Cooperate or not to cooperate? Lecturers' understandings and attitudes towards cooperative learning

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Abstract

Cooperative Learning should be understood as attempts of students with different abilities to work together in a group, share a common goal, and learn with and from each other. Here a learning environment is created in accordance with some basic elements such as heterogeneous groups, positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face interaction, interpersonal and small group skills and group processing. It has considerable relevance to ELT on account of promoting students' achievement, providing socialization, fostering positive peer relations, and decreasing anxiety. However, research examining the picture at tertiary level remains scarce. Thus, the current case study aimed at exploring the understanding and attitudes of lecturers towards utilising CL in higher education. To this end, a semi-structured interview was conducted with six lecturers in the Department of English Language and Literature at a large-size university in the northeast part of Turkey. The results revealed that although they were positive, they were observed not to have adequate knowledge about it and mistakenly associate it with group work. The paper ends with pedagogical implications for practitioners and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: cooperative learning; learner centred education; positive interdependence; cooperation; ELT

1. Introduction

Cooperation is a key virtue for everybody in the post-modern world as it ensures survival by makes group living easy for people who are all interdependent in the globalised era. Its importance for education has been well-documented in the relevant literature as this student-centred strategy, Cooperative Learning (CL, hereafter), activates learners in the learning process with its social and effective components. This activation is particularly a prime concern

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for language classes, for language learning is a meaningful and social activity in which learners are responsible for their own learning.

The existing literature covers intense academic discussions and empirical studies at both tertiary and lower level of education such as (Ning & Hornby, 2014), the effects of CL on reading achievement and vocabulary learning, its role on learner motivation (Zarei & Keshavarz, 2011), and its role for primary school students (Aytekin & Saban, 2013). Yet, mindset is a vital element in classroom pedagogy, and thereby investigating the attitudes of practitioners as one of the most important parties in education is of utmost importance. However, seldom is attention devoted to the picture at tertiary level regarding practitioner perspective (see, for instance, Çelik, Aytın & Bayram, 2012). Besides, the integration of CL requires not only skill but an adequate understanding (Çelik et al., 2013) and positive attitude towards it. Thus, as a response the academic calls for this pressing need the current study was devised to explore a small case in depth and find out both the understanding and attitudes of practitioners, i.e., lecturers, towards the integration of CL into classes at tertiary level education.

1.1. Literature review / Theoretical background

Key to the way forward is a true understanding of the concept, i.e., CL. A plethora of definitions welcomes readers in the existing literature. For instance, Johnson, Johnson and Smith (2013) describe cooperative learning as a strategy that increases learning by the way of collaboration. Similarly, Han (2014) emphasizes the existence of mixed groups with cooperating but not competing students. Azizinezhad, Hashemi and Darvishi (2013) touches on student centred learning where they learn from each other instead of the teacher. In the same vein, Kagan (1994) highlights the importance of forming small teams that include interdependent learners with various abilities who help each other's learning. Liao (2006) describes the real cooperative learning by stating what it is not:

> cooperative learning is not assigning a project to a group in which one or few students do all the work while the others do nothing but earn the grade. Nor is cooperative learning assigning a report to a group in which members divide the labour and then each works individually on his or her share only. Cooperative learning has a distinct characteristic of being "carefully structured." For group learning to be truly cooperative, the activity has to be structured in a way that certain cooperative elements not only exist but also co-exist (p. 42).

Reading between the lines, it could be said that CL is a concept beyond group work. Rather, it should be understood as students' having a common goal and working with each other in small groups in accordance with this goal. As individuals are responsible for each others' learning, they teach their teammates what they learn, and thus a mutual learning environment comes up. Briefly, in this strategy, there is the conception of unity instead of self in the learning process.

