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Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi – Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü'nce
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ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, işbirlikli öğrenme aktivitelerinin öğrencilerin yabancı dil olarak İngilizce derslerindeki başarısına ve öğrencilerin işbirlikli öğrenmeye yönelik tutumlarına olan etkisini araştırmaktır. Cinsiyet açısından tutumlardaki ve başarıdaki olası farklılıklar da araştırılmıştır. Bunun yanında, işbirlikli öğrenmenin öğrencilerin özgüveni üzerindeki etkisi de araştırılmıştır. Çalışma, bir deney ve bir kontrol grubu ile uygulanmıştır. Çalışmaya toplam 51 öğrenci katılmıştır. Uygulama yapılmadan önce, her iki gruba da bir ön-test uygulanmıştır. Deney grubu, dört işbirlikli öğrenme aktivitesi kullanılarak öğretilmiştir. Kontrol grubu, geleneksel yöntemle öğretilmiştir. Dört haftalık sürecin sonunda, her iki gruba bir son-test uygulanmıştır. Dört haftalık uygulama sonrasında deney grubuna bir anket uygulanmıştır. Ayrıca amaçlı seçilen 6 öğrenci ile yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Her iki grubun ön-test ve son-test puanları t-testi ile analiz edilmiştir. Test sonuçlarına göre deney ve kontrol grubu arasında uygulama sonrasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmuştur. Deney grubu son-testte kontrol grubundan çok daha başarılı olmuştur. Anketlerden edinilen veriler SPSS yazılımı kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Cinsiyet açısından öğrencilerin tutumlarında ve başarısında anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmamıştır. Mülakatlardan edinilen veriler içerik analizi yapılarak incelenmiştir. Mülakatlardan ve anketten edinilen veriler öğrencilerin işbirlikli öğrenmeye yönelik olumlu tutum sergilediklerini göstermiştir. Ayrıca öğrenciler işbirlikli öğrenme aktiviteleri ile özgüvenlerinin arttığını belirtmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: İşbirlikli öğrenme, özsaygı, okuma

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of cooperative learning activities on students' achievement in EFL reading classes and students' attitudes towards cooperative learning. Possible differences in attitudes and scores in terms of gender are also investigated. Besides, the effect of cooperative learning on learners' self esteem is investigated. The study was conducted with one control and one experimental group. In total, 51 students participated in the study. Before the implementation of the treatment, a pre-test was given to both groups. The experimental group was instructed using four types of cooperative learning activities. The control group was taught using the traditional method. At the end of the four-week process, a post test was administered to both groups. A questionnaire was administered to the experimental group after the four-week treatment. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with six purposefully selected students. Pre-test and post-test scores of both groups were analyzed by t-tests. According to the results of these tests, a significant difference after the treatment was found between the control group and the experimental group. The experimental group performed significantly better than the control group at post-test. Questionnaire data was analyzed through the SPSS. Gender was found to have no significant influence on students' attitudes towards cooperative learning and achievement. The interviews were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Data collected in student interviews and the questionnaire reveal that students have positive attitudes towards cooperative learning. In addition, students reported that their self-esteem increased through cooperative learning activities.

Key words: Cooperative learning, self-esteem, reading

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CL	Cooperative Learning
CLA	Cooperative Learning Activities
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
Std	Standard Deviation

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

There has been a growing emphasis on learner-centeredness in all walks of education. Similarly, in foreign language teaching, placing the learner at the center has been promoted in numerous studies. Although much attention seems to be paid to learner-centeredness, much of the education in Turkey is still “testing-centered”, which usually results in a fierce competition. It is an axiom that foreign language learning requires a communicative atmosphere where different parties interact with each other. Thus, the need to cooperate rather than to compete becomes inevitable.

By its nature, language is a social concept. It involves communication and communication takes place between at least two people. Therefore, learning a language, whether native or foreign, requires interaction with other people. The learning of a foreign language necessitates a social environment in which people talk or write to each other, listen to each other, make decisions together and learn to interact with each other for many reasons. In short, communication requires cooperation and, thus, developing a cooperative learning style is essential in EFL classes.

Cooperative learning is a teaching technique in which students form groups to work together and they make use of each other’s capabilities. Rather than competing against each other, students learn to work together, consult each other to reach a decision or result from which all the group members benefit. Cooperative learning also makes students have to work together not only inside the classroom but also outside the school, too.

In EFL classes, cooperative learning, as the name suggests, makes students work in structured groups by interacting, helping, checking, agreeing or disagreeing, asking, answering and, as a result, learning more than in a traditional classroom. Because language is for communication, in an environment in which a foreign language is being learned, interaction is a must. Therefore, cooperative learning can be applied in EFL classrooms.

Cooperative learning is helpful for students in many ways. It has academic, social and psychological benefits. It has been shown to increase academic achievement, to improve students' critical thinking abilities, to help students develop social skills and to satisfy students' feelings of belonging, helping and being important in a group. It is also helpful in terms of assessment because cooperative learning pays importance to the process of learning rather than the product. Similarly, this focus on the process decreases students' anxiety on tests.

In an EFL classroom, students benefit greatly from asking and answering each other. Social skills like disagreeing which they need to use are also reinforced through cooperative learning activities. Besides, students feel more relaxed and less anxious when they are in a group. In terms of academic achievement, students can be more successful when cooperative learning is applied. Also, assessment can be more accurate because both the groups as well as the individual members are marked.

Applying cooperative learning into reading classes could be an effective way to increase students' motivation, participation and academic achievement. It could also increase students' self-esteem and improve their attitudes towards reading classes and the materials used in reading classes.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Reading is one of the four essential skills to be taught in foreign language teaching. During the process of reading, learners have to struggle with new vocabulary, structure, culture, and information in the target language. A great number of studies have been conducted to create a learner-centered atmosphere in reading classes. Cooperative

learning activities which emphasize the learning aspect of working together have been suggested as an effective way to increase students' achievement, self-esteem and social skills.

Because of the intensive curriculum to be followed at The School of Foreign Languages at Karadeniz Technical University, it is difficult to teach the knowledge and skills necessary for effective reading in classes. The number of reading classes per week is not sufficient for learners to be able to fully internalize concepts and topics in the reading course book. Furthermore, besides the course book, students read two stories each semester and are held responsible for them in reading examinations. As a result of this, conducting an effective reading class becomes even more difficult.

Due to those facts mentioned above, students can not actively participate in classes. Also, they do not have any opportunities to interact with each other. Contrarily, they interact with the teacher, who is the authority in the class. This causes students to be passive listeners and there can only be dialogues between the teacher and one of the students at a time. This study is expected to be helpful to promote effective reading instruction by involving students in the reading process. Furthermore, it investigates the attitudes of students towards cooperative learning activities in hope of contributing to the creation of a more enjoyable and relaxing atmosphere for students.

1.3. Research Questions

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

Major research questions:

1. What is the impact of CL activities on EFL learners' achievement in reading classes?
2. What are learners' attitudes towards cooperative learning activities?

Minor research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between genders regarding their test scores in the experimental group?
2. Is there a significant difference between genders in their attitudes towards cooperative learning activities?
3. Do cooperative learning activities contribute to EFL learners' self-esteem as it relates to their reading comprehension?

1.4. Significance of the Study

Although cooperative learning is a popular idea, there is lack of research in the field of foreign language teaching concerning learner attitudes towards cooperative learning activities and the effects of those activities on learners' achievement in EFL reading classes. This study may contribute to the literature in these areas. In addition, since the research is implemented in reading classes in which cooperative learning activities have not been previously used, the results may provide information to compare teacher-centered and learner-centered techniques, since learner-centeredness is one of the most important elements of cooperative language learning. However, despite this fact, in Turkey, most teachers continue to employ teacher-centered techniques.

The study may also contribute to improving the reading classes offered in preparatory classes of the School of Foreign Languages at Karadeniz Technical University. The teachers who are not familiar with cooperative learning activities in their reading classes may be encouraged to use cooperative learning.

1.5. Outline of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction of the study. It presents the statement of the problem, and gives the purpose and significance of the study by providing the particular research questions.

The second chapter deals with the review of literature. This chapter begins by defining reading and common terms in the field of reading. Then, cooperative learning is defined. History, types, characteristics, essential skills, benefits and elements of cooperative learning are described with reference to the roles of teachers and learners. Moreover, teaching the skills of cooperation is mentioned and cooperative learning is contrasted with group work and competition. Next, some cooperative learning activities are described and implementing cooperative learning is defined. Also some challenges of and questions about cooperative learning are discussed. Finally, some studies which combine cooperative learning and reading are mentioned.

The third chapter is devoted to the methodology of the study. The research methods used in the study, data collection instruments, participants, setting, piloting, and sampling are elaborated.

The fourth chapter deals with the main findings and discussions of the study. The data obtained from the pre-test and the post-test, the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews are analyzed. Group evaluation forms are also analyzed.

The fifth chapter summarizes the conclusions that are drawn from the study and limitations and recommendations for further research are highlighted.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Reading

Reading is an important skill not only in foreign language learning but also in first language learning. At schools, students are first taught to read and write. In later years of their education, they learn a great deal through reading. It is by means of reading that people perform most of the things in their daily life, like getting on the correct bus or choosing their food from a menu.

In one's native language or in a foreign language, reading involves moving one's eyes over a line of words and getting some meaning out of it. Sometimes, however, readers may not get any meaning from what they read, due to a variety of reasons some of which are discussed later.

Reading is a very important activity not only as a source of information and an activity for pleasure, but also as a means of increasing one's knowledge of the language or the field one is studying. As Grabe and Stoller (1997) state, in academic settings, reading is assumed to be the central means for learning new information and gaining access to alternative explanations and interpretations. In addition, reading is the primary means for independent learning, whether the goal is performing better on academic tasks, learning more about the subject matter, or improving language abilities (cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001:187).

2.1.1. What is Reading?

It is necessary to distinguish two activities which are both called “reading”. A teacher may ask a student to read something on the board or in a book. The student may be producing the correct sounds and this is called reading or reading aloud. However, in terms of second or foreign language teaching, teachers aim to enable their students to derive meaning from words and combinations in a text. Additionally, they assist their students to do this in a consecutive fashion at a reasonable speed, without necessarily vocalizing what is being read. Rivers calls this “reading for comprehension” (1981:261).

When people learn to read in their native language, they learn to recognize the shapes of letters in the alphabet and become skilled at reading them. They also become familiar with the punctuation marks and their functions. When it comes to reading in another language, they already understand what the process of reading involves. However, in foreign or second language learning classrooms, the type of reading performed is expected to be what Rivers (1981:261) called “reading for comprehension”.

Traditionally, reading has been defined as a receptive skill because the reader is receiving something from the writer. Sometimes it is also called a passive skill because the reader does not produce anything. However, reading is active in that the reader is constantly processing something in his / her mind for communication, which is the main reason why language exists.

Reading can also be defined as a decoding skill, which, thereby, makes it an active side skill: The reader decodes some previously-encoded message from the paper and thus communication somehow takes place.

Reading has one more meaning. Researchers, as mentioned in Chastain, describe reading in a way which emphasizes the reader’s skill in “recreating” the writer’s intended message (1988:216). For example, Perfetti (1984) defines reading as “thinking guided by print” (cited in Chastain, 1988:216).

Ur (1996:138) defines reading as “reading and understanding”. For Ur, a foreign language learner who says, “I can read the words but I don't know what they mean” is not, therefore, reading, in this sense. He or she is merely decoding, or in other words, translating written symbols into corresponding sounds.

Simpson (2008:7) states that there is no guarantee that the meaning which a writer intends to encode in a text will be the same as the message the reader decodes from it. Reading is not a passive process where the meaning passes directly from the writer to the reader via the medium of the text, but rather an interactive process during which the reader extracts meaning from the signs on a page, and interprets those signs in light of what he / she knows about the world. It is, therefore, subject to both cultural and experiential differences, between readers and writers.

2.1.2. Why do People Read?

People read for various reasons. Harmer (2001:200) divides the reasons people read into two main categories. The first one, he suggests, is that people read because they have a specific aim or they look for a certain answer to a question. For example, when reading a road sign, the reader has a clear aim. Harmer calls this “instrumental reading”. The other type of reading is “pleasurable reading”. When, for example, a person is reading a novel, or a magazine, the reader has a reason other than obtaining specific information.

Furthermore, Rivers and Temperly (1978) suggest that there are seven main purposes for reading (cited in Nunan, 1999:137):

1. To obtain information for some purpose or because we are curious about some topic;
2. To obtain instructions on how to perform some task for our work or daily life (e.g., knowing how an appliance works);
3. To act in a play, play a game, do a puzzle;
4. To keep in touch with friends by correspondence or to understand business letters;
5. To know when or where something will take place or what is available;
6. To know what is happening or has happened (as reported in newspapers, magazines, reports);
7. For enjoyment or excitement.

2.1.3. Why Teach Reading?

Reasons for why people read are various. They may want to read, they may need to read or they may have to read. Similarly, reasons for why reading is taught are various. To begin with, some students want to be able to read texts in English for their careers, some read for study purposes and still others read simply for pleasure. Secondly, reading texts provide good models for writing. When teaching the skill of writing, students need to be provided with models. Reading texts also provide opportunities to study language: vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and texts. Finally, good reading texts can create discussions and, thus, integrate the different language skills.

2.1.4. Common Reading Terms in the Related Literature

A review of related literature shows that there are many terms in reading. To have a general picture, some of them are highlighted in this section.

Chastain (1988:217) holds that "comprehension" is a very important term and states that when readers are not comprehending, they are not reading. For him, the goal is to reach a level at which they have confidence in their ability to overcome temporary or partial lapses of understanding and to continue reading until they have understood the writer's general meaning. Also, they need to reach a reading speed that will enable them to use the reading skill realistically as a source of information or enjoyment. As was previously mentioned, Rivers (1981:261) holds that when students derive meaning and do this in a consecutive fashion at a reasonable speed, this is "comprehension" or, in other words, understanding.

For Chastain, "skimming", "scanning", "extensive reading" and "intensive reading" are types of reading (1988:220). According to Harmer, (2001:204) extensive reading means "reading at length, often for pleasure" whereas intensive reading is "more concentrated and less relaxed". Similarly, as cited in Richards and Renandya (2002: 295-296), according to Carrell and Carson (1997), "extensive reading ... generally involves rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings (e.g., whole books) for

general understanding, with the focus generally on the meaning of what is being read than on the language". For them, during intensive reading, students normally work with short texts with close guidance from the teacher. The aim of intensive reading is to help students obtain detailed meaning from the text, to develop reading skills and to enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge (2002:296).

