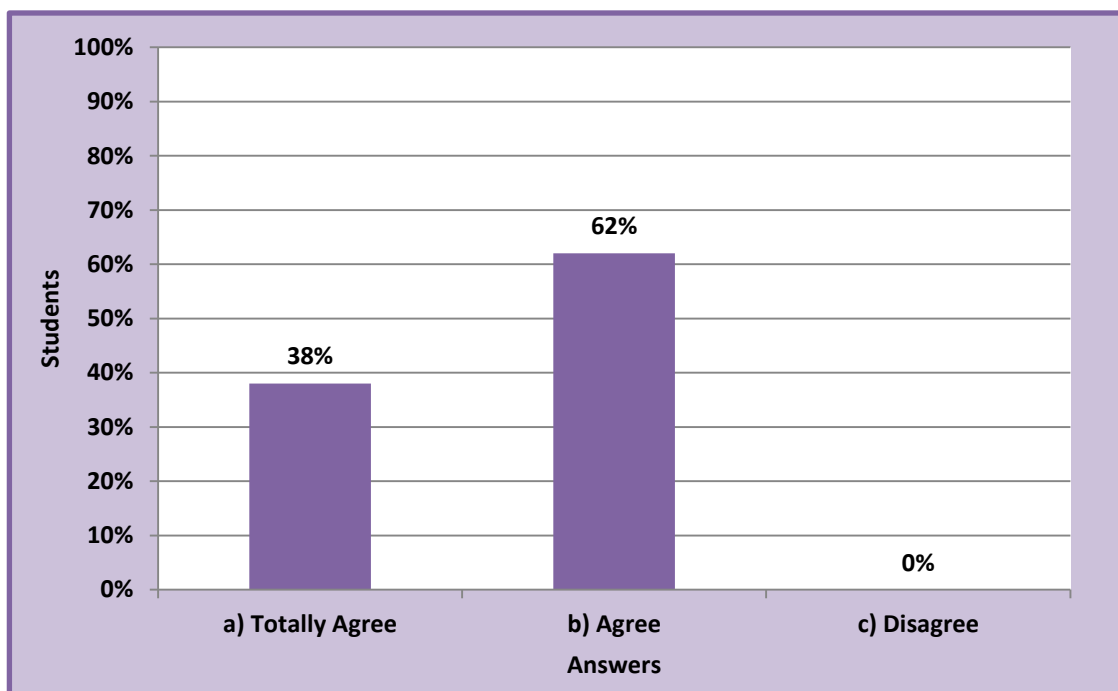
Figure 9. Students’ opinions on how group work benefits them



As shown in figure 9, there seems to be a strong agreement with all the benefits of group work. That is, students believe group work really benefits their learning. Working in teams, was considered also a way to interact with people, clarify doubts, share ideas and

knowledge, which can be improved or changed. As the results show more than 50% of the students considered these benefits important and as mentioned in the review of the literature, students not only learn from their classmates at school but also from people who belong to the other communities they participate in such as at work, at home, in their hobbies, with their friends, etc. learning is a mutual reciprocal constantly practice and the benefits are the same wherever they are (Wenger, 2007).

Figure 10. Students' opinions on their use of group work in their future teaching



All students selected for this research were ELT undergraduate students. Thus, the results show the student, in this study, thought group work was an effective technique in language classrooms. That is, 62% of the students considered group work important and that it can help them to promote students' learning and foster communication skills. Up to 38% of students strongly agreed and nobody disagreed. This means, all the future teachers in this study were considering using group work in their future classrooms.

Additionally, students wrote some explanations and most of them consider group work as a good technique to teach a language because it involves learners in a communicative environment and teaches them to be tolerant with other points of view but it must be well monitored by the teacher. Others stated it helped shy students to be more self-confident and improve the use of the language they were learning and their relationships with other students and the teacher.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the results and their main highlights are presented. In addition, the implications of the study, its main limitations, and some directions for further research are provided.

