

*International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*  
Vol. 19, No. 9, pp. 301-319, September 2020  
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.9.16>

# The Attitudes of Tertiary Level Students Towards Cooperative Learning Strategies in Afghan EFL Context

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**Abstract.** Educators use various active learning strategies over the last decades in different educational contexts globally. The current study aimed to investigate the attitudes of Afghan tertiary level students towards cooperative learning strategies in the Afghan EFL context. The current study used a questionnaire as a primary instrument for collecting the data employing a descriptive survey design for data collection and analysis. The participants were 165 undergraduate students from the Department of English, Languages and Literature Faculty, Kandahar University. The findings revealed that participants have positive attitudes towards cooperative learning strategies, and several reasons were pointed out for positive changes to take place. Cooperative learning strategies have also been considered as useful teaching and learning techniques that increase classroom participation from the perspectives of students. Thus, it is recommended for Afghan teachers to adopt cooperative learning strategies due to the positive effects on students' attitudes and classroom participation. The findings of the current study will help educators to incorporate cooperative learning in their courses. The result will be a guide for curriculum developers to include cooperative strategies in designing curriculum and textbooks.

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning strategies; EFL context; Afghan

## 1. Introduction

In the Afghan context, the English language is considered to be taught and treated as a foreign language. In the schooling system of Afghanistan, English was to start in Grade 7 during the years 1985-2004, but after 2005 it starts at Grade 4 in primary schools (Alamyar, 2017). English Language in both schools and universities is being taught by Afghan teachers (Ahmadzai et al., 2019), who are actually not

native speakers of the English language. Therefore, one reason that students are not as good in using the English language communicatively as they could be is that non-native speakers cannot teach English in Afghan context well (Ahmadzai et al., 2019; Alamyar, 2017) and it is because they sometimes fail to foster students to experience the communicative usage of English in the real-life situation.

Another reason is that English teachers in Afghanistan still rely on teacher-centered methods (Ahmadzai et al., 2019; Katawazai et al., 2019), where students are passive receivers in the process of teaching and learning. Alamyar (2017) stated that *“often these teachers are not familiar with the new English language teaching methods due to lack of training, facilities, and materials.”* In her research, she stated that this could be the cause of low proficiency in Afghan learners. It means that the non-native Afghan teachers have not been trained enough to teach English implementing new teaching strategies effectively. Furthermore, Azizi (2014) conducted a study to find out the opinions of teachers regarding interactive teaching in Kapisa Province of Afghanistan. The findings of his research indicate that teachers use interactive teaching in their classrooms. However, teachers stated that there are some obstacles that avoid the implementation of interactive teaching as; lack of time for preparation and large class size. The study shows that teachers claimed the usefulness of interactive teaching in the classrooms, but the obstacles avoided full implementation of interactive teaching in the Afghan context. On the other hand, the current trends in ELT suggest new ways of teaching and learning, where students are actively engaged in teaching and learning environments globally (Peña-López, 2009). One of the frameworks is cooperative learning strategies that help learners to have actively participated and engaged in classroom activities.

Cooperative learning is one of the terms in CLT that comprises many cooperative activities. Within other significant aspects, the primary outcome of using cooperative learning activities is that it can increase students' participation in the process of teaching and learning (Tran & Lewis, 2012; Zakaria, 2010). Slavin (2015) explained a linear relation between multiple cognitive, social, interactional, and motivation-based approaches to cooperative learning and its success in classroom activities, which contribute to not only students' participation during in-class activities but results enhanced learning as well. In his dissertation, George (2017) mentioned that the theoretical background of cooperative learning focuses on cognitive, developmental, and democratic elements of the scholars (Piaget, 1926; Vygotsky, 1978; Wittrock, 1978). Furthermore, Dewey (1938) explained the role of democratic social theories, which he considered as one of the significant theories about group working and helping others during group work activities. It means: social, cognitive and democratic theories of Second Language Acquisition, cooperative learning is to be counted as one of the significant teaching and learning approaches that helps learners not only to pursue their educational objectives but to foster social skills, critical skills, problem-solving skills and the ones included in 21st-century requirements as well.

The current research aimed to investigate the attitudes of students towards cooperative learning in the Afghan EFL context and the efficacy of cooperative learning in terms of increasing classroom participation. Thus, the focus of this

study is to explore the attitudes of students about cooperative learning strategies and to investigate the use of cooperative learning strategies from the perspective of students. Therefore, the current study tries to find out appropriate answers for the following research objectives.