Skimming is "the skill that helps the student read quickly and selectively in order to obtain a general idea of the material" and scanning "helps the student search quickly for the specific information he wishes to get from the material". Skimming is mainly about finding key topics, main ideas, an overall theme, basic structure, etc. In scanning, readers move their eyes quickly over a text, looking for specific information (Scrivener, 1994:154). Harmer (2000) calls this skill "reading for detailed comprehension".

"Critical reading" refers to understanding the author's purpose, distinguishing facts from opinions, judging the reliability of the opinions presented, interpreting the statements further, and drawing inferences or implications from what is presented.

Dubin (1982:126) suggests that there are three basic methods most widely used in teaching reading. "Phonics" is the instruction in the correspondence between English letters and sounds (also known as the "linguistic approach," particularly when the analysis of letter combinations and sounds is more precise). "Whole-word reading" involves recognition of single words representing objects or concepts well understood by the learners, and then moves into word groups. The third one is "the language-experience approach" in which learners tell a brief story, or give a description or a comment, the teacher writes down the language they use, and the learners then read the language they have spoken.

2.1.5. The Transfer Hypothesis

The transfer hypothesis suggests that good readers in a first language will be able to transfer their skills to the second language. However, as Nunan (1999:258) states, it has been found that L1 reading skill does not guarantee second language reading proficiency.

2.1.6. Interactive Model

Öztürk (cited in Zaman, 2000:45) quotes Grabe who states that the term "interactive" can be interpreted in three different ways: interaction between the text and the reader, interaction between the component skills of reading (both bottom-up and top-down), and interaction between form and function in the text which she calls "text interaction". In the first sense, interaction means processing a text on the basis of one's background knowledge and the information provided in the text simultaneously. This means that meaning is viewed to be both in the text and in the reader's mind. In the second sense, interaction is the simultaneous application of both bottom-up skills and top-down skills to the reading process. It is now known that fluent readers process information both at a local level, such as processing of words, and at a more global level, like using background knowledge to interpret the text. In other words, they make use of both the linguistic information in the text and the contextual information provided by their knowledge of the world. The third sense of interaction is related to the interaction of form and function in certain texts.

2.1.7. Schema Theory

Understanding a piece of discourse involves much more than just knowing the language. In order to make sense of any text readers need to have "pre-existent knowledge of the world" according to Cook (cited in Harmer, 2001:199). Such knowledge is often referred to as "schema" and the plural form is "schemata".

Schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text. As cited in Stott (2001), Anderson et al. in Carrell and Eisterhold state that "every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well". Thus, readers develop a coherent interpretation of a text through the interactive process of combining textual information with the information a reader brings to a text. Readers' mental stores, too, are termed "schemata".

According to Ajideh (2006), schema theory proposes that when people obtain knowledge, they try to fit that knowledge into some structure in their memory. This helps them to make sense of that knowledge. Schema theory is an active strategy coding technique necessary for facilitating the recall of knowledge. As new knowledge is perceived, it is coded into either pre-existing schema or organized into a new script. In essence, schemata are organized mental structures that aid the learner's ability to understand and associate with what is being presented to them.

Reading is considered a kind of process in which the reader picks and chooses from the available information. To do this, background information is necessary. The previously acquired knowledge is called the readers' background knowledge. According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the readers' background knowledge and the text itself.

2.1.8. Bottom-up Process

In bottom-up processing, the reader focuses on individual words and phrases, and achieves understanding by stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole (Harmer, 2001:201).

The bottom-up approach views reading as a process of decoding written symbols into their aural equivalents in a linear fashion. Thus, one first discriminates each letter as it is encountered, sounds these out, matching the written symbols with their aural equivalents, blends them together to form words, and derives meaning. Arriving at the meaning of a word is, therefore, the final step in the process.

2.1.9. Top-down Process

In the top-down models, the meaning is created by the reader. The text does not by itself have a meaning. It becomes meaningful only when a reader ascribes a meaning to it (Öztürk, 2000:44, cited in Zaman).

According to Harmer (2001;201), in top-down processing the reader gets a general view of the reading passage by, in some way, absorbing the overall picture. According to the top-down or "psycholinguistic approach" to reading, one begins with a set of hypotheses or predictions about the meaning of the text one is about to read, and then selectively samples the text to determine whether or not one's predictions are correct. Nunan calls this "miscue analysis" (1999:253).

2.1.10. The Teacher's Role in Reading Classes

The teacher must firstly create interest in reading. He / she must project his or her enthusiasm for books, and must help students to see that reading can be of real value to them. This means relating reading to the interests of the students, to what they are thinking and talking about. Also, the teacher must take into account the level of the students and conduct the lessons accordingly. Additionally, the teacher must provide students with feedback as needed. Finally, good teachers create good learning environments for particular classes by stimulating interest, selecting and adapting appropriate materials, promoting useful strategies, and providing each student with feedback as needed.

2.2. Cooperative Learning

In this section, types of cooperative learning, elements of cooperative learning, basic methods and techniques of cooperative learning, some cooperative class activities, cooperative learning groups, characteristics of cooperative learning activities and cooperative skills are explained. The history and some shortcomings of CL are also mentioned and the roles of learners and teachers are described. Finally, some studies in which cooperative learning was applied in reading classes are mentioned.

2.2.1. A Brief History of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is not a new idea. As cited in Putnam (1998:72), in the 1st century, Quintillion claimed that students could benefit from teaching one another. In the same resource, it is stated that Seneca showed that he is in favor of cooperative learning by stating that when you teach, you learn twice. Johann Amos Comenius also believed

that students could benefit both by teaching and being taught by other students. Towards the end of the 18th century, Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell applied cooperative learning in England, and this idea was also extended to be used the United States. After the Common School Movement in the United States in the early 1800s, cooperative learning was emphasized even more strongly. Although interpersonal competition was emphasized in the 1930s and in the late 1960s, in the 1980s, cooperative learning reappeared in schools.

2.2.2. Misconceptions about Cooperative Learning

There may be misconceptions about what cooperative learning is. Therefore, describing cooperative learning by what it is not may be a good idea. Cooperative learning, by its nature, is most often regarded as being group work. Also it is usually thought of only as an in-class activity. Further, some people think cooperative learning requires too much on the side of the teacher.

To begin with, cooperative learning is not group work. From the outside, it does look like group work. However, cooperative learning teams, or groups, involve much more than mere group work. For example, in group work, one or a few of the students may do all the work while the other members may just sit passively or do little work or may not even show up in classes but in a cooperative learning group each member has unique contribution to the total success – or failure – of the group. Each member has a different duty and those different responsibilities come together to make up the final product.

Similarly, cooperative learning does not come to mean that brighter – or better – students help weaker students all the time, although such cases may happen occasionally. In cooperative learning, responsibilities are shared and each member has something to bring to the process, whether it is something very easy or something very difficult. This also helps everyone to feel valuable and helps each member increase their self-esteem.

In addition, cooperative learning does not take place only inside the classroom. In cooperative base groups, for example, students work together for a whole term or a year

with the same group members. This means that students pursue their cooperative activities not only at school but also outside, as well. They may come together somewhere else and the same principles of cooperative learning will still take place because of the structure and the nature of cooperative learning.

Another point is that teachers who are new to cooperative learning may have some difficulties at first and it may take some time for the students to get used to this way of learning. However, as teachers and their students get used to cooperative learning, things will be easier because, for example, the previously-used materials can be re-used and after the students have the feeling of belonging to a group and feel that they can contribute to a group's success, they will start to like it even more. Therefore, a teacher will have fewer problems to deal with and the students will need less help from their teacher.

Besides, cooperative learning is not one single way to teach something like a lecture or a discussion. It is actually an umbrella term covering activities like Student-Teams-Achievement-Divisions, Jigsaw, Asking Together, Learning Together and the principles apply to all those activities, with a few minor changes in each.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that although it is a very effective way to teach, cooperative learning is not something magical that can solve all the problems. Many other factors outside school affect students in some ways and cooperative learning cannot be the solution to problems like discomfort within a student's family or physical environment. Similarly, some topics may not be appropriate to be taught through cooperative learning methods. Therefore, it can be said that cooperative learning is not applicable to all subjects and on every occasion.

2.2.3. Types of Cooperative Learning Groups

Johnson and Johnson in Sharan (1999:54-55) classify types of cooperative learning groups into three types:

2.2.3.1. Formal Cooperative Learning Groups

Formal cooperative learning groups last from one class period to several weeks to complete. The teacher introduces the lesson, puts students into groups of two to six members, gives students the materials they need in order to complete the assignment, and gives students their roles. Then, the teacher explains the task, teaches any concepts or procedures the students need in order to complete the assignment, and structures the cooperation among students. Students work on the assignment until all group members have successfully understood and completed it.

2.2.3.2. Informal Cooperative Learning Groups

Informal cooperative learning groups are temporary groups that last from a few minutes to a whole class period. The teacher needs to ensure that students organize the materials, explain things, summarize them, and integrate them with the other structures.

2.2.3.3. Cooperative Base Groups

In cooperative base groups, students work together for a whole term or a year with the same group members. In base groups, students give each other support, help, encouragement and assistance to make academic progress by encouraging each member to attend classes, complete all assignments, learn things completely and develop cognitively and socially in healthy ways.

2.2.4. Characteristics of Cooperative Learning Activities

Watson, Solomon, Dasho, Shwartz, and Kendzior in Sharan (1999:148) list five main characteristics of cooperative learning activities:

2.2.4.1. Inherent Interest

For teachers to increase students' motivation, the cooperative tasks must be worthy of such motivation. They must either be interesting to students, or the teacher needs to make clear the benefits, importance, or relevance of these activities beforehand.

2.2.4.2. Developmental Appropriateness

Cooperative learning activities need to be designed to provide students with developmentally appropriate opportunities to work cooperatively.

2.2.4.3. Open-endedness

Each student needs to deal with new learning in his or her own way within the group context. Cooperative learning tasks define broad goals and objectives and the different members of a group have different skills, interests, or styles. Therefore, it becomes necessary for them to negotiate to find an approach to the task that will be satisfying and useful for all members.

2.2.4.4. Genuine Benefit from Collaboration

Not all learning tasks can be turned into cooperative activities. Some tasks are better done by individual students and are not appropriate for cooperative learning activities. Good cooperative activities are those in which students take advantage of different points of view and the efficiency of many people.

2.2.4.5. Benefit from Many Different Skills or Abilities

In cooperative learning, it is important to get all students to contribute to group tasks. Cooperative learning tasks usually require combinations of different skills, so that different group members will be “good” at different aspects of the task and will satisfy themselves, too.

2.2.5. Differences between Group Work and Cooperative Learning

In the related literature, cooperative learning is very often confounded with group work. For this reason, a separate section is necessary to distinguish between these two types of learning activities. Researchers point out several differences. Although group work and cooperative learning are usually associated with each other, some key characteristics distinguish the two terms from each other.

To begin with, cooperative learning is much more than simply using groups in a classroom environment. Grouping is, of course, important, but the structure of the group combined with the structure of the activities is what truly defines cooperative learning.

Cooter and Flynt (1996:102) write: "Cooperative learning groups are heterogeneous groups usually ranging in size from two to five students working as a team to accomplish a classroom assignment". It is clear from this statement that the author pays specific importance to the fact that in cooperative learning, grouping the students in a heterogeneous fashion is the key factor.

The second key factor for cooperative learning groups is represented in Aykaç's words:

> For a group work to be a cooperative learning activity, students are expected to try to maximize their own learning and also the group's learning. In other words, in cooperative learning, the activity is organized in such a way that the group members know that they can not succeed unless the other group members have also succeeded. (2005:77).

In the statement above, the author points to the importance of positive interdependence, which is perhaps the most important element of cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning is not simply group work or small group work. In group work, after having shared the portions of the work to be done, each member works on their own part by themselves. Furthermore, in cooperative learning, there is a sharing of different responsibilities like the record keeper, noise-monitor or the group writer. However, in traditional group work, such roles do not exist. Also, in traditional group

work, there is the risk that students might not participate, since they usually rely on the strongest group members to accomplish the group task. However, this can not exist in a truly cooperative activity.

Another difference between cooperative learning and group work lies in the former's tendency towards a process-based approach. Whereas in group work the group product is the main emphasis, the focus in cooperative learning is on learning and social processes of each individual student during the students' collaboration.

The steps to be taken in cooperative learning are different in terms of preparation and planning. This point is clearly stated in the following words:

> A key difference between cooperative learning and traditional group work is that in the latter, students are asked to work in groups with no attention paid to group functioning, whereas in cooperative learning, groupwork is carefully prepared, planned, and monitored (Jacobs, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Ng & Lee, 1996, cited in Jacobs, Lee and Ng, 1997).

By the same token, Egen and Kauchak (1997) propose that the key difference between group work and cooperative learning lies in the structure of groups. In group work, students simply work together whereas in cooperative learning the students in a group are selected on the basis of certain criteria.

The last difference concerns the nature of the activities. Cooperative learning activities are well-structured tasks which involve "genuine information gap, requiring learners to both listen to and contribute to the development of an oral, written or other product which represents the group's efforts, knowledge and perspectives" (Crandall, 1999:227, cited in Bayat, 2004). In typical group work activities, the tasks are usually not as well and clearly designed as those in cooperative learning activities. Besides, students are responsible for both their own learning and their group members' learning in cooperative learning activities. Also, cooperative learning groups are usually intentionally mixed in terms of ability, achievement level, gender, culture, and language characteristics.

2.2.6. The Essential Skills of Cooperation

As cited in Baloche (1998:146), Johnson, Johnson and Holubec describe four basic categories of skills. They are as follows: Skills that help students get into groups, skills that help groups stay together and get the job done, skills that help students build an understanding of academic material and skills that encourage students to become empowered thinkers.

Sometimes teachers assume that students have these basic skills and then get angry when, for example, the simple direction "Move into your groups!" causes much noise and disorganization. Staying together involves students' being ready to complete academic tasks and building and maintaining their relationships with their group mates. Skills such as seeking accuracy, planning, and summarizing are all important skills if students are going to build understanding of academic material. However, for students to become genuinely empowered learners they need some additional skills - skills that encourage them to view things from different points of view, ask questions, and learn to agree or disagree. Without these skills, there is a risk that students will define "cooperation" as simply "getting along," "behaving with other people," or "getting a lot done" (Holloway, 1992, cited in Baloche, 1998:149).

2.2.7. Teaching the Skills of Cooperation

Telling students to listen, paraphrase, or ask a question is not helpful if students do not understand what those skills are. Skills must be defined, explained, and contextualized in a way that students understand. Students must also be given feedback about their use of important skills and they must be given time to reflect on their use of those skills. Therefore, it is important for teachers to observe students' use of interpersonal and small-group learning skills while the students are working together in their cooperative groups.