A cooperative group involves some basic elements that differentiate it from a simple group work: heterogeneous groups, positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face interaction, interpersonal and small group skills and group processing (Johnson et al., 1991: Slavin, 1983; Stahl, 1994). First, CL necessitates forming heterogeneous because students with different abilities affect the learning environment positively as less proficient ones could be helped by their peers, and thus their social skills are improved. Besides, they learn to become tolerant and to respect each other. Second, positive interdependence is key as thanks to this

mutual responsibility within a group students can develop responsibility feeling for each others' learning. In Stahl (1994)'s own words, this is "sink or swim together" (p.4) strategy. Third, individual accountability, i.e., individual assessment matters much in CL. It should be understood as evaluating learners individually besides group evaluation and giving individuals different roles in the process of working together (Slavin, 1983). The fourth one is face to face promote interaction, which is associated with positive interdependence. Interaction between the group members enhances positive interdependence because group members promote each other's success, and this, in turn, teaches them how to trust each other, and low anxiety environment arises due to supporting and motivating each other. The fifth one is interpersonal and small group skills, which should be understood as social competences needed for a successful process. Groups must be given chance to discuss their group process. The last one is group processing, i.e., evaluating process. Here groups discuss group maintenance, and in this way it is ensured how to enable consistent group work. In order to conduct an effective group processing enough time should be allocated and all steps and expectations need to be clarified (Smith, 1996).

During CL activities, Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1998) note that three types of cooperative groups could be formed: formal groups, informal groups, and base groups. Formal groups are one or several class session groups aiming at reaching a goal through working together, which the teacher creates, decides responsibilities, and explains the elements and the strategies needed for collaboration by giving an assignment. During the cooperation, he or she observes the groups and intervenes when needed and finally, evaluates the groups. On the other hand, informal groups are:

> ad hoc groups that last for only one discussion or one class period. Their purposes are to focus students' attention on the material to be learned, to set a mood conducive to learning, to help organize in advance the material to be covered in class, to ensure that students cognitively process the material being taught, and to provide closure to an instructional session, informal cooperative learning groups also ensure that misconceptions, incorrect understanding, and gaps in understanding are identified and corrected and that learning experiences are personalized (Johnson et al.,1998, p. 105)

The last group is base groups that should be understood as "long-term, heterogeneous cooperative learning groups with stable membership whose primary responsibility is to provide each student the support, encouragement, and assistance he or she needs to make academic progress" (Smith, 1996, p. 3). These do not change during a course, and group members can go in communicating outside the school borders.

1.2. Research questions

The following research questions were designed to investigate teachers' understanding and implementation of CL:

1.1. How do the participants conceptualize cooperative learning?

1.2. Do they implement CL in their classes at tertiary level?

1.3. If they implement CL, which activities do they conduct?

1.4. What advantages and challenges do they associate with CL?

2. Article structure

2.1. Possible advantages and challenges of CL

The advantages of CL documented in the related literature could be summarised as achievement, interpersonal relationships, and psychological competence. Johnson and Johnson (1999) state that CL increases achievement because students take part in the learning process and while they are working together, they achieve more things than they can normally do alone, which automatically increases their motivation. This cooperation also has a positive effect on weak students because they have difficulties when they are working individually (Felder & Brent, 1994). Hardworking students understanding the material easily can help them. Besides, in this process members complete their works in time due to their responsibility feelings to complete assignments. In similar vein, Azizinezhad et al. (2013) associate CL with not only achievement but also personal growth, for (1) it reduced anxiety, (2) it increased the amount of student participation and student talk in the target language, (3) it built supportive and less threatening learning environment, and (4) it helped the rate of learning retention" (p.139).

In addition to achievement, CL enhances interpersonal relationships. Although there may be group members not liking each other because of the competitor environment, they are obliged to communicate with each other, which, in turn, helps the establishment of friendships in the cooperative environment. Also psychological health, self worth, and social competence/skills are promoted. Their communication skills improve because they are obliged to communicate with each other for completing an assignment, and they gain self worth by supporting each other's achievement. Besides, they learn to respect each other's perspective. In such a free and relaxed learning atmosphere it is highly likely for moral qualities to be enhanced. Group members learn how to trust and encourage each other, which turns into a kind of involvement that encourage members to think creatively and become aware of democratic values (Han, 2014).

However, no single strategy is without limitations, and CL is not an exception. Felder and Brent (1994) observe that hardworking students may feel reluctant to work with weak students because they think that the weak students decelerate the process and result in time waste. On the other hand, the weaker ones may feel uncomfortable because of the hardworking students. This process may be also hard for inexperienced teachers who can have difficulties in terms of time management. Similarly, Slavin (1991) highlights some disadvantages as misbehaviour, noise, absences, and ineffective use of team practice time.