5.1 Summary of the results

The purpose of this project was to analyze and describe the characteristics of group work in ELT classrooms as well as the undergraduate students' perceptions of group work when learning a second language. After the analysis of the data we collected from different sources, the results were described. These results indicated that in the second language classrooms, in this context, collaborative work is often carried out. Generally, students preferred to work with someone else because they thought it was easier and during the observation students showed a positive attitude and active participation. Moreover, students thought that using group work techniques in classrooms benefited them in different ways. The results also indicated that interaction among the students needed to be promoted in order to learn collaboratively (Cohen, 1994).

Finally, based on the results, group work was considered as one of the most effective techniques in language classroom since it allows students to develop and to enhance all their language skills. However, the results of this study seem to indicate teachers should foster teamwork activities and teach students to work collaboratively from the beginning of the course because although most of the students participated in the different tasks, some of them did not participate during group work, and this may be negative for their learning.

5.2 Implications

The analysis and the results suggest that the use of group work activities should be promoted more in classrooms in order to engage students in the activities because it is possible to achieve a collaborative learning in classrooms, where all members participate and interact with each other. When teachers plan a group work activity, they must take into account certain factors which can influence students work in teams. It is also important to give students the opportunity to assemble their teams because they may feel more comfortable and more motivated. Students can also learn to talk in front of their classmates and to be more friendly and tolerant with everybody.

It is important for future teachers to understand how they can foster students' learning to live together, communicating skills, values and the development of interpersonal relationships to enhance socio-cultural environments. Furthermore, teachers should pay more attention to students' needs and interests so that they feel more willing to participate in teamwork activities and allow students to interact more among them. Thereby, teachers may include at least one group work or pair work activity per lesson plan.

5.3 Limitations

While carrying out this research some limitations were faced. Firstly, the lack of research on this issue, so it took more time to research and find available sources. Secondly, the results obtained from the observations forms were subjective since they cannot be measured due to the fact it was used a qualitative method. Then, the design of the questionnaire was a little difficult because in order to improve it, it was necessary to carry out a focus group which was difficult because the researchers did not know how to use it. The teachers who

taught English classes were not very accessible, and some of them said for the next class and the next class they said the same, thus it also took a long time to gain entry to the classes. Finally, to find classes where teachers used group work was complicate because very few teachers promote this technique and in some cases there was only one teamwork activity in whole class so the observations were limited.

5.4 Directions for further research

This project provides the basis of a larger research since this study was about students' perceptions and it could be interesting to carry out this in teachers' perceptions; what they think about it, why or why not they use it; if they like it, what advantages or disadvantages have using group work.

Additionally, the observations can be more detailed and more aspects could be added such as how much the second language is used during group work activity; the interaction patterns: who works more, who less among other factors and the classes can be even videotaped or a survey can be applied. Moreover, this research can be useful for all teachers not only for those who are teaching a second language because this project provides characteristics and benefits to teaching using this technique.

All suggestions above are directed to promote active participation among the members of a team and also to give students the opportunity to construct their own knowledge adopts others' perspectives to achieve a meaningful learning.

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Appendix A

GROUP WORK OBSERVATION

OBJECTIVE: The following instrument has been designed in order to collect data about the activities interaction by group work and their characteristics in an ELT classroom.

School: _____

Subject: _____ **Grade:** _____ **Level:** _____

Number of students: _____ **Time:** _____ **Date:** _____

Activity	Working		Assembled group		Environment		Assignment		Task		Work shared		Genre group	
	Separately	Collaboratively	Free choices	Teacher directed	Harmoniously	Boring / tedious	Clear	Confusing	Appropriated	Beyond	All member	One child	Single sex	Mixed
1														
2														
3														
4														
5														

How does the teacher monitor what the group is doing?

Factors	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Observations
Classmates:				
Friends				
Whoever				
Teacher Attitude				
A good relationship between students (communications)				
Clear instructions				
Interest on the task				
Time on the activities				

9. In what way does working in teams benefits you?

Benefits	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree
Meet new classmates			
Share ideas			
Learn from others			
Clarify doubts			
Others			

10. As future teacher do you consider group work as a good technique a language?

- a) Total agree b) Agree c) Disagree

Explain please

Thank you for your participation because with your support we can achieve the objective.