The following are some steps that can be used as a guide when planning and teaching students the interpersonal and small group learning skills they need in order to work successfully in cooperative groups and in real life (Baloche, 1998:150):

1. Developing the context so that students understand the importance of cooperation and of the specific interpersonal skills you want them to learn.
2. Developing an understanding of what a specific skill is and when to use it.
3. Providing opportunities for students to practice the use of the skill: These opportunities include both obvious "practice" situations and opportunities within the context of group work that focus on academic learning.
4. Monitoring group work and observing and collecting data about student use of the skill.
5. Providing feedback to students and facilitating their own reflection about their use of the skill.
6. Providing more opportunities for students to use the skill so that they become comfortable with it.

2.2.8. Benefits of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning has many benefits. Students benefit academically, psychologically and socially, especially in terms of diverse populations or race relations, if relevant. Also there are more specific classroom benefits like increased motivation and more opportunities to talk. Teachers benefit, too, by professionally improving themselves and giving their students more chances to talk and be more active. The society as a whole benefits in the long run.

To begin with, cooperative learning classes are often more relaxed and enjoyable than traditional classes like those commonly found in Turkish educational system. This creates a positive learning environment, with more students attentive to assigned tasks, which results in increased achievement for all students.

Academically, cooperative learning activities increase students' critical thinking skills because they are not passive listeners but they actively take part in the process of learning. Senemoğlu (2004), too, found evidence for this advantage in a study.

Moreover, cooperative learning has social benefits. Senemoğlu (2004) holds that cooperative learning helps students gain skills like working in a group and, thus, prepares them for their future lives at work and at home. It also enhances communicative skills because while one student talks, the others listen. This also helps them to become better listeners and speakers. Students learn social skills, for example, by focusing on things rather than on people. Students can learn to work with all types of people from different countries or cities, with people of different sexes, and with people of different backgrounds. Further, when a question is asked, different students have different

responses. Each of these can help the group create a product that reflects a wide range of perspectives. What is more, students can learn to relate to their peers and other learners as they work together in a group. This can be especially helpful for students who have difficulty with social skills. In terms of how active the students are, each member of the group has opportunities to contribute.

Furthermore, cooperative learning offers psychological benefits. It helps to increase students' trust for each other and their interest in and attitudes towards the subjects at school. Moreover, cooperative learning activities help students increase their attention. These activities also prevent the students from getting lost or losing concentration. It helps students gain higher level thinking skills and problem solving skills (Senemoğlu, 2004:498-499). Further support is found in Jacobs and Hall (2002). They suggest that a good deal of research exists in education suggesting that cooperative learning is associated with benefits in such key areas as learning, self-esteem, liking for school, and interethnic relations. Human beings are social creatures and they like and need to be in a community. Cooperative learning provides students with social responsibilities and duties within a community. People like it when they are active and when they can use their skills.

Cooperative learning activities help students use their skills and feel satisfied. Cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic traditional instruction, which is often found in Turkey, is considerably more popular among students. This is true regardless of differences in ability level, sex, disability, ethnic membership, social class differences, or task orientation. Students who collaborate on their studies develop considerable commitment and caring for each other no matter what their initial impressions of and attitudes toward each other were when they started. They also like the teacher more and perceive the teacher as being more supportive and accepting academically and personally. Students develop a sense of trust among their peers as they share the responsibility of their own and each other's learning. Cooperative efforts result in participants who are striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts. They recognize that all group members share a common fate. Also they know that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's team

members and they feel proud and jointly celebrate when a group member is recognized for achievement.

Slavin (1995) suggests that the most important psychological outcome of cooperative learning methods is their effect on student self-esteem. When students believe that they are valuable and important individuals, it improves their ability to deal with the difficulties at school and later in life. This results in happy, self-confident decision-makers, and productive individuals in society. Students' anxiety results from the fear of making mistakes, especially when they are asked a question to be answered individually. When students are allowed to study together, they have more time to think, to share their opinions with other students, receive feedback from them, and correct any mistakes. As a result, their anxiety level is reduced, and they become willing to participate in answering the questions of the teacher. This often results in enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem (Dornyei, 1997:482-493). Cooperative language learning also empowers learners to acquire increased language skills. Because cooperative language learning promotes interaction, learners have more opportunities to listen to, talk and produce the language which means more practice in the target language.

As for assessment, cooperative learning relies on the process rather than the product and students are graded according to their efforts within the group. Therefore, students feel less anxious in terms of grades, especially when compared to examination periods. Also, teachers can observe groups and grade them rather than grading students one by one, which is easier for the teacher.

In addition, during a class, cooperative learning provides numerous benefits. It increases the amount of participation in the classroom and helps to decrease discipline problems. By distributing duties and responsibilities in the classroom, it also helps the teacher to manage both slow learners and quick learners. The interaction during cooperative learning activities is enjoyable for the students and this contributes to creating a more enjoyable learning environment (Senemoğlu, 2004:498-499).

In second and foreign language learning, theorists propose several advantages for cooperative learning: increased student talk, more varied talk, a more relaxed atmosphere,

greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning, and increased amounts of comprehensible input (Liang, Mohan, & Early, 1998; Olsen and Kagan, 1992, cited in Richards and Renandya, 2002). Students are active all the time because the process itself requires students to be listening, talking, agreeing or disagreeing, in short, taking an active role all the time. Furthermore, cooperative learning activities somehow force students to come to school regularly because the group work requires students to be ready all the time and take part in the activities. Also success brings more success and working together increases students' motivation. Cooperative learning offers increased frequency and a variety of second language practice opportunities through different types of interaction. It also creates possibility for development or use of the first language in ways that support cognitive development and increased second language skills. Besides, it offers opportunities to integrate language with content-based instruction. Cooperative learning also increases participation and decreases discipline problems (Aykaç, 2005). Similarly, students have more opportunities for personal feedback because there are more exchanges among students in cooperative learning groups.

In addition, in terms of teachers, cooperative learning provides opportunities to include a greater variety of curricular materials to stimulate language as well as concept learning, freedom for teachers to master new professional skills, particularly those emphasizing communication; and opportunities for students to act as resources for each other, thus assuming a more active role in their learning. Cooperative learning can help address the needs of heterogeneous classes - diverse in home languages, English-language proficiency, and academic achievement. Moreover, perhaps most importantly, cooperative learning offers a wide variety of techniques, strategies, and considerations for teachers. Murdoch and Wilson (2004:16) claim that while the students are working with each other, teachers can be freed up to observe and assess pupils and to step in when the need arises. Also, observing how students interact with each other can provide important assessment data that is otherwise unavailable when students work individually or as a whole class. Finally, the teacher helps students only when they need. This helps in that the teacher can act early on problems and he / she can deal with the students who have learning difficulties (Aykaç, 2005).

Finally, cooperative learning promotes creative thinking by increasing the number of ideas, quality of ideas, feelings of stimulation and enjoyment, and originality of expression in creative problem solving. Students are "triggered" by the ideas of others and those different perspectives cause group members to consider a larger number of alternatives. The cooperative relationship also provides a context to consider and appreciate other group members' ideas instead of ignoring (individualistic) or trying to come up with a better one (competition).

2.2.9. Elements of Cooperative Learning

It is generally accepted that cooperative learning has five basic elements: Positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal skills and group processing.

What is meant by the term positive interdependence is that activities are structured so that students must depend on each other to successfully reach their goals. Positive interdependence is the first requirement for an effectively structured cooperative lesson. Students believe that they sink or swim together. They have two responsibilities: 1) learn the assigned material, and 2) ensure that all members of the group learn the assigned material. When positive interdependence is clearly understood, there can be no free-riders and each group member has a unique contribution to make because of his / her resources and / or role and task responsibilities.

Johnson and Johnson (1994) provide further information about positive interdependence. They state that there are a number of ways of structuring positive interdependence within a learning group. For example, "positive goal interdependence" exists when students perceive that they can achieve their learning goals if and only if all the members of their group also attain their goals. "Positive reward" or "celebrate interdependence" means that each group member receives the same reward when the group achieves its goals. Furthermore, "positive resource interdependence" means that each group member has only a portion of the resources, information, or materials necessary for the task to be completed, which means that the members' resources have to be combined for the group to achieve its goals. Also, "positive role interdependence"

comes to mean that each member is assigned complementary and interconnected roles that specify responsibilities that the group needs in order to complete the joint task (cited in Sharan, 1999).

In addition to these, they continue, there are other types of positive interdependence. Positive task interdependence means that a division of labor is created and the actions of one group member have to be completed if the next member is to complete his or her responsibility. Positive identity interdependence exists when a mutual identity is established through a name or motto. Outside threat interdependence exists when groups are placed in competition with each other. Fantasy interdependence exists when a task that requires group members to imagine that they are in a hypothetical situation is given.

Positive interdependence means that a gain for one student is a gain for the others in the group. This can be contrasted with negative interdependence, where one student's failure could be another student's gain. Therefore, it is obvious that negative interdependence creates competitive rather than cooperative relationships between learners. Besides, no interdependence means that what one learner does has no effect on another learner.

The second basic element of cooperative learning is promotive interaction, preferably face-to-face. Students work together and they promote each other's success by sharing resources and helping, supporting, encouraging, and applauding each other's efforts to achieve. This way, students orally explain how to solve problems, teach one's knowledge to others, check for understanding, discuss concepts being learned, and connect present with past learning. It is through promoting each other's learning face-to-face that members become personally committed to each other as well as to their mutual goals. Johnson and Johnson (1994) state that the purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Thus, individual accountability is the key to ensuring that all group members are, in fact, strengthened by learning cooperatively.

Johnson and Johnson (1994) list some ideas to structure individual accountability, which is the third main element of cooperative learning:

1. Keeping the size of the group small. The smaller the size of the group, the greater the individual accountability may be.
2. Giving an individual test to each student.
3. Randomly examining students orally by calling on one student to present his or her group's work to the teacher (in the presence of the group) or to the entire class.
4. Observing each group and recording the frequency with which each member-contributes to the group's work.
5. Assigning one student in each group the role of checker. The checker asks other group members to explain the reasoning and rationale underlying group answers.
6. Having students teach what they learned to someone else. When all students do this, it is called simultaneous explaining.

Individual accountability can be described as personal responsibility. A key factor for the effectiveness of cooperation is a sense of personal responsibility for contributing one's efforts to accomplish the group's goals. This involves being responsible for completing one's share of the work and facilitating the work of other group members and minimally hindering their efforts.

If students feel individually accountable, they are more likely to try to learn, rather than letting others do the work and the learning for them. However, if teachers just put students in groups without carefully planning and thinking, one or two group members may have to do all the work and all the learning while the other members just sit and wait.

The fourth element to be mentioned in this section is cooperative skills or interpersonal skills. It is obvious that cooperative learning is an attempt to increase social skills. Students should be required to learn and practice social and cooperative skills within their groups. Cooperative skills are those social skills commonly used in group activities. After determining what skills are needed by students, teachers should provide necessary instruction by defining the skills, explaining their importance, demonstrating the skills, creating practice situations in the groups, and giving students feedback on how well they are using a skill.

Social skills do not only promote higher achievement, they also contribute to building more positive relationships among group members. When students are taught

social skills, observed by the teacher, and given individual feedback as to how frequently they engaged in the skills, their relationships become more positive.

Group processing is the fifth element of cooperative learning. Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (in Stahl, 1995:65) additionally provide the term "debriefing", when explaining this term. They explain that group processing exists when group members discuss how well they worked as a team to achieve their goals and maintain effective working relationships. Groups need to describe what member actions are helpful and unhelpful and make decisions about which behaviors to continue and which to change. Students must also be given the time and procedures for analyzing how well their learning groups are functioning and the extent to which students are employing their social skills, to help all group members to achieve and to maintain effective working relationships within the group. This processing (a) enables learning groups to focus on group maintenance; (b) facilitates the learning of social skills; (c) ensures that members receive feedback on their participation; and (d) reminds students to practice collaborative skills consistently.

2.2.10. Cooperation and Competition

In today's world, competition is an important term especially in terms of products and services. For example, a competition between two companies may lead to better services at lower prices or to a wider variety of products on the market, which is something good for many people. However, when it comes to education, to schools, to classrooms, competition is presently seen as something causing trouble among students. The reasons that lie behind this fact can be summarized in a few words. When students compete, they have to be better than their classmates or they compete against a standard grade or level. Also, when they compete, feelings of friendship and sharing are lost. Even parents may start to compete by urging their children to be better, to get higher grades even if this means losing friends or other social skills like sharing, discussing, or agreeing.

In a competitive environment, a student is forced to be better than others or to go beyond some pre-specified level. When a student can not accomplish this goal, this may result in psychological and physical discomfort. Sometimes, parents may add to this

discomfort by yelling at their children or by punishing them. Research shows that competition often decreases motivation (Tavris and Wade, 1996). Similarly, Oxford (1990) explains that competition very often results in debilitating anxiety, inadequacy, guilt, hostility, withdrawal, fear of failure, and desire for approval. All in all, competition does not seem to be a good way to teach although it has been used for many years.

According to Gillies and Ashman (2003:164), it is the nature of co-operation that group members strive to achieve for (1) own well-being, (2) the well-being of others, and (3) the common good. They go on to state that working cooperatively with others tends to amplify the emotions experienced while working on a task. Group enjoyment of an activity, for example, is more powerful than individual enjoyment.

Helgesen and Jacobs (2003) suggest some ideas for balancing cooperation and competition. They start by suggesting that rather than competing against others, students can compete against a standard or against a problem. Further, they add that cooperation and competition can be not just part of the *how* (the method) of learning, but also part of the *what* (the content). In terms of assessment, they suggest that criterion-referenced assessment rather than norm-referenced assessment is recommended as a way of providing clear ends yet discouraging competition among students. What is more, how students react to competition depends in part on the overall climate of the classroom, school, and society. Therefore, they suggest, teachers can do a great deal to encourage an overall cooperative climate in the classroom, and they also have roles to play in the school and society. Using warm-up activities that build familiarity and trust is another suggestion. Promoting service learning activities in which students help others beyond their classroom can also help. Besides, teachers could change competitive games into cooperative ones.

2.2.11. Some Cooperative Learning Activities

The Learning Together model of cooperative learning was developed by Johnson and Johnson (1994). In this model, heterogeneous groups of four or five learners work on assignment sheets. A main aspect of this model is having students who differ in

achievement, gender or ethnicity work together to achieve shared learning goals and to complete the group assignments (cited in Bayat, 2004).

In Group Investigation, students form groups and study subtopics of a unit studied by the whole class. The group members determine the subtopics, plan their investigations, carry out individual tasks, plan and make presentations. Eventually, the teacher and the students evaluate their projects together.