2.2. Differences between cooperative groups and traditional learning groups

Cooperative groups and traditional learning groups are totally different from each other, which Johnson et al. (1984, p. 16) outline in the following table:

Table 1. Differences between CL groups and traditional learning groups

Cooperative learning groups	Traditional learning groups

Positive interdependence	No interdependence
Individual accountability	No individual accountability
Heterogeneous	Homogeneous
Shared leadership	One appointed leader
Shared responsibility for each	Responsibility only for self
other	Only task emphasized
Task and maintenance emphasized	Social skills assumed and ignored
Social skills directly taught	Teacher ignores group functioning
Teacher observers andintervenes	No group processing
Group process theireffectiveness	

As is seen in the table above, these two groups are dissimilar. In cooperative learning groups, students have a responsibility for each other's learning, for at the end of the process, only a group product is created, and the result of the process affects all group members, thereby creating positive interdependence comes out. However, in traditional groups, students are responsible for themselves because of the lack of this interdependence. While in the former both leadership and responsibility are shared, in the latter self is emphasised. Also, the importance of social skills distinguishes the former from the latter. Besides, teacher roles are different in that in cooperative group the teacher observes groups and intervene when necessary. However, in the latter the teacher is indifferent to group functioning.

2.3. Misconceptions and truths about cooperative learning

CL is mostly misused and misunderstood as it is thought as simply a group attempt rather than a complex implementation beyond an ordinary group work. Lundgren (1994, p. 10) points out the misconceptions and truths about CL in the following table:

Table 2. Misconceptions and truths about CL

Misconception	Truth
All group work is cooperative.	Students must use specific skills in order to work cooperatively.
Students can work cooperatively to complete individual assignments.	The work of cooperative group results in a joint product or group conclusions
One student in a group usually ends up doing most of the work.	Use of cooperative skills ensures an equal division of the task
Students perceive group evaluations as beingunfair.	Once they experience cooperative learning, most students acknowledge that group grades are fair.

Competition is more realistic strategy.	Almost all human activity is cooperative.
Cooperative learning strategies can enliven a	Effective cooperative learning evolves as it is used
classroom when they are used occasionally.	over a period of time
Difficult classroom management problems	More management problems may exist in
accompany to use of cooperative learning strategies.	traditional classrooms, which require silence and
	attention.
High achievers suffer academically when they	Research shows that high achievers in cooperative
work in heterogeneous cooperative group.	learning situations do as well as or better than their
	peers in traditional classrooms
All group members do the same work at the same	Students in the same group can be assigned
rate.	different tasks.
Cooperative learning is easy to implement.	The concept of cooperative learning is simple, but
	its implementation is complex.

2.4. Some relevant earlier studies

There are several studies conducted on CL generally focusing on its possible effects for achievement, motivation, and anxiety in education. Yet, there are a few studies exploring the opinions of teachers about the strategy. As an example study investigating its effect on achievement, Zarei and Keshavarz (2011) investigated the effects of student teams achievement divisions and cooperative integrated reading and composition models on reading achievement and vocabulary learning on 132 Iranian female EFL learners. The results indicated that the experimental group and especially elementary EFL learners instructed with these methods were used showed statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. In an example motivation study, Ning and Hornby (2014) investigated six aspects of motivation in Chinese tertiary English learners. The findings showed that the intervention group improved in terms of intrinsic motivation although there were no statistically significant differences between two groups in the other five aspects of motivation, namely integrated regulation, identified regulation, interjected regulation, external regulation, and motivation.

In an example Turkish study, Çelik et al. (2012) investigated the applicability of cooperative learning in the Turkish context among fourteen English lecturers at a university. The results of the study indicated that they had a good understanding of the concept of group learning, but the EFL curriculum and students' attitudes towards CL were obstacles for its implementation although lecturers believed in its possible benefits. Also, the participants stated that there was no mutual responsibility with each other, everyone did not work uniformly, and some of the students did not want to participate in activities. However, they also stated that some students want to utilise CL instead of listening the teacher passively. They also stated that CL has a significant effect on communicative language learning.

Another study was conducted by Aytekin and Saban (2013) who investigated the use of the cooperative learning in teaching Turkish at the fourth and fifth grade elementary classes in

Konya. The results showed that the 26 teachers did not have enough knowledge about CL and they regarded it as an ordinary group work. Also, as they stated that it was waste of time if the desired objectives were not reached and it students' behaviour may change, they did not use it.