In Slavin's (1994) Teams-Games Tournament (TGT) model, students work together in heterogeneously grouped teams to compete against other teams. After the teacher presents the instruction, groups discuss and work on the material. Finally, they compete with other teams to answer questions prepared by the teacher. The tournaments may last for several weeks. Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) is a simpler version of TGT. Students are grouped and work as in TGT; however, in STAD tournaments are replaced by quizzes. After cooperative group work, students are given quizzes to be answered individually. Both individual and group quiz scores are used for evaluating student learning.

Jigsaw II, developed by Slavin (1994), is a modified version of the original Jigsaw. In this version, students work on common material first and then are given separate topics to become experts on. Having worked on their topics in the expert groups, students return to their home groups to explain the materials that they have studied.

In the activity, Asking Together, Learning Together, developed by Açıkgöz (2002), students study reading texts in their cooperative learning groups. Each group prepares high consensus questions for the reading assignment, writes them on pieces of paper, and gives them to other groups and the teacher. Answers to the questions are discussed in groups and the teacher elicits the answers from randomly chosen students.

The jigsaw grouping strategy is an excellent way to encourage all pupils to participate in and to contribute to each other's learning by sharing their expert knowledge. It can also help pupils work through a larger volume of information in a shorter amount of time than if they were working alone. The teacher begins by organizing students into

groups (usually of four to five). This is the home group. Each student in the group is responsible for gathering information from a particular source or answering a particular question. These become the experts and work with others in an expert group. Once the expert groups have completed their task, individuals return to their home group to share their new expertise (Murdoch & Wilson, 2004:31).

Think-pair-share strategy asks students to first think on their own (and note ideas if needed), then share with a friend (and look for patterns or similarities), and then with the whole class or group (Murdoch & Wilson, 2004:35).

In Three-Step Interview, student A interviews student B for the specified number of minutes, listening attentively and asking probing questions (Kagan, 1994). At a signal, students reverse roles and then student B interviews students A for the same number of minutes. At another signal, each pair turn to another pair, forming a group of four. Each member of the group introduces his or her partner, highlighting the most interesting points (Liang, 2002).

In Numbered Heads Together (Kagan, 1994) first, the teacher puts learners into groups of four to work on a task, and then gives each student a number. After working on a task together, the teacher calls out a number (for example, "2"). Each student with that number stands up and gives a brief report of his or her group's work to the whole class. (Apple, 2006).

In Travelling Heads Together, the team is given a task. They discuss until they arrive at an answer and make sure they all agree about it and can defend it. Then, a student from each team goes to the next group, where he / she explains the team's answer. (Stenlev, 2003).

2.2.12. Implementing Cooperative Learning

The key to effective groupwork is organization (Eggen & Kauchak, 1997:502). Applying cooperative learning in the classroom begins with physical preparation. If the space allows, desks must be designed in such a way that they can move easily, allowing

students to be able to move around easily and face each other too. One part of the classroom can be spared as the place to use the native language, where students can go and speak their native language in cases of confusion and much difficulty. Also, groups must be sitting in such a position that at least one member of each group can see the teacher's table.

In terms of forming the groups, the number of students per group must be between two and six. Aykaç (2005:78) suggests, however, that until the students get used to working in this fashion, it is a good idea to make students work in groups of two or three.

The teacher must make it clear to the students what they will be doing, what materials they will be using and when they will receive them before they start working as a group. After that comes the actual stage of forming the groups. The teacher assigns students from different sexes and from different academic achievement levels to form heterogeneous groups. Students must be ensured that working in their group will benefit them and their contribution will benefit the whole group. Then, they must be informed about how cooperative learning works and must be assigned their in-group duties. The aims of the group must be understood and accepted by each group member because the success of the group depends on the contributions of each member.

The distribution of sexes is also important. In cooperative learning groups, the number of male students and female students in a group should be balanced. According to a study mentioned in Senemoğlu (2004), when there are too few female students in a group, they are sometimes left outside the discussion. Contrarily, if there are just a couple of male students in the group, and if they are not less proficient than their female group mates, they are more dominant (Webb, 1980, 1985, cited in Senemoğlu, 2004:500).

Another important point to be kept in mind is that if some of the students in a group do most of the work and the others just sit and do little for the group, the ones who explain learn better and the ones who sit and listen learn less. Accordingly, when forming groups for cooperative learning, the teacher should pay attention to picking students of different abilities and finding tasks which require all the members to work cooperatively.

In other words, students should be “interdependent and the load should be shared by all the members” (Senemoğlu, 2004:501).

2.2.13. Cooperative Learning and the Learner

Learners in a traditional classroom and those in a cooperative learning classroom are significantly different. The roles attached to students in cooperative learning include working together, sharing work load, contributing to the group tasks, negotiation and paying attention to attendance.

In traditional classrooms, students are in a kind of race against each other or against a previously-determined point. However, in cooperative learning, students most importantly learn to work together. While working together in teams, students learn social skills like asking questions, answering, intervening, agreeing or disagreeing and so on. They also help each other by sharing the work load. They make positive contributions to the group. They also force their teammates to do their best.

The primary role of the learner is to contribute to the completion of the group tasks while collaboratively working with the members of the group. Cooperative learning provides second language learners with opportunities to hear more language and more complex language during interaction with peers. This increased complexity of input facilitates language development. Therefore, the students’ duty is to interact with their teammates as much as possible.

Students in a cooperative learning group discuss things to be learned, they help other members understand better for the sake of the whole group and they encourage the other members to work harder. In the case of peer tutoring activities, for example, they have the roles of tutors and tutees.

Students in a cooperative learning activity also have to pay attention to attendance because the group cannot succeed totally without the presence of all the members.

2.2.14. Cooperative Learning and the Teacher

The idea of cooperative learning does not come to mean that teachers are free of many of their responsibilities or that they can distribute duties and roles and leave the class on their own. Quite the contrary, teachers have even more responsibilities and these roles are more complicated and more demanding when compared to a traditional class.

The role of the teacher is critical for success in cooperative learning in the classroom. The details that the teacher needs to consider exist in all phases of a cooperative lesson: while planning, during the application, even after the lesson finishes and, certainly, during the feedback session. Cooperative learning allows teachers to create a learner-centered class and focus on students' needs.

The roles of the teacher in a cooperative classroom are many. First, and foremost, the teacher needs to introduce cooperative learning clearly to his / her students. Because it is a new concept and is quite different from the traditional ways in which students were taught before, the teacher should help his / her students gain a sound understanding of cooperative learning and its principles and how it is applied and so on. In this respect, the teacher is both a helper as well as a leader.

The teacher in a cooperative lesson is also there to motivate the students. Many students need to be helped for different reasons. Therefore, the teacher should create a supportive, noncompetitive environment and help students treat each other with care, respect, and fairness.

Modeling is another duty that the teacher in a cooperative classroom needs to do. Students need practice, like in everything else. One effective way to help them learn to cooperate is to present regular, effective models of cooperation around them.

Giving feedback is another crucial detail in cooperative learning activities. Regular and constructive feedback helps keep pupils mindful of what is expected, promotes accountability, helps develop skills and enables pupils to set individual and group goals.

Feedback can be given on both what the students are working on and how they are working. It may be written or oral, formal or informal.

The teacher needs to intervene at strategic moments. Although the aim is to enable the students to work on their own cooperatively with minimal assistance from the teacher, in some cases groups or even individual students may need instruction while they are working. If a problem prevents the group from progressing, the teacher may need to intervene and help.

Selection of tasks is also worth mentioning. The teacher of the cooperative class is responsible for providing students with appropriate and rich tasks for them to engage in and concentrate on. Some tasks may not be appropriate for cooperative learning or may not involve students in learning something worthwhile.

The teacher of the cooperative learning classroom needs to consider the physical environment for cooperation, too. The teacher needs to arrange the chairs, tables or desks in a way which is appropriate for a cooperative activity. The students need to be able to see each other's faces and sit close to each other so that interaction can increase. Also, if one student faces the teacher or can see the teacher's table, the teacher can attract that student's attention when he / she needs to silence the group or tell them to stop.

Group size and group formation are also important decisions to be made by the teacher. According to Baloche (1998:212), it is best to keep group size small. The teacher needs to make sure everyone has a chance to speak, stays on task, understands the material, and agrees with the group's decisions. This becomes difficult as the group size increases. In terms of the number of members, Baloche (1998) points out that pairs are frequently ideal for group work but when a greater variety of ideas, opinions, and work styles is important, threes and fours are helpful numbers for the teacher.

The teacher in the cooperative learning classroom needs to be a good observer. Listening to students while they work helps the teacher see their strengths and weaknesses (Bayat, 2004). Problems likely to arise can also be prevented. When the need arises, the

teacher can intervene, too. Most importantly, the teacher can help the students if they need it while walking among the groups.

The teachers in cooperative learning atmospheres should have positive beliefs and attitudes about cooperative learning. Gwyn-Paquette and Tochon's study showed that during cooperative learning activities, teachers were enthusiastic about using cooperative learning activities in their lessons and in spite of the problems they encountered, such as noise, they developed the confidence to implement those activities and tried to solve the problems that emerged (cited in Bayat, 2004).

2.2.15. Some Challenges of Cooperative Learning

Certainly, like many other things, cooperative learning is not without pitfalls or shortcomings. However, it seems that advantages outweigh the disadvantages or likely problems.

To begin with, some students may not want to work in a group and this is something quite natural in a class where students come from different educational and social backgrounds. Considering the fact that many students from those different schools and from their own worlds come together in a class where something that they had never heard about before is to be used, it is easier to understand the difficulty that they experience. Many Turkish students matriculate through the Turkish educational system where they have to compete against each other in order to succeed or be better than the others. Therefore, a cooperative activity may seem strange to students until they get used to it. In addition, aggressive students may try to take over, bright students may tend to act superior, and shy students may find it hard to share answers. By the same token, an inexperienced or careless teacher may place too much burden on the better students and make them do most of the work while the others, especially the weaker ones, do not benefit much from cooperative learning. Sometimes there may even be some disagreement which results in a conflict between boys and girls.

Some students may even claim that their groupmates are not working or are working but not satisfactorily. Although this may seem like a lazy excuse in order not to work within a group, in some cases it may be true.

Another problem is that some students or parents may think that cooperative learning prevents them from being better or that helping or teaching each other is a waste of time. Some may even claim that, especially at a university, people pay in order to be taught by a teacher not by just another student.

Another criticism is from the teachers who do not wish to make students work together. One reason may be the high noise. Another reason may be that some teachers are used to one or two specific types of teaching and may not be open to changes or trying new things. Still another reason may be the time that teachers need to spend trying to get used to using cooperative learning. This means that teachers need to learn and apply strategies and structures in order to fully grasp the requirements of cooperative learning. Similarly, they will have to teach the same strategies and structures to their students.

Moreover, a teacher may find it difficult, or sometimes impossible, to control the whole class while the students are working in groups. One obvious reason could be the high noise level. Another one could be the amount of attention that a teacher can pay to each group.

With all these in mind, it is necessary to quote (Oxford, 1990:146) here. According to her, the research shows that on their own, without special training or encouragement, language learners do not typically report a natural preference for cooperative strategies.

As cited in Liang (2002), Carroll (1994) reported in a one-year study of an 11th grade English class that there were a significant number of students with negative responses to cooperative learning. Many of the students were reluctant to talk over personal ideas with their peers for fear that other students might think little of their opinions.

Another possible problem with cooperative learning involves racial and gender inequities. However, such cases do not seem likely to arise within the setting of the present study.

2.2.16. Some Questions Discussed

Jacobs and Hall in Richards and Renandya (2002:53-57) discuss some questions and provide some ideas about dealing with them.

2.2.16.1. Size of Groups

Even two students can make a group. This is advantageous because the group members can talk more and practice the cooperative learning skills like turn-taking or disagreeing more often. This becomes even more fruitful in EFL classes. However, the size of the class, that is the number of the students in the classroom may make it impossible to work with such a low number of students per group. On the other hand, if there are more people in a group, there can be more ideas, more backgrounds, more contribution, more skills and more personalities.

2.2.16.2. Forming the Groups

Teacher-selected groups work well especially at the beginning because students need time to get used to working in this fashion. When students have had enough experience with using cooperative learning, they may be allowed to create their own groups.

On the other hand, random grouping is another idea which can be applied in the cooperative classroom. The positive side of random grouping is that students can see that they can work with anyone, in any group and this helps to increase self-esteem.

2.2.16.3. Intervening while the Students are Working

When the teacher wants to get the class's attention he / she can use some techniques. One example is the RSPA technique (R stands for "raise a hand", S stands for "stop talking", P stands for "pass the signal to those who have not seen it", and A stands for "attention to the teacher"). Other possible signals include ringing a bell, playing a musical instrument, blowing a whistle, snapping fingers, or turning the lights on and off. The teacher may play music in the background as groups study together. In this case, turning off the music can be the attention signal (Saeki, 1994, cited in Jacobs and Hall in Richards and Renandya, 2002:55). One student in each group can take the role of group checker with the responsibility of watching out for the teacher's signal and being sure the group responds to the signal quickly. Many other types of roles can be used to facilitate group functioning.

2.2.16.4. The too-high Noise

Slavin (1995) suggests that a cooperative learning classroom should sound like a beehive, not a sports event. A busy sound is fine, but one should not be able to pick out individual voices. While distributing duties for the students, the teacher may choose one of them as the noise monitor or quiet captain whose duty is to make he group function cooperatively but at the same time quietly. Another suggestion could be to ask students to sit closer together. In this way, the noise level can be lowered while the feeling of togetherness can be increased. Also, students can be asked to use "6-inch" voices or "30-centimeter" voices. Furthermore, a signal similar to the one used to get the class's attention can be used as a sign to continue working but a bit more quietly. For example, for "Stop working," the signal might be hand raised straight up, and for "work more quietly," the signal could be hand raised with arm bent at the elbow. The teacher may even put up some signs on the walls or on the board to be able to draw the students' attention. Also, as cited in Jacobs and Hall in Richards and Renandya, 2002:55), Kagan (1992) suggests stoplight cards. A green card goes on the desk of groups if they are working together quietly. A yellow card indicates they need to quiet down a bit. When a red card is put on their desk, the group should become completely silent, and all should silently count to ten before starting work again.

2.2.16.5. The Quiet or Reluctant Student

Talking to students about the advantages of working in this way may help. They may see it as a better way of learning if they realize talking with others is a language learning strategy that they can apply outside of class as well (Oxford, 1990). Group games can also be used to increase students' motivation. The reluctant student may be allowed to work alone for a while and experience shows that they will be willing to take part in a group after some time. Quiet or reluctant students can be involved in non-threatening activities that highlight their strengths. Also, being explicit about the reasons for team work and giving positive feedback to those who work well as a team is a good strategy.