3. Method

The ultimate aim of the current study was to explore both the understanding and attitudes of lecturers towards utilising CL in higher education. To these ends, a case study was conducted to explore the issue in depth.

3.1. Sample / Participants

The study was conducted at the dapartment of English language and literature at a large-size public university in the northeast part of Turkey. The institution is an old one dating back to 1955 with seventeen faculties, four academies, thirteen vocational schools of higher education, seven institutes, and one conservatory. The department was formally established in 1993 and started to offer Bachelors of Art courses in English Language and Literature in the 1999-2000 academic year. English is the medium of instruction and the educational duration is 1+4 years. It offers both regular and evening programme. Besides, it has MA in Linguistics and English Literature and culture, and PhD in Applied Linguistics. The newcomers who cannot pass the English proficiency exam have to take an intensive one-year preparatory language course before starting the departmental courses.

Convenience sampling strategy was used to choose the participants. It "involves obtaining responses from those people who are available and willing to take part" (Kitchenham & Pfleeger, 2002, p. 19). This strategy was opted for as it is used mainly in the case of limited time, helps save time, money, and effort (Dörnyei, 2007), and lack of strict selection rules makes the process easy for the researcher (Tansey, 2007). The participants selected for this study were six preparatory English language lecturers available and working in the department (F=3, M=3). They were teaching various courses in the department, i.e., language skill, literature, and linguistics-related courses. While 2 of them were from Iran, the rest were from Turkey. Their working experiences differ: participant 1 (female) with 9-year teaching experience, participant 2 (female) with 2-year experience, participant 3 (female, Iranian) 15-year experience, participant 4 (male, Iranian) with 10-year experience, participant 5 (male) with 14-year experience, and participant 6 (male) with 12-year teaching experience.

3.2. Instrument(s)

A semi-structured interview was preferred in that there researchers encouraged the participants to elaborate on their answers with some pre-prepared interview prompt. Yet, during the interviews bridging questions were utilised to gather in-depth data (Dörnyei, 2007). The questions asked in the current study were adapted from the study of Çelik et al. (2013). Totally seven questions were asked to the interviewees:

1. What do you understand by the term "Cooperative Learning"?
2. Do you implement CL in your courses at tertiary level?
   2.1. If you implement CL, what do you do in your classes?

      2.2.   If you do not implement this strategy, what are your reasons?

3. Are there any possible advantages of CL for higher education context?

4. Are there any possible challenges of this implementation process?

5. Would you like to add anything else about the integration of CL into language classes?

While 2 participants (participant 2 and 4) responded in English, the remaining 4 preferred to use Turkish as the medium of communication. The interviewees were conducted at their convenience in their offices, and the process was audio recorded with their consent.

3.3. Data collection procedures

The qualitative data were gathered within a week with in-depth individual interviews conducted with these six voluntary participants at their convenience. Interviews are strong data gathering techniques within qualitative research paradigm as they "give voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words, and open for a close personal interaction between the researchers and their subjects" (Kvale, 2006, p.481). In the current study interview was chosen to investigate the world of these six lecturers and gather rich data (Qu & Dumay, 2011). It was opted for its three advantageous documented by Anderson and Arsenault (2005): people are more interested in participating in an interview rather than responding to a questionnaire; the interviewee can clarify the questions and thus reach more accurate and in-depth data; and the interviewer can make use of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and tones of voice to make the meaning clearer.

While planning, conducting, and reporting the research, ethical considerations which "are intended to guide the behaviour of researchers and offer security and protection to participants" (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005, p. 26) were taken into account. The following ethical principles documented by Anderson and Arsenault (2005) were followed. First, oral informed consent was obtained from the voluntary participants in that they were informed about the purpose of the research and its procedure, and ensured that participation is voluntary and they had the right to withdraw whenever they want. Also, the researchers were honest and open through the whole process and avoided deception that refers to telling just the opposite about the purpose and procedure of the research. Besides, confidentiality was assured in that the identities of the participants were protected in the research report. They were enumerated such as "participant 1" instead of using their real names. As another ethical consideration, the researchers respected the participants' time by not asking irrelevant questions to them. Besides, two participants were from Iran, and thus in order to avoid any language barriers they were offered to reply back in English. Only the male one did so.

3.4. Data analysis

The collected qualitative data were analysed with content analysis which is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005,

p. 1278). After transcribing the oral data into text one, the researchers read it through several times, found out the codes, categorized them, and interpreted the findings.