2.2.16.6. When Groups Finish Tasks at Different Times

Firstly, the teacher may check to see if the assignment has been done correctly and appropriately. The students in a group which finishes early may be asked to compare what they have done with another group. Extra fillers ready at hand could be helpful. When a group finishes early, an extra activity can be given or those early-finishers may simply be asked to help other groups that have not finished yet.

2.2.16.7. Frequently Absent Students

Those students can be assigned as the extra members of different groups. For example, if the class is working in groups of four, such a student can be the fifth member of a group. Assigning tasks that can be accomplished in one class period may help force them to come to class regularly. Being in a group gives students a feeling of belonging. Therefore, the teacher should find ways for those students to taste that feeling. Also, groups can be taught to have contingency plans in case a group member is absent. This is an important group skill. Teachers may even make groups responsible for the absent group members. They can be urged to inform the absent students of what they missed and tell them their assignments. As a last resort, the teacher may give a lower mark to the frequently-absent student.

2.2.16.8. How Long to Keep the Groups

As cited in Jacobs and Hall in Richards and Renandya (2002:57), Dishon & O'Leary (1993) suggest that keeping the groups together for a long time, like four to eight weeks, helps students to form a group identity and they get to know each other better. This gives them the opportunity to learn to work together and to solve problems more easily. Even while students are in long-term groups, short one-shot activities can be done with different grouping configurations. This may add a bit of variety. Of course, if serious problems arise, group members can be changed.

On the other hand, Jacobs, Gilbert, Lopriore, Goldstein, and Thiragarajali (1997) suggest that changing groups frequently helps students get to know everyone in the class. They go on to write that one figure for how long groups should be together often seen in the cooperative learning literature is six weeks. This gives students time to learn how to work with their group members, thus emphasizing the importance of allotting time for groups to discuss how well they are functioning and how they can function better.

2.2.16.9. Ending the Groups

Groups should be ended by getting comments from students about not only the product but also about the process of learning together. Students can be asked to prepare a closure activity in which they thank each other and describe what has been learned about working together – either written or orally. In order to increase motivation, photographs can be taken. The groups' products can be published or displayed to be seen by other students – even from other classes. This helps to create a sense of achievement.

2.2.16.10. The Dominant Student

Sometimes one of the students may take over the whole group. In such cases, it helps if that student is asked to be the silent observer. The teacher may do something to ensure equal participation – like distributing cards which allow a student to talk. Also, dominant students can be put together in the same group.

2.2.16.11. Getting Along

According to Slavin (1995), this problem often comes up in the first week or two of cooperative learning because the students are not yet used to this type of learning. He goes on to suggest that the primary solution for this problem is time. When they get their first team scores and realize that they really are a team and need to cooperate to be successful, they will find a way to get along. In this respect, it is important not to allow students to change teams except in extreme circumstances. Students should be focusing their attention on making their teams work, not on getting out of them.

Another way to get students to cooperate better is to provide extra rewards to winning teams. It is also a good idea to have students who work in pairs within their teams to switch partners from time to time, to reemphasize that it is a team effort that is needed, not just individual preparation. Still another way to encourage students to behave appropriately is to give each team additional team points based on the team's behavior, cooperativeness, and effort.

2.2.16.12. Use of the Native Language

Gilbert, Goldstein, Jacobs, and Olsen (1997) suggest that some use of the native language may be beneficial. For example, some words are very difficult to explain or guess from context, and if the group has a time limit, it may be faster to use an L1 translation. Another alternative could be praising or rewarding the use of L2 rather than punishing or criticizing the use of L1. Furthermore, one member from each group can be the "language monitor" whose role is to encourage appropriate L2 use. In some CL activities, students have time to think, plan, and arrange what to say; therefore, they can prepare before they speak and the need to use L1 decreases. Similarly, teachers can discuss this issue with students and encourage them to reach a class consensus on using the L1 in their groups. Gilbert, Goldstein, Jacobs, and Olsen, (1997), again, suggest that one corner of the classroom can be designated as the place where students can go temporarily to speak the L1. Further, the teacher can give each group L1 tickets for the day, or the semester and students decide together if they need to use the L1. They turn in a ticket when the L1 is used. Groups discuss how many tickets they use and why.

2.2.16.13. Teacher Preparation

Teachers need time and effort to prepare for cooperative learning activities. However, it is important to notice that the more a teacher uses cooperative learning, the more efficient he / she becomes at it. Just like in anything else, cooperative learning requires practice. Over the years, teachers can accumulate lots of materials and can reuse them. Also non-cooperative learning activities from textbooks can be used by modifying them to make them cooperative group activities. All in all, teachers shouldn't try to do it all at once. Starting with little steps and improving over time is easier.

Jacobs, Gilbert, Lopriore, Goldstein, and Thiragarajali (1997) suggest that cooperative learning is slower at first because teachers need to learn how to use it and need to spend time incorporating it into their lessons, and students need time to learn to collaborate and become familiar with various cooperative learning techniques. However, cooperative learning is quicker and more efficient by time.

2.2.16.14. Cooperative Learning and Students with Low Proficiency

Jacobs, Gilbert, Lopriore, Goldstein, and Thiragarajali (1997) point out that cooperative learning techniques can be used with low proficiency students, as long as the language task is within their reach. Although students may not be good at L2, their capacity may be high. Therefore, they can easily deal with the concepts of grouping, task assignments, and so on. Short, simple cooperative learning activities can be useful, especially at the beginning. Students with low proficiency often lack confidence. Cooperative learning builds confidence by providing them with support from their groupmates. Once those students become familiar with cooperative learning, the techniques increase confidence. Students with low proficiency can get help from their groupmates, too. The teacher is not the only person to consult or to ask something. Once students have had an understanding of cooperative learning, mixed proficiency groups can be formed easily.

2.3. Studies on Cooperative Learning and Reading

Jacob et al. (1996) found that the Learning Together activity of cooperative learning made students ask questions to each other and discuss their answers to understand the academic language in the reading materials. This showed that cooperative learning activities helped learners to understand texts while they were studying the difficult academic terms and concepts in the reading material.

Klinger and Vaughn (2000) found that through cooperative learning activities, bilingual students helped their less proficient classmates in understanding the meanings of some words, getting the main idea of the texts, and asking and answering questions in reading.

In a study conducted by Zimbardo, Butler, and Wolfe (2003), participants expressed that cooperative learning decreased their anxiety, promoted self-confidence, and created more positive attitudes towards the course and the topics.

Ghaith (2003) investigated the effects of the Learning Together cooperative learning model in improving EFL reading achievement and academic self-esteem and in decreasing feelings of school alienation. The results, he found, indicated no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of academic self-esteem and feelings of school alienation. However, the results of his study revealed a statistically significant difference in favor of the experimental group in terms of EFL reading achievement.

Ghaith and El-Malak (2004) examined the effects of cooperative Jigsaw II method on improving literal and higher order reading comprehension in EFL. Although the results did not reveal a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, a statistically significant difference in favor of the experimental group on the variable of higher order comprehension was found.

Bayat (2004) investigated the effects of cooperative learning activities on student attitudes towards English reading courses and cooperative learning. Her study was

conducted with one control and one experimental group. She found no significant differences after the treatment between the control group and the experimental group regarding students' attitudes towards English reading courses and cooperative learning. Data collected in her study, however, suggested that cooperative learning had positive effects on attitudes towards English reading courses. In addition, both the teacher and the students reported positive attitude towards cooperative learning.

Wichadee (2005) studied the effects of cooperative learning on English reading skills and attitudes of first-year students at Bangkok University. Her study revealed that cooperative learning increased students' English reading skills. The study also showed that cooperative learning activities maximized students' interaction in English and that it helped to a large extent in the case of large classes.

Şenel (2008) studied the effects of cooperative learning activities in a reading class and observed that cooperative learning gave each student the chance to exchange information. He also observed that the whole class participated and exchanged ideas. This, he believes, is a good example of how a truly communicative class was conducted.

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides detailed information about the design, setting, participants and sampling of the study. Data collection tools, piloting of the study and data analysis procedures are also presented.

3.2. Overall Research Design

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of cooperative learning activities on students' achievement in reading classes and their attitudes towards those activities. This study also intends to find out the effect of cooperative learning activities on EFL learners' self-esteem. The study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages at Karadeniz Technical University.

The study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with the students and the quantitative data was collected through the questionnaire administered and pre-test and post-test results.

The present research design is a quasi-experimental one. Both a control group and an experimental group were used as well as convenience sampling. The experimental study took 4 weeks and 51 participants took part. In the experimental group, 22 of the students were in the Public Administration department and 2 were in the International Relations department. The control group consisted of 27 students, all of whom were in the International Relations department. After a four-week treatment, a

questionnaire was administered to the students to elicit their opinions about cooperative learning and a semi-structured interview was conducted.

The experimental study started on 23rd February, and the last class was conducted on 22nd March. The pre-test was given to the experimental group on 16th February and the control group took the pre-test on 15th February. The reason for this difference of dates was due to the schedule of the classes in question. After four weeks, the post-test was given to the experimental group on 23rd March and to the control group on 24th March.

Both groups were video-recorded only once in order not to create anxiety. The experimental group was video-recorded on 18th March. The date was chosen on purpose because the students in that group had already been working in cooperative learning groups for three weeks and they were used to working in this fashion. The control group, too, was video-recorded. The main purpose of recording one class in each group was to see if there were any striking differences between the two groups in terms of participation, interaction, turn-taking, and question - answer exchanges. Also, photographs of the students while they were working in their groups were taken.

During those four weeks, the same reading material was taught in both groups. In the control group, the material was taught according to the procedures in the reading course book whereas the experimental group was exposed to different cooperative learning activities based on the same course material. In the first week, "Numbered Heads Together" was used. In the second week, "Asking Together, Learning Together" was applied. In the third week, "Jigsaw" was used. In the last week, "Think-Pair-Share" was applied. The activities were chosen from the early studies conducted in this field.

3.3. Research Design of the Study

The present study is quasi experimental with a pre-test and a post-test. The experimental group (Group A) and the control group (Group B) were selected non-randomly. The rationale for selecting convenience sampling was the availability of naturally formed groups (Creswell, 1994). The two classes which were selected as the

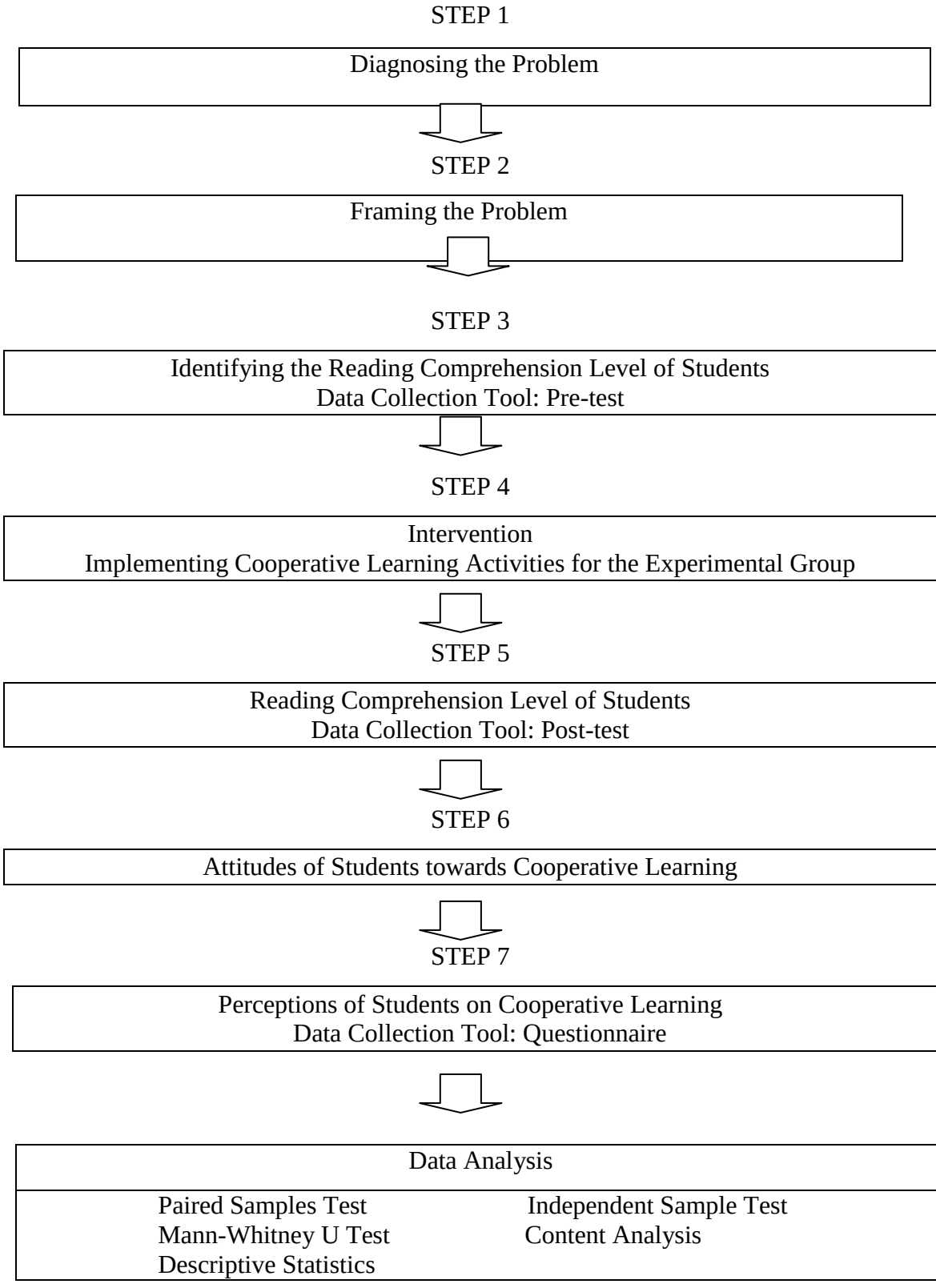
experimental group and the control group were two classes which the researcher had been teaching for about six months.

Group A	O1 ——— X ——— O2

Group B	O1 ——————————— O2

Here O1 represents the situation of the learners at the beginning of the study with respect to their achievement in the pre-test. X represents the intervention or treatment. This is the 4-week exposure to cooperative learning activities. Finally, O2 refers to the situation after the post test. At this point, it is necessary to highlight that both groups were subject to the same pre-test and post-test. Table 1 demonstrates the steps taken at each stage of the study.