4. Results and discussion

The data analysed with content analysis were presented theme by theme below.

4.1. Understanding of cooperative learning

The participants were asked how they conceptualised CL and what they understood form the term. Although all of them declared that they were familiar with the concept, they understood different things from CL. The encoded answers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The encoded conceptualisations of CL

Codes	Frequency
learning from each other	n= 4
compensating weak points	n= 2
sharing the knowledge between the teacher and the student	n= 2
cooperation between the teacher and the student	n=2
groups integrating	n=1
decentralizing the teacher	n= 1
socialising	n=1
peer learning	n=1
common goals	n=1
learning from each other of students with different abilities	n= 1

As is seen in the table above, they have different understanding of the concept. Yet, most commonly associated it with learning from each other (n=4), which is a limited way of understanding of the concept. Only Participant 1 managed to cover almost all the basic elements of CL as follows:

"When asked about cooperative learning, it comes to my mind an activity that the students with different abilities learn with each other and compensate their weak points. At the same time, groups integrating, common goals and socialising come to my mind". [Participant 1, female]

The excerpt shows that she focused on the learning from each other of students with different abilities, compensating their weak points, groups integrating, common goals, and socialising, which are fundamental in the definition of the term as documented in the related literature (Kagan, 1994). One participant's understanding could be entitled as both correct and incorrect as he associated it with peer learning, but reported that the contribution of the teacher and students is equal in the process:

"When asked about cooperative learning, the concept of peer learning comes to my mind. That is, the things which students learn with each other and sometimes with teacher comes to my mind. Both sides make contribution to conversation equally". [Participant 6, male]

The concept of 'the contribution to conversation equally' is wrong because students are more active than the teacher in the process, and there are equal contribution between the students in a group but not between the teacher and the students. In CL, students discuss and learn with each other, and the teacher becomes only a guide and observer in the process. One participant, though, totally misunderstood the concept, who elaborated on the issue as follows:

"Literarily defining it, it means cooperation which is realized through cooperation between the teacher and the student. It means decentralizing the teacher. The teacher is not the sources, not the knowledge. But the knowledge or initiate of the learning but the learning and the knowledge are shared between the teacher and the student". [Participant 4, male]

As is seen in the excerpt, he focused on the cooperation between the teacher and the student, which does not reflect the cooperation among the students in a group in CL. Overall, most of the participants understood right things from the concept of cooperative learning, but they were found not to have adequate knowledge of the concept.

4.2. Implementation of cooperative learning

The participants were also asked whether they implemented CL in their classes. Although declared that they did so, it was found that what they did is totally different from each other, and some did not reflect the exact nature of the concept. They reported that this implementation takes place in speaking (n=3), reading, listening, and writing (n=3, respectively). The activities they self-reported doing in their classes are listed in the following table:

Table 4. CL-oriented activities

Activities	Frequency
group work	n= 5
pair work	n= 4
dividing students into groups and giving them tasks	n= 2
giving students videos and asking them to transcribe them	n= 1
writing a paragraph	n= 1
problem solving in speaking	n= 1
role play	n=1
giving students a chapter for reading at home	n=1

Five of the participants highlighted group work, and four of them focused on pair work as a general term in their courses. As specific activities, two of the participants focused on dividing students into groups and giving them roles. For instance, the following excerpt taken from the participant 1 is about assigning roles and producing a common final product:

"Last lesson, we talked about European cultural and the second session of the course, I divided the class into groups of five students and assigned them roles. Every group became European Union committee and prepared a brochure. While they are preparing it, they chose students with different abilities. For example, they chose a student who is capable of painting because, it was needed to interact between them. At the end of the process, they gave me a common product. While they were preparing it, they communicated with each other and socialised. They completed each other in the process like a jigsaw". [Participant 1, female]

One of the most important things in this excerpt is that groups consist of students with different abilities, i.e., heterogeneous groups as one of the elements of CL. They prepared a joint product, and there was mutual interaction and mutual responsibility while doing this. Thus, this activity includes also positive interdependence and face to face promotive interaction (Stahl, 1994) and thus cooperative in nature.

One of the participants declared that he gave students videos and wanted them to transcribe them in groups to compensate their weak points; another one reported that he gave tasks to students; still another one asked his students to write a paragraph, solve problems, and do role-play activities: a female participant said that she asked her students to read a chapter at home. However, these activities can be mostly related with only group work rather than CL. Overall, although most of the participants reported that they implemented CL, what they did could be entitled as only group work. Here what the findings show is in line with the observation of Johnson et al. (1991), who rightly state that educators do not actually utilise CL although they argue to do so. What they do is actually designing activities in which they put students into groups. However, in their own words:

> Cooperation is much more than being physically near other students, discussing material with them, helping them, or sharing material among students, although each is important in cooperative learning. To be cooperative, a group must have clear positive inter-dependence, members must promote each other's learning and success face to face, hold each other personally and individually accountable to do his or her fair share of the work, use appropriately the interpersonal and small-group skills needed for cooperative efforts to be successful, and process as a group how effectively members are working together. These five essential components must be present for small-group learning to be truly cooperative (p.6).

4.3. Possible advantages and disadvantages of cooperative learning

The participants were also asked whether CL has any possible benefits and challenges for higher education classes. Their answers regarding the benefits of this strategy were encoded in the following table.

Table 5. Advantages of CL

Codes	Frequency
learning from each other instead of learning from the teacher	n= 4
socialising the students	n=3
learning to work together with other people in their future life	n=3
helping weak students for learning from other students	n=3
completing each other in terms of different abilities	n=2
increasing motivation	n=2
improving sense of belonging	n=1
improving sense of helping	n=1
decreasing anxiety	n=1
improving sense of believing yourself	n=1
increasing the student talk time	n=1
serving well in crowded classrooms	n=1
provoking and encouraging students	n=1
making students understand that learning is in fact a social and communicative activity	n=1
making it easier for students to understand	n=1
providing a flexible and comfortable atmosphere for studying	n=1

As seen in the table above, the code learning from each other instead of the teacher is repeated 4 times as one of the basic advantage of CL. The other frequently stated benefits are socialising, learning how to cooperate for the future life, and helping weak students (n=3, respectively). They also stated that team members compensate each other's weak sides, and this increases motivation. Besides, they listed several other possible benefits as seen in the table above. The following excerpts exemplify some of these encoded advantages:

"It decreases anxiety and improves the sense of belonging yourself. Also, it increases the student talk time". [Participant 3, female]

"I think that students learn easily and more effectively through cooperative learning. There can be a more flexible and comfortable atmosphere for them". [Participant 2, female]

"Weak students learn from other students and complete their weak sides in a group". [Participant 5, male]

Overall, it was found that all of the participants think that CL has a lot of advantages. Although what they do in their classes are within the context of only group work, they managed

to list several advantages of CL documented in the existing literature: creating a student centred environment Han (2014), reducing anxiety and increasing student participation and talk (Azizinezhad et al., 2013), promoting achievement, enhancing interpersonal relations, and increasing the sense of self-worth (Johnson & Johnson, 1999), having a positive effect on weaker students (Felder & Brent, 1994), and so forth.

In addition to these benefits, the participants listed several limitations of the strategy. The possible drawbacks of CL are documented in the following table.

Table 6. Limitations of CL

Codes	Frequency
having problems with learning if the process cannot be managed	n= 2
abusing goodwill by students	n=1
problems in classroom management	n=1
problems in time management	n=1
jealousy between the students	n=1
the decrease in the ideas that is exchanged in the case of being problems between the students	n=1
passiveness of weak learners	n=1
problems in terms of shy students	n=1
noise	n=1

The participants reported their concerns about CL although they listed more advantages of this cooperation in higher education classes. The concern about how to manage the process so as not to hamper learning was repeated twice. They also seemed worried about classroom management, jealousy between students, student passivity, and noise as documented in the relevant literature (Felder & Brent, 1994; Slavin, 1991). The following excerpts exemplify some of these limitations:

"If the teacher cannot manage the process, it can be malfunction in the learning. Also, it can be faced with a problem in terms of classroom and time management. Also, it can be noise problem and this can be tired". [Participant 1, female]

"In the classroom, it can be shy students and they can not want to attend to these activities". [Participant 6, male]

5. Conclusions

The current case study aimed at exploring the understanding and attitudes of lecturers towards utilising CL in higher education classes. The findings gathered via in-depth individual

interviews showed that although most understood correct things from the concept, the conceptualisations of some are erroneous. What complicates the matter even further is that what they declared to do in their own classes could not go beyond simple group works. Most of the activities they listed involve group works rather than cooperative groups as they lack interdependence, shared accountability, heterogeneity, common leadership and responsibility feeling, emphasis on social skills, and group functioning and processing (Johnson, 1984). However, they managed to list several benefits and limitations of CL in line with the ones documented in the existing literature.