Table 1: Research Design of the Study



3.4. Data Collection Instruments

This study benefits from both qualitative and quantitative methods. The researcher employed a pre-test, a post-test, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

3.4.1. Pre-test and Post-test

Both the pre-test and the post-test included items which were prepared by the researcher herself. After the construction of the tests, an expert was consulted for the reliability of the tests. In order to investigate whether the tests were valid, in terms of content, three experts in the field expressed their opinion. The questions involved a cloze test, a reading passage with True / False questions, multiple-choice items, open-ended questions, word-formation questions, and one question which asked students to underline the main idea in a paragraph. The questions, which asked students to find the correct forms of words, were derived from the course book followed in the reading classes.

The pre-test was applied to both groups before the treatment was started. Similarly, the post-test was given at the end of the four-week treatment to both groups. The students were given 75 minutes for each test.

The aim of the tests was to see whether cooperative learning activities increased EFL learners' achievement in reading classes, which is one of the major research questions of this study.

3.4.2. Questionnaire

One of the aims of this study is to elicit EFL learners' opinions about cooperative learning and their attitudes towards cooperative learning activities. In order to collect data about these issues, the study employed a questionnaire as a data collection tool.

In social studies, questionnaires are commonly-used data collection instruments. In questionnaires, respondents read the questions, understand what is expected from them and then write down their answers. Although questionnaires provide less detailed information about what is researched, they are useful to collect data in a short period of time. Dörnyei (2003:10) states that:

> "By administering a questionnaire to a group of people, one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour. They are also very versatile, which means that they can be used successfully with a variety of people in a variety of situations targeting a variety of topics. As a result, the vast majority of research projects in the behavioral and social sciences involve at one stage or another collecting some sorts of questionnaire data'.

According to Ünsal (2003), questionnaires may be divided into two groups: unstructured and structured questionnaires. Unstructured questionnaires are used when the researcher asks open-ended questions and requests the participants to express their feelings openly about what is researched on a piece of paper. On the other hand, structured questionnaires are comprised of various statements that the respondents are asked to identify their degree of agreement or disagreement with these statements. These questionnaires obtain data by using Likert scales or multiple questions.

Since the statements of the questionnaire in this study were pre-determined by the researcher and put in order according to their aims, this study used a "structured" student questionnaire (See Appendix E). The statements of the questionnaire were not open-ended. It consisted of twenty statements with ranging keys (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree). After a four-week treatment, the questionnaire was administered to the students to elicit their attitudes towards the cooperative learning activities and their opinions about the basic features of cooperative learning.

3.4.3. Interview

Qualitative data in the present study came from the semi-structured interviews with six students who were chosen purposefully. Cannell and Kahn (1968) describe interview as "a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content

specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation" (cited in Cohen & Manion, 2000:271). The respondents were given questions orally and the answers were received orally, as well.

The most common types of interviewing techniques are structured (standardized), unstructured (unstandardized) and semi-structured interviews (semi-standardized). As stated by Cohen and Manion (1994), a structured interview is one in which the contents, procedures and order of structure are formed beforehand. The interviewer is required to ask each question to subjects exactly as worded.

Unstructured interviews do not use schedules of questions and they are put on the imaginary continuum at the opposite extreme from structured interviews. According to Berg (2004:80), in an unstructured interview, interviewers must develop, adapt, and generate questions and follow-up probes appropriate to each given situation and the central purpose of the investigation.

Berg (2004) also points out that a semi-structured interview involves the implementation of a range of pre-determined questions and certain topics. These questions are typically asked to interviewees in a systematic order; however, interviewers are free to probe far beyond the answers to their pre-determined standardized questions.

In this study, a semi-structured interview with 6 open-ended questions was used (See Appendix G). The questions were constructed in accordance with the current literature on cooperative learning. The main purpose of administering the semi-structured interview was to obtain multiple perspectives in data collection and analysis and to gain a more detailed insight in to the participants' experiences. Cohen and Manion (1994) emphasize the use of open-ended questions by stating that they are flexible; they enable the interviewers to probe in order to enable them to go into more depth if they prefer; or to clear up any misunderstandings.

The interviews were conducted in Turkish in order to enable the participants to give longer and more detailed answers. This also created a less threatening atmosphere.

All of the interviews were recorded and interviewees' permission was obtained prior to the interview.

3.5. Setting

The study was conducted in the Department of Basic English, School of Foreign Languages at Karadeniz Technical University. Each year, a proficiency and placement examination is applied to the students whose departments offer courses in English. According to the results of that examination, students either start courses in their own department or are placed in beginner, pre-intermediate or intermediate classes in the preparatory school. The preparatory school offers four language courses: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, and Grammar. The questionnaire was conducted in the classroom at the end of the treatment. The interviews were conducted in the researcher's office due to the fact that it was a silent and peaceful atmosphere where there was no noise or interference.

3.6. Participants

The participants in this study were chosen from the students in the departments of Public Administration and International Relations who were studying at Karadeniz Technical University School of Foreign Languages at the time of the study. This school offers a preparatory program for those who do not earn a passing grade on the proficiency and placement examination carried out at the beginning of each academic year. Those who get 70 points or higher are considered to be successful and they can continue with their departmental courses. However, the students who get less than 70 points are placed in beginner, pre-intermediate and intermediate classes. Accordingly, the ones who get between 0 and 35 points are considered to have a poor command of English. Thus, they are categorized as beginners. The scores ranging from 35 to 49 indicate pre-intermediate students while 50 and 69 refer to intermediate ones. The participants in this study were pre-intermediate students under this categorizing system.

This study employed a convenience sample technique, which is commonly used in social sciences. This type of sample relies on available subjects – those who are close

at hand or easily accessible. Under certain circumstances, this strategy is an excellent means of obtaining preliminary information about some research questions quickly and inexpensively (Berg, 2004:35).

In this study, the control group consisted of 27 students, 16 of whom were females and 11 of whom were males. The experimental group consisted of 24 students with 13 females and 11 males. In total, 51 students participated in the study. The participants' ages varied between 18 and 20. Before the study, the pre-test was given to both the experimental group and the control group. At the end of those four weeks, the post test was applied to both groups. The questionnaire, however, was only given to the experimental group and all of the students completed them. The semi-structured interview was applied to six students from the experimental group. This selection was not random. Three of the students had the highest degree of improvement between the pre-test and the post-test. The other three had the lowest degree of improvement between the tests.

Table 2: Sex Profile of Participants

Groups	Male	Female	Total
Experimental	11	13	24
Control	11	16	27

3.7. Piloting

Piloting is important to see ambiguities, poorly worded questions and statements which are not fully understood by the students. The questionnaire and interviews were piloted to see the weaknesses of the questionnaire statements and interview questions.

The pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted with a class from pre-intermediate level students. Those students were informed about the purpose of the study prior to taking the questionnaire. They were asked if they had any difficulty in understanding the statements, wording of them and anything else. The questionnaire

was translated into Turkish in order to make them clearer for the students. After the translation, the items of the new version in the native language were cross-checked by two translators recruited in the Department of Interpretation and Translation, School of Foreign Languages, Karadeniz Technical University. A literature teacher made the final corrections in Turkish. After all these, the researcher took the final Turkish version to the classroom and conducted a pilot study. All the students agreed that the statements in the questionnaire were understandable and clear.

The Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire was calculated as 0,79 which indicated that the instrument was highly reliable. The last version of the questionnaire with 20 statements was administered in the actual research setting. The participants who took part in the pilot study were not involved in the actual study.

Piloting of the interview was conducted with two students from a different class at the same level. They were asked if the questions were clear. They stated that the questions were quite clear. The interviews in the pilot study lasted between 2-3 minutes and it was decided that the study could be employed to the samples.

3.8. Data Collection Procedure

The first stage of the data collection procedure in this study was to administer a pre-test to the control group and the experimental group in order to determine the level of students. Next, cooperative learning activities, which were adapted according to the reading course book, were carried out for four weeks in the experimental group. During the treatment, at the end of each week, a group evaluation form was given to students in order to judge how well they worked as a group. After a four-week treatment, a post-test was given to both groups. The aim of the post-test was to see the impact of cooperative learning activities and compare the groups. Then, the questionnaire was administered to the experimental group to elicit their attitudes towards cooperative learning activities and their opinions about cooperative learning. Finally, semi-structured interviews with six students from the experimental group were conducted to capture as much information as possible about the individuals' opinions.

3.9. Data Analysis Procedure

This study collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.16.0) was used to analyze the quantitative data which was obtained from the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, such as mean, percentage, and standard deviation of each item, were used. The numerical data which was obtained through the pre-test and post-test scores was entered into SPSS program on the computer. A t-test was used to see whether there were any significant differences between the pre-test and the post-test scores of the two groups. Results were displayed in tables. The qualitative data which was gathered through the interviews was analyzed by categorizing the main considerations. These categories were determined according to the content of the interview questions, research questions and common responses raised by the participants.

3.10. Cooperative Learning Activities Implemented throughout the Study

The experimental group had three hours of reading classes per week. Except for the fourth week, they studied one passage in each class. In the fourth week, they had to study two passages during each class because of the strict schedule to be followed by the entire department in reading classes. "Numbered Heads Together," "Asking Together, Learning Together," "Jigsaw," and "Think-Pair-Share" were the cooperative learning activities which were adapted to the units of the course book. The cooperative learning groups organized throughout the study are of the informal cooperative learning group.

In the first week, the "Numbered Heads Together" activity was used. Students were divided randomly into groups of four and were assigned numbers from 1 to 4. For this activity, the students put their heads together and discussed the correct answers and made sure that everyone knew them. They were given enough wait-time for the task. Finally, the teacher called a number and students who were assigned that number raised their hands to respond. At the end of the week, each group was given a group-evaluation form to evaluate the group's performance (See Appendix K1, K2, K3).

Table 3: Numbered Heads Together

WEEK 1					
ACTIVITY	**READING PASSAGES**	**LINGUISTIC OBJECTIVES**	**COOPERATION OBJECTIVES**	**MATERIAL**	**GROUP SIZE**
Numbered Heads Together	1. Music at Midnight 2. Turn it Down 3. Baby Elephants	1. Comprehending the passage 2 Learning new words 3. Labelling paragraphs	1. Sharing ideas 2. Helping each other with their weaknesses, 3. Facilitating positive interdependence 4. Increasing participation 5. Increasing the amount of student talk.	Coursebook	4 to 5 students per group

In the second week, the "Asking Together, Learning Together" activity was used. Students were randomly divided into groups of three. Each group prepared high consensus questions for the reading assignment, wrote them on pieces of paper, and gave them to other groups and the teacher. Answers to the questions were discussed in groups and the teacher elicited the answers from randomly chosen students. At the end of the week, each group was given a group evaluation form to evaluate the group's performance (See Appendix K4, K5, K6).

Table 4: Asking Together, Learning Together

WEEK 2					
ACTIVITY	**READING PASSAGES**	**LINGUISTIC OBJECTIVES**	**COOPERATION OBJECTIVES**	**MATERIAL**	**GROUP SIZE**
Asking Together, Learning Together	1. The Sailor's Friend 2. Life on the Ice 3. Tomatina	1. Comprehending the passage 2. Producing questions from the text 3. Exchanging questions among groups 4. Discussing the questions	1. Sharing ideas 2. Helping each other with their weaknesses 3. Facilitating positive interdependence 4. Increasing participation 5. Increasing the amount of student talk.	Coursebook	3 students per group

In the third week, the "Jigsaw" activity was used. Students were randomly divided into groups of three or four. This was the "home" group and each student in the group was responsible for summarizing a chapter of the story used in the reading

classes. These students became the experts and worked with others in an "expert" group. Once the expert groups have completed their tasks, individuals returned to their home groups to share their information. At the end of the week, each group was given a group evaluation form to evaluate the group's performance (See Appendix K7).

Table 5: Jigsaw

WEEK 3				
ACTIVITY	**LINGUISTIC OBJECTIVES**	**COOPERATION OBJECTIVES**	**MATERIAL**	**GROUP SIZE**
Jigsaw	1. Comprehending the story 2. Summarizing 3. Peer teaching	1. Sharing ideas 2. Helping each other with their weaknesses 3. Facilitating positive interdependence 4. Increasing participation 5. increasing the amount of student talk 6. increasing responsibility.	The story book (The Rainbow Girl)	3 to 4 students per group

In the fourth week, the "Think-Pair-Share" activity was used. Students were randomly grouped in pairs. This was a simple activity in which the students were given a set of questions related to the reading text. They thought about the answers individually and shared them with a partner. Answers were then shared with the whole class. At the end of the week, each pair was given a pair evaluation form to evaluate the pair's performance (See Appendix K8, K9, K10).

Table 6: Think – Pair – Share

WEEK 4					
ACTIVITY	**READING PASSAGES**	**LINGUISTIC OBJECTIVES**	**COOPERATION OBJECTIVES**	**MATERIAL**	**GROUP SIZE**
Think – Pair – Share	1. The Young Riders 2. Guy Fawkes Night 3. Sharks 4. Asteroid 1950DA 5. The Stuntman	1. Comprehending the passage 2. Discussing questions with their partners	1. Sharing ideas 2. Helping the partner 3. Facilitating interaction 4. Increasing the amount of student talk.	Coursebook	2 students per group

During the implementation, the students were asked to fill a group evaluation form for their groups at the end of each week. The main aim was to see if the students were able to adapt to the requirements of cooperative learning like listening to each other, encouraging each other, obeying group rules and feeling responsible for the success of their group. The group evaluation form follows below:

Table 7: Group Evaluation Form

	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
We listen to each other's ideas carefully.					
We encourage each other to participate in the activities.					
We obey group rules during the activities.					
We are responsible for the success of each individual.					

CHAPTER FOUR

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the findings, analysis of the data, and the discussion of the results. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques were used. Quantitative data comes from the pre-test and post- test results and the questionnaire. The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test results and the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS (v.16.0). Additionally, qualitative data comes from the semi-structured interviews. The data collected through the interviews were processed using content analysis. The results gathered from the pre-test and post-test scores, interviews and the questionnaire were triangulated. This chapter also presents the group evaluation forms that the researcher kept during the treatment. Due to the abundant results yielded in this study, the findings were presented according to the sequence of the research questions.

4.2. Data Analysis Procedures of Pre-test and Post-test Results

In this section, the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control group are presented to examine the effects of cooperative learning activities on EFL learners' achievement in reading classes. An Independent Sample Test was utilized for the inter-group analysis and a Paired Sample Test for the intra-group analysis.

In order to see whether there was any statistically significant difference or not between the experimental and control groups in terms of pre-test scores, an Independent Sample t-test was used, and the statistical data from the t-test results are presented in Table 1.