CL could be listed as one of the skills that should be improved in higher education classes for learner's future as everybody is interdependent in this global era and thus will need the skills to cooperate together for common goals. As Johnson and Johnson (1999, p.73) rightly note, CL enhances learners' psychological health, self-esteem, and social abilities, and "When individuals work together to complete assignments, they interact (improving social skills and competencies), promote each other's success (gaining self-worth), and form personal as well as professional relationships (creating the basis for healthy social development)"

Thus, practitioners could assign group projects and group-oriented tasks to small groups to encourage them to work as part of a team, which in turn would bring them fun, motivation, and improvement of thinking skills. Here they can utilise some CL techniques documented in the literature (Slavin, 1991).

There are two different Jigsaw method as Jigsaw I and Jigsaw II. According to Slavin (1991), in Jigsaw I, a group consists of six students, and the material is divided into parts. That is, each student has a different part of material. First, they read their parts and then create expert groups consisting of different group members with the same part and in the expert groups, students discuss their parts. Then they return to their own groups and share their knowledge with teammates. In Jigsaw II, on the other hand, the teacher does not divide the material into sections. Rather, the teacher gives each student a book chapter, and each student selects a topic on which to become expert. Students who receive the same topic in different teams gather in expert groups and discuss their topics. Then they return to their teams and share their knowledge. In the end, the teacher makes individual quizzes, and in this way team scores are determined.

Another technique, Student Teams Achievement Divisions, covers five major components as class presentations, teams, quizzes, individual improvement scores, and team recognition. In class presentations, the teacher presents the material through audio visual aids and students learn what they are supposed to do in the group process. Teams, as a second component, consist of four or five students who have different academic achievement, different race, and sex. The main purpose of the teams is to prepare their teammates to the quizzes by studying on the material together. In another component, quizzes, the teacher designs individual quizzes for testing what the students have learned during the presentation and group process. And, as the last component, team recognition is provided by a newsletter for rewarding teams and students for their success during a week.

In Teams-Games-Tournament, every week tournaments are organized, and students of different teams compete with each other. In these tournaments, a high performing student does not compete with low performing student; a high performing student competes with another high performing student. After the tournaments, the teacher figures team scores and the best teams and the winners of tournament are declared with a newsletter (Slavin, 1991).

Team Accelerated Instruction is "a combination of individualized instruction and team learning designed for use in elementary and middle school mathematics classes" (Slavin, 1991, p.13). Like other strategies, the groups are heterogeneous, yet different from other strategies, at the beginning, students have a placement test and then they work according to their success level. After they have worked, their teammates control each other's work in accordance with the answer sheet.

Lastly, in Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition there are two main components as basal readers and reading groups. Two students from two different groups come together. The teacher deals with the groups respectively while the other groups are working with their pairs. Students are supposed to read the text to each other, express what they have understood from the text, study pronunciation and etc. In this strategy, at the end of the courses, a class book will be publicised. Also, as an alternative to evaluation, teacher can design individual quizzes on the story (Slavin, 1991).

Yet, what should be done first is to ensure a correct understanding of the concept. As is seen in the findings, some participants' conceptualisations were erroneous as they mistakenly associated CL with simple group works. Thus, it is of utmost importance to integrate CL into the syllabus of teacher education and inform teacher candidates about how they can help their students in the future learn as part of a team.

However, here what lies in the crux of the matter is teacher/lecturer/practitioner mindset, i.e., attitudes. If they themselves do not welcome the idea, it is naive to expect them to corporate CL into their classes. Thus, they should be offered professional development trainings about how to incorporate this joint attempt tradition in their teaching. Besides, they could be encouraged to read academic studies which exemplify the use of CL in actual classrooms.

The scope of the current study was limited to the analysis of the issue from practitioner perspective. Yet, further actual classroom implementation studies are needed to draw a holistic picture of what is actually happening in the field. Thus, further studies using naturalistic data gathering techniques such as observation could be conducted to explore whether there is a difference between what practitioners say and do.

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