Table 8: Inter-Group Statistics of Pre-test Scores

Group	N	Mean	Std dev	df	t	p
Experimental	24	50,13	14,183	49	0,836	0,407
Control	27	52,93	9,523			

As it is seen in Table 8, the experimental group consists of 24 students and the control group consists of 27 students. The results indicate that at pre-test the students in the control group showed higher achievement than those in the experimental group. The mean pre-test score of the control group is 52,93 and for the experimental group it is 50,13. While the std of control group is 9,523; the std of experimental group is 14,183. The p value of 0,407 is not smaller than 0,05 (>0,05). T-test showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between pre-test scores of the experimental and the control group.

4.3. Statistical Analysis of Post-test Scores of the Groups

In order to see the effects of the treatment, the post-test scores of experimental and control groups were compared. Table 2 displays the post-test results of the experimental and the control group after the implementation of cooperative learning activities.

Table 9: Inter-Group Statistics of Post-test Scores

Group	N	Mean	Std dev	df	t	p
Experimental	24	64,33	10,655	49	2,77	0,008
Control	27	54,67	13,773			

It is quite clear in Table 9 that there is an increase in achievement from the pre-test to the post-test in both the cooperative learning and the traditionally-taught group. However, the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly on the post-test. The mean post-test scores of the experimental group is 64,33. As for the control group, the mean score is 54, 67. While the std of experimental group is 10,655; the std of control group is 13,773. A significant difference is observed between the two groups in question. The p value of 0,008 is smaller than 0,05 (p<0,05). The results reveal that there

is a statistically significant difference between post-test scores of the experimental and the control groups.

4.4. Statistical Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Groups

In order to see whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups, a paired sample t-test was used.

Table 10: Paired samples t-test (Experimental Group)

	N	Mean	Std dev	df	t	p
Pre-test	24	50,13	14,183	23	7,377	0,000
Post-test	24	64,33	10,655			

When the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group are compared, it is found that there is a significant difference ($p<0,05$). The Cooperative learning method is found to be more efficient than the traditional method. Considering the sharp increase in the mean scores of students in the experimental group, it is possible to say that CL activities have a significantly positive impact on students' achievement in reading classes.

Table 11: Paired samples t-test (Control Group)

Group	N	Mean	Std dev	df	t	p
Pre-test	27	52,93	9,523	26	0,759	0,455
Post-test	27	54,67	13,773			

As Table 11 presents, there is a slight increase in scores from the pre-test to the post-test in the control group. However, there is not a significant difference in the mean scores of the control group. When the p-value of the pre-test and the post-test of the control group is considered, it is seen that the value is $p=0,455$ ($p>0,05$), which shows that the difference is not statistically significant.

To sum up, at the beginning of the study, the mean scores of the control group (52,93) was higher than the mean score of experimental group (50,13). However, after the

treatment there was a significant increase in the mean scores of the experimental group. As for the control group, which received no exposure to cooperative learning, there was a slight increase in the mean scores. The students in the experimental group scored significantly better than the traditional group on the post-test. This increase is attributable to the treatment. It can be inferred from these results that cooperative learning activities have a significantly positive impact on student achievement. In light of the findings given above, it is also possible to say that compared to competitive and individual learning, cooperative learning results in greater student achievement. This is consistent with Ghaith's study (2003), in which he found that students in the cooperative learning group showed higher achievement than those in the traditional learning group.

4.5. Data Analysis Procedures of the Questionnaire

A frequency analysis was carried out to reflect students' attitudes towards cooperative learning. The data displayed below suggest some important findings in terms of students' emotional well-being, group spirit, social skills, oral communication skills and achievement. In the analysis of the questionnaire, responses to strongly agree and agree were combined and responses to strongly disagree and disagree were combined too. Students who responded neutral were not included in the analysis.

Table 12: Emotional Well-being

	Strongly Agree (%)	**Agree (%)**	**Neutral (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Strongly Disagree (%)**
2. Working with other students on a problem gives me confidence to answer a question in the class.	25	58,3	12,5	4,2	-
5. Cooperative learning encourages me to be actively engaged in learning activities.	20,8	58,3	8,3	12,5	-
16. Cooperative learning reduces classroom anxiety.	20,8	70,8	8,3	-	-
18. Cooperative learning builds self esteem in students.	16,7	66,7	16,7	-	-

The questionnaire shows that cooperative learning activities acted as a positive stimulus in reading classes. To illustrate, 83,3% of the respondents agreed for the item "Working with other students on a problem gives me confidence to answer a question in

the class". Only 4,2 % of the students disagreed with this statement. In a parallel vein, similar responses were given to the item "Cooperative learning builds self-esteem in students". This finding correlates with Slavin's (1995) emphasis that cooperative learning enhances self-esteem**.** A great number of students stated that cooperative learning reduced classroom anxiety. This finding suggests that cooperative learning activities help to create a relaxing, student-centered atmosphere for students. As a result, they feel more relaxed and do not worry about making mistakes. This is consistent with the findings of Oxford (1997) who mentioned that cooperative learning helped teachers to create a positive affective classroom atmosphere in which psychological barriers, such as student anxiety, were lowered.

Table 13: Cooperative Learning Activities and Time

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
6. I think learning from other students is a waste of time.	-	-	8,3	62,5	29,2
13. I think working with other students slows down my progress.	-	-	20,8	41,7	37,5
17. Working in groups helps the students to complete their task faster.	29,2	50	4,2	16,7	-

As stated earlier, there might be some misconceptions about CLA. One among them is related to time. Some people view CLA as time-consuming and, therefore, avoid engaging in these activities. However, the findings in this study tell the opposite story, that is, learning through CLA is not a waste of time. To exemplify, the majority of the respondents indicate their disagreement with the statement that learning from other students is a waste of time. Similarly, a substantial amount of the respondents disagree that working with other students slows down their progress.

Table 14: Learning and Achievement

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
4. I think sharing ideas with other students helps me learn.	16,7	75	4,2	4,2	-
7. I think cooperative learning activities give me more opportunities to practice newly learned vocabulary.	12,5	62,5	16,7	4,2	4,2
10. I think cooperative learning activities will have positive effects on my grades.	12,5	54,2	29,2	4,2	-
11. I think comprehending the texts is easier when I study within a group.	29,2	66,7	4,2	-	-

So far, numerous studies have revealed that cooperative learning activities have a facilitating role on learning and achievement. Table 16 indicates that 66,7 % of the students agree with the statement that cooperative learning activities will have positive effects on their grades, while 4,2 % of them disagree. In a parallel vein, similar responses were given to the item "I think cooperative learning activities give me more opportunities to practice newly learned vocabulary". Furthermore, a substantial amount of students responded that comprehending the texts was easier when they studied within a group. Similar findings were obtained in other studies like the one conducted by Zimbardo, Butler, and Wolfe (2003).

Since cooperative learning promotes interaction, learners have more opportunities to ask and answer questions with their classmates in groups, so they practice the target language. This is in line with the finding of Jacob et al. (1996) who observed that cooperative learning activities allowed students to ask questions to their group members and discuss the answers of these questions to understand the academic language and concepts in the reading materials.

Table 15: CL Activities and Group Spirit

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. I feel more relaxed when I work with other students.	33,3	50	12,5	4,2	-
3. Cooperative learning activities make learning English more enjoyable.	50	41,7	4,2	4,2	-
14. Cooperative learning activities build positive relationships among students.	20,8	70,8	8,3	-	-
19. It is difficult for me to concentrate when I study within a group.	-	12,5	4,2	50	33,3

This could be compared to a team of players who want to manifest their individual talents. Perhaps spectators single out one paying attention to his / her artistic talent. But what about the overall flow of the game or the score? It is the team spirit that makes the difference when these two concerns are taken into account. The same thing actually goes on in EFL classrooms because EFL classrooms offer places where individuals with diverse tastes and expectations should be mixed. Therefore, the teachers in EFL classrooms need to trigger group spirit to create the "melting pot". To illustrate, a considerable amount of students stated that they felt more relaxed within a group. Furthermore, 91,6% of the students responded that cooperative learning activities built positive relationships among students. This finding correlates with Senemoğlu's (2004) emphasis that CL activities give students the chance to develop positive relationships among themselves.

Table 16: Social and Oral Communication Skills

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
12. Cooperative learning activities develop social skills such as problem solving.	12,5	79,2	8,3	-	-
20. Working with other students develops oral communication skills.	45,8	50	4,2	-	-

Social and oral communication skills are two reported positive outcomes of cooperative learning activities. The majority of the respondents agreed that working with

other students developed their social and oral communication skills. To exemplify, when students faced a problem in their groups, such as deciding on the best answer of a question, they handled the problem in a manner that respected all group members' opinions. Such behavior suggests that cooperative learning activities help students in improving their social skills which is one of the greatest benefits of cooperative learning, according to Senemoğlu (2004).

Table 17: CLA and Attitudes of Students

	Strongly Agree (%)	**Agree (%)**	**Neutral (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Strongly Disagree (%)**
8. Cooperative learning activities promote a positive attitude towards the subject matter.	37,5	58,3	-	-	4,2
9. Cooperative learning activities force me to take on more responsibility for learning.	45,8	50	4,2	-	-
15. The lessons become more interesting through cooperative learning activities.	37,5	45,8	16,7	-	-

In general, a great number of the students developed a positive understanding of cooperative learning activities in this study. To illustrate, a considerable number of students agreed that they took on more responsibility in cooperative learning activities. This finding suggests that cooperative learning activities encourage students to take responsibility in their own learning process and increase the participation of students. Nearly all the respondents, 95,8 %, agreed that cooperative learning activities promoted a positive attitude towards the subject matter. A substantial amount of students stated that lessons became more interesting through these activities. It can be deduced from these findings that cooperative learning activities help to create a pleasant learning environment for students.

4.6. Gender Difference in Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Experimental Group

In order to see whether there was any significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group in terms of gender, an independent sample t-test was conducted.

Table 18: Pre-test Scores according to Gender

Independent Sample t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	Std dev	df	t	p
Male	11	46,55	13,953	22	1,145	0,265
Female	13	53,15	14,20			

Based on the data in Table 12, the difference between males and females in terms of pre-test scores was not found statistically significant (p>0,05). However, the mean scores of female students were higher than male students at pre-test.

Table 19: Post-test Scores according to Gender

Independent Sample t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	Std dev	df	t	p
Male	11	63,18	10,342	22	0,479	0,637
Female	13	65,31	11,235			

As Table 13 illustrates, the difference between males and females in terms of post-test scores was not found statistically significant (p>0,05).

In conclusion, female students' means were higher than male students' means in the experimental group before and after the implementation of cooperative learning activities. However, there was not a significant difference in terms of gender and achievement in the experimental group.

4.7. Gender difference in Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning Activities

A comparison of genders in terms of their attitudes towards cooperative learning activities was drawn item by item. A Mann-Whitney U Test was used to see the difference between genders regarding their attitudes towards CL activities. Except two items, no significant difference was found.

Table 20:

Gender difference in Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning Activities

Items	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
1	Female	13	14,54	189	45	0,093
	Male	11	10,09	111		
2	Female	13	13,12	170,5	63,5	0,601
	Male	11	11,77	129,5		
3	Female	13	13,85	180	54	0,258
	Male	11	10,91	120		
4	Female	13	14,04	182,5	51,5	0,126
	Male	11	10,68	117,5		
5	Female	13	13,46	175	59	0,416
	Male	11	11,36	125		
6	Female	13	11,23	146	55	0,264
	Male	11	14,00	154		
7	Female	13	14,62	190	44	0,066
	Male	11	10,00	110		
8	Female	13	12,92	168	66	0,713
	Male	11	12,00	132		
9	Female	13	12,31	160	69	0,870
	Male	11	12,73	140		
10	Female	13	12,38	161	70	0,923
	Male	11	12,64	139		
11	Female	13	11,81	192,5	41,5	0,035
	Male	11	9,77	107,5		
12	Female	13	12,92	168	66	0,653
	Male	11	12,00	132		
13	Female	13	10,54	137	46	0,113
	Male	11	14,82	163		
14	Female	13	15,23	198	36	0,010
	Male	11	9,27	102		
15	Female	13	12,12	157,5	66,5	0,753
	Male	11	12,95	142,5		
16	Female	13	13,77	179	55	0,231
	Male	11	11,00	121		
17	Female	13	13,77	179	55	0,299
	Male	11	11,00	121		
18	Female	13	14,04	182,5	51,5	0,165
	Male	11	10,68	117,5		
19	Female	13	10,38	135	44	0,082
	Male	11	15,00	165		
20	Female	13	13,69	178	56	0,309
	Male	11	11,09	122		

When the mean rank was considered for the 11th item (I think comprehending the texts is easier when I study within a group), it was found that female respondents reacted more positively to this item. This result suggests that female students found comprehending the texts easier within a group than males did ($p<0,05$).

As seen in Table 20, female students reacted more positively to the 14th item of the questionnaire (Cooperative learning activities build positive relationships among students). This finding suggests that female students found cooperative learning activities effective in fostering positive relationships when compared to males' responses ($p<0,05$).

The gender difference in attitudes towards cooperative learning has not been widely researched in the field. In one study Ghaith (2001) observed that male students found cooperative learning experience more useful, less frustrating, funnier and more interesting than female students. Furthermore, 83% of the male students reported that they learnt a lot whereas the percentage of female students who reported that they learnt a lot was 49%. This difference may result from grouping of students. As Putnam (1998) highlighted, heterogeneous groups, including gender balance, should be formed in order to help learners develop positive attitudes towards cooperative learning.

4.8. The Role of Cooperative Learning Activities on Learners' Self-esteem

The 2nd and the 18th items of the questionnaire demonstrated a substantial level of confidence thanks to CL activities. Students felt that their level of self-confidence increased. The second item of the questionnaire "Working with other students on a problem gives me confidence to answer a question in the class" indicates that working cooperatively helps students develop their self-confidence. The eighteenth item of the questionnaire "Cooperative learning builds self esteem in students" also demonstrates that students find cooperative learning helpful in increasing self-esteem. Table 21 illustrates the findings.

Table 21: Self-esteem

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
2. Working with other students on a problem gives me confidence to answer a question in the class.	25	58,3	12,5	4,2	-
18. Cooperative learning builds self esteem in students.	16,7	66,7	16,7	-	-

It is possible to say that when students study together, they share their opinions with the other group members, receive feedback from them, and correct any mistakes. As a result, their anxiety level is lowered, and they participate in answering the questions of the teacher willingly. This often results in enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, which is in line with the findings of Slavin (1995) and Dornyei (1997).

4.9. The Analysis of the Semi-structured Interview

In this study, the third set of data was obtained from a semi-structured interview. Six students from the experimental group participated in the interviews. These participants were not randomly chosen. Three of those students had the highest degree of improvement between the pre-test and the post-test. The other three had the lowest degree of improvement between the tests. The students were categorized as X1, X2, X3, X4, X5 and X6. The interviews were conducted in Turkish and then translated into English by the researcher. The interview contained six open-ended questions which were constructed by the researcher. The responses given to the interview questions are categorized under the following titles.

4.10. Students' General Views on Cooperative Learning Activities

In general, students' responses in the interview revealed the fact that they had positive attitudes towards cooperative learning activities in their reading classes. Positive contribution in their achievement, self-esteem, cooperation and strengthening of friendship were the leading points suggested by the students who took the interview.

All the interviewees reacted positively to the question "What do you think about those cooperative learning activities that we have done for the past month?" Four interviewees suggested that cooperative learning activities fostered friendship among the group members. To characterize, X2 said: "*Sometimes we even had the chance to talk to the other students whom we had never talked to before. We became better friends*." Similar comments came from X1, who said: "*Those activities enabled the friendship in the class to improve*."

Moreover, affective and emotional aspects of the individuals were revealed by some interviewees. To illustrate, X1 pointed out that *"Cooperative learning activities increased* (their) *self-esteem*". X3 and X6 mentioned similar views, too.

Cooperation, as the name suggests, made the students work together. X1, X4 and X6 said: *"The activities which we carried out let us work together."*

Students believed that cooperative learning activities in reading classes boosted their performance. X1 said: *"Those activities enabled some passive friends of ours to become more active*," and X4 said: *"The activities were fruitful"*.

4.11. Students' Description of What They Liked Best

Although students gave an extensive account of positive comments on the use of cooperative learning activities in their reading classes, the chief popular items mentioned can be described as follows.

First of all, students emphasized that their friendship strengthened as a result of those activities. Interaction among the students was reflected in X5's words: *"When we did not know something, we could learn from our friends."*

Moreover, students reported that they sharpened their awareness of their mistakes because, as X3 pointed out, *"After the group discussion, everybody saw that his / her opinion was not necessarily the best but always amenable to change."* The interviewees also stated that their sense of responsibility flourished during the activities. For example,

when asked what he liked best, X3 said: *"Creating a common idea – that everyone can see their mistakes and correct it and then come up with a common idea."*

4.12. Students' Description of What They Disliked

Not many negative ideas were suggested to the question "Did you dislike anything about those activities?" One reason for why they did not have any trouble was that they already knew each other, as X6 stated: *"I didn't have any problems because we already know each other."* However, X1 complained about not being assigned in an appropriate group in which, she explained, her group mates forced her to accept the others' answer as being the group's final product: *"Some of my friends wanted to impose their wrong ideas. No matter how much we told them they were not correct, they did not accept that. They insisted on trying to make us accept their idea."* This comment is noteworthy because all the other respondents expressed positive ideas about cooperative learning activities but X1 disagreed.

4.13. The Problems Encountered and Students' Suggested Solutions

For the question which asked them what they did in case of problems, if any existed, students' responses were all "No" except for X6, who pointed out that he worked on his own when he and his team mates disagreed: *"To solve it, I was on my own, teacher. I worked by myself."*

4.14. Participation

Participation, which is a desired outcome of any activity or skill, has been a growing concern in foreign language teaching. Therefore, many educationalists focus on promoting participation. One expected outcome of cooperative learning is to increase participation among students, which was the case in this study, too.

Students remarked that their participation increased. For instance, X3 said: *"I was already trying to participate. When I was in the group, it increased even more. I mean, speaking for myself, it did. From among 25 or 30 others, I had little chance to talk.*

Among ourselves, we talked like what did you do, how did you do, etc. Our responsibilities increased. Therefore, participation increased."

This statement reveals the fact that in a traditional class, students do not have the chance to talk as much as those in a student-centered, cooperative learning class. Especially when large classes, which are an unavoidable fact in Turkey, are concerned, cooperative learning classes bring about more chances to talk and practice.

A few of the students, for example, X1, explained that they already participated but cooperative learning activities increased their participation even more in these words: *"My participation was already high but I guess they* (cooperative learning activities) *increased that even more."*

4.15. Self-esteem and Cooperative Learning Activities

Increased self-esteem is another expected outcome of cooperative learning. Interviewees' self-esteem was reported to have increased after the introduction of cooperative learning activities in reading classes. To illustrate, some comments follow below:

> X2: I can say my self-confidence absolutely increased because sometimes I was limited when I could not answer a question while in group work I asked my friends and I got the answers. This already increases one's self-confidence.
>
> X1: Well, I didn't use to raise my hand when I couldn't answer a question but now I asked my friends in the class, I mean my group mates. When they, too, approved of my answer, I raised my hand. The activities encouraged me.
>
> X6: At that time my friends helped when I did not know the answer to a question; therefore, they contributed positively, my self-esteem increased. Additionally, I felt more eager to study.
>
> X3: I was the speaker in different groups many times and my self-esteem increased.
>
> X5: I already had (self-esteem) but I can say they increased myself-esteem… yes…

As the students' comments point out, cooperative learning activities play a crucial role in increasing learners' self-esteem. Learners specifically explained that being approved by their group mates gave them encouragement and confidence.

4.16. Findings from the Group Evaluation Forms

Group processing is one of the key elements of cooperative learning. For this reason, students were asked to fill in group evaluation forms at the end of each week in order to judge how well they worked as a group and to see whether they felt as a group or not.

At the end of each week, one form was delivered to each group. The data on the forms reflected the ideas of the groups rather than the individuals, thus, indicating that those forms were the products of each entire group.

Below are the students' responses to the group evaluation forms. Specifically, in the first week the groups consisted of 4 or 5 students and in the second week the groups consisted of 3 students. The following week, the groups were comprised of 3 or 4 students. In the last week there were not groups but pairs. The slight changes in group size were due to the number of attendants and some adjustments regarding the group size were made according to the recommended group size of the activities implemented.

In the tables below, number 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 represent "Never", "Rarely", "Sometimes", "Usually" and "Always", respectively. The last line, entitled "Mean" shows the arithmetical average of the groups' responses based on the numbers they provided for each item.

Table 22: Group Evaluation Form for the First Week

First Week - Numbered Heads Together	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
We listen to each other's ideas carefully.	3	5	5	4	5
We encourage each other to participate in the activities.	5	5	5	5	5
We obey group rules during the activities.	4	4	3	4	5
We are responsible for the success of each individual.	4	5	4	5	5
MEAN	4	4,7	4,2	4,5	5

Table 23: Group Evaluation Form for the Second Week

Second Week - Asking Together, Learning Together	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
We listen to each other's ideas carefully.	4	4	5	4	5
We encourage each other to participate in the activities.	4	3	5	5	5
We obey group rules during the activities.	5	5	5	4	3
We are responsible for the success of each individual.	5	4	5	5	5
MEAN	4,5	4	5	4,5	4,5

Table 24: Group Evaluation Form for the Third Week

Third Week - Jigsaw	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
We listen to each other's ideas carefully.	4	5	5	4	4
We encourage each other to participate in the activities.	4	5	4	5	5
We obey group rules during the activities.	5	4	5	5	4
We are responsible for the success of each individual.	5	5	5	5	4
MEAN	4,5	4,7	4,7	4,7	4,2

Table 25: Group Evaluation Form for the Fourth Week

Fourth Week - Think Pair Share	Pair 1	Pair 2	Pair 3	Pair 4	Pair 5	Pair 6	Pair 7	Pair 8	Pair 9	Pair 10
We listen to each other's ideas carefully.	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
We encourage each other to participate in the activities.	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	5
We obey group rules during the activities.	5	5	5	5	2	4	5	5	4	5
We are responsible for the success of each individual.	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
MEAN	5	5	4,7	5	4,2	4,5	4,5	5	4,5	5

When the mean values for the statements are interpreted with respect to frequency, it can be concluded that the students fulfilled the elements of cooperative learning some of which are listening to each other, encouraging each other, obeying group rules and feeling responsible for the success of the group as a whole. It can also be inferred from the tables above that students were able to adapt to a new type of learning although they had never been exposed to that type of teaching before.

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a brief summary of the study. With the research questions and findings in mind, the chapter provides some conclusions. There is an overall evaluation of the findings regarding the research questions. This chapter also includes the limitations of the study and some recommendations for further studies are provided.

5.2. Concluding Remarks

Cooperative learning is not and can not be a magical way to solve problems which are likely to arise in an EFL classroom. It may not be applicable in every setting and it may not produce positive results in every class. Possible shortcomings do exist because of the fact that every single student has a different world in his / her mind and this diversity may result in students who do not wish to work together or those who frequently skip classes. Similarly, cooperative learning activities may not be a solution to problems which stem from outside the class – like problems that a student has due to his or her family structure or social environment outside the school. In addition to students' issues, teachers may not wish to work in this fashion for different reasons – including the increased noise level in the classroom and the burden which cooperative learning places on their shoulders.

However, as it is explained in the literature review section, the benefits of cooperative outweigh the shortcomings which are a few in number. This type of teaching can be the solution to many problems which EFL teachers have long faced in their classrooms, as is exemplified in the literature review section.

Cooperative learning, as explained earlier, is an attempt to take students away from competition, which has been the dominant idea for a long time in schools and even at universities in Turkey. Students who have always had to compete against each other or against a pre-specified point are now supposed to talk, to support, to listen, to help and to get help from each other. Traditionally, Turkish students are not used to this way of teaching and learning. However, cooperative learning is beginning to find its place in Turkish educational system. In spite of being conducted at a university-level, it is hoped that this study contributes to all education levels in Turkey in a positive way.

The present study aims to find answers to some particular questions. Specifically, it seeks to see the impact of cooperative learning activities on students' achievement. The results from the data show that cooperative learning activities contributed positively to EFL learners' success in reading classes. This finding may lead EFL teachers to take a new look at their teaching strategies and styles and encourage them to make innovations in their teaching. The present study is expected to be a stimulus for a change in educational institutions.

Another aim of the study was to see EFL learners' attitudes towards cooperative learning and cooperative learning activities. As was already mentioned, Turkish students are not used to cooperative learning. This way of learning is quite different from what they had experienced in their previous schools. Especially those students coming from large classrooms, where teachers prefer traditional methods, find the practice of cooperative learning very different. Traditional teaching methods mean there is very little exchange of information, little interaction and a kind of flow of information where the teacher is the knower and answer-giver (and the mistake-corrector). However, as the review of related literature and the results from the questionnaire and the interviews reveal, learners are in favor of cooperative learning and they believe that working in this fashion is better than working alone or than whole-class teaching.

The study also investigates differences between learners' test scores in terms of gender. The findings reveal that there is not a statistically significant difference between female learners and male learners when their test scores are regarded. It is found, though, that female learners are slightly better than male learners.

Furthermore, the present study aims to see if there is a difference between genders in their attitudes towards cooperative learning activities. The findings show that there is not a statistically significant difference between genders. However, it was found that female learners reacted more positively than male learners to item 11 (Comprehending the texts is easier when I study within a group) and to item 14 (Cooperative learning activities build positive relationships among students).

Lastly, the study sought to see if cooperative learning activities contribute to EFL learners' reading comprehension with respect to their self-esteem. A vast majority of the learners agree that cooperative learning activities increased their self-esteem. Moreover, during the interview, one question was directed at eliciting the answer to the third minor research question. Learners' responses support the finding from the questionnaire.

All in all, it can be concluded that applying cooperative learning in our schools can be an effective way of increasing learning, although it is a demanding change. To begin with, cooperative learning increases achievement. Secondly, it may prevent absenteeism because of the fact that many group structures require students to attend classes regularly. Thirdly, those activities increase learners' self-esteem which is a desired outcome not only in EFL classroom but in other settings as well. In addition, cooperative learning creates more enjoyable learning environments which are less threatening and reduce anxiety. Cooperative learning also has social benefits like asking, helping, agreeing or disagreeing, checking, listening and speaking. These are skills which learners need in the classroom as well as in their lives outside of school. Psychologically, cooperative learning activities help students gain higher level thinking skills and make them like their school and classes. In terms of assessment, teachers can grade both groups as well as individual students, which can show more precise results. In terms of foreign or second language teaching, cooperative learning environments provide students with more opportunities to interact whereas in a traditional classroom only one person can talk at a time.

Cooperative learning may be an ideal way of teaching more effectively thanks to its characteristics. Although it may take a little time to get used to, its advantages outweigh the difficulty which is faced at the very beginning. It is hoped that this study

provides some encouragement for EFL teachers to implement cooperative learning in their classrooms.

In Turkey, educational system, even including examinations for university student selection and placement, is based on tests. In this system, students are left obliged to race against each other. With the introduction of cooperative learning in schools, future generations can be raised by learning to work together, which is a skill that they will need in their later lives. Although it may not contribute to assessment, cooperative learning can positively contribute to the process of learning.

5.3. Pedagogical Implications

In the light of the findings, the following pedagogical implications can be made:

1. Activities that increase learners' self-esteem should be practiced more often in classes.
2. Teachers should be cautious about the dynamics of their classrooms and make necessary changes and adjustments accordingly.
3. There should be cooperation among teachers, too, and they should pool their experiences together to build up a cooperative school and a cooperative society.
4. Integrating cooperative learning activities would bring variety and enthusiasm in classes which are teacher-led.
5. Students should be informed about the key points of cooperative learning, what it includes, and what good results it may produce before implementing.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

The following are some limitations of the study:

1. This study was conducted for a period of four weeks in an environment where students received reading classes for only three ninety-minute classes each week. However, a longer treatment may have yielded more fruitful results.

2. Because of the strict schedule to be followed in reading classes and the need to cover the required content, the activities were based only on the course book which is used in the school. The activities could have worked better if they had been used with a wider range of materials.

3. As this study is limited to the context of the School of Foreign Languages at Karadeniz Technical University, the results may not be generalized to other settings.

4. Cooperative learning activities can not be suitable for all types of learners. Some students, especially introvert ones, did not share their ideas with the other group members easily and found the activities challenging.

5.5. Suggestions for Further Research

The following are some suggestions for further research:

1. The results of the study reveal that cooperative learning has a positive impact on learners' achievement in reading classes. However, the same treatment can be applied in the other classrooms to strengthen the findings of the present study. Similarly, cooperative learning can be applied in other classes such as writing or speaking.

2. This study is based on four types of cooperative learning activities. However, future research could include more types of cooperative learning in order to determine if other cooperative learning activities are equally effective in getting the desired results.

3. Another suggestion is related to the number of the groups. Having more experimental groups in a study could yield more reliable findings. Also having identical numbers in gender and achievement level of the students could provide more precise findings.

4. Finally, for more meaningful results, the treatment could be extended to a longer period of time.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter presented the concluding remarks. The finding from the study were re-emphasized and some ideas which could be applied in English as a Foreign Language classes for better learning and teaching were added. The chapter also pointed out some pedagogical implications, presented the limitations of the study and presented some suggestions for further research.

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