1. To investigate the attitudes of Afghan tertiary level students towards cooperative learning.
2. To explore whether implementing cooperative learning increases participation in classroom activities from the perspectives of students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 What does cooperative learning mean?**

Many language scholars and psychologists defined cooperative learning variously. Kagan (1994) explained cooperative learning as one of the active learning types where students work for completing specific tasks that they have been assigned by teacher(s) during classroom activities into small groups. Oxford (1997) opine that cooperative learning strategies are pedagogical procedures that are effective in fostering students' critical thinking skills, group working skills, interdependence, and social interactions. Similarly, Slavin (2011) asserts CL as a kind of instructional method, students have been organized by teachers into small groups, and they are assigned for the purpose of working together, helping each other and achieving their group goals together. Yusuf et al. (2019) stated that cooperative learning is an instructional strategy, and the base is on the instinct of humans to cooperate. Cooperative learning is, therefore, based on the definitions above, a type of group learning where students can be allocated to small and large groups depending on the context of the classroom to discuss and work together for achieving their common goal(s).

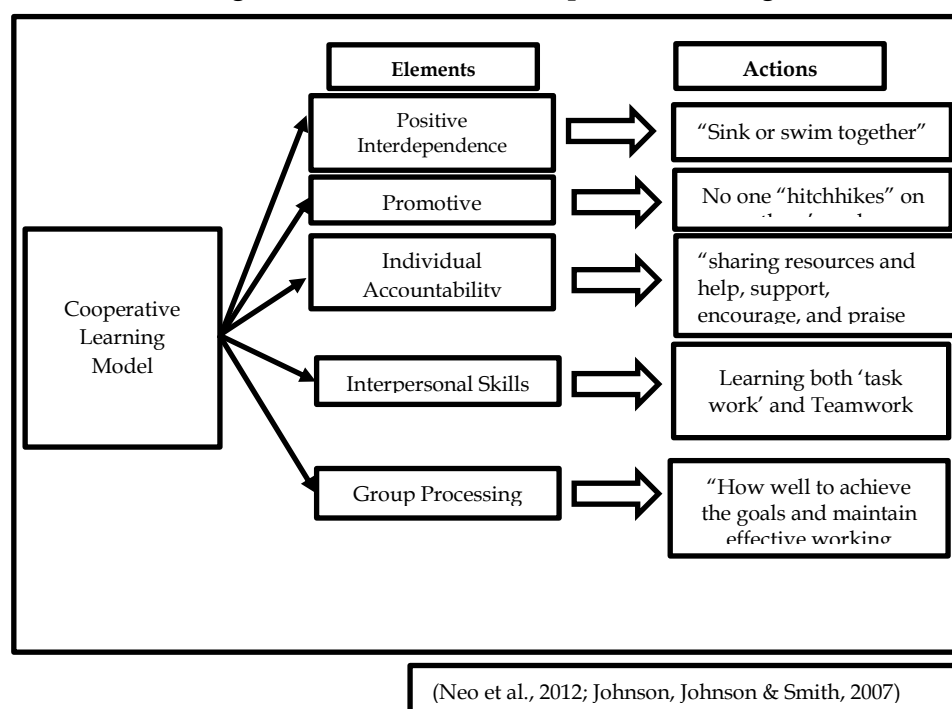
### **2.2 Elements of Cooperative Learning**

Since the existing literature offers some shreds of evidence and emphasizes that in order to successfully incorporate cooperative learning in various classrooms and contexts globally, it is crucial to structure teaching and learning materials based on the elements of cooperative learning that are perceived to be key to success in this process (Ballantine & McCourt Larres, 2007; Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Hsiung et al., 2014; Lièvre et al., 2006). Hence, these components of cooperative learning are known as the foundations to ensure its success. Likewise, scholars and researchers, (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Johnson & Johnson, 2011; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2007) listed five elements and emphasized these as the basic ones and the key features to be considered while implementing cooperative learning strategies.

Johnson and Johnson (2018) indicated these five elements underpinned with two theories as Interdependence theory and Structure-Process-Outcome theory. This means that missing one of the components of cooperative learning would lead to a lack of connection with the associated theories. Johnson and Johnson (2011) strongly focused on these five elements for teachers to structure their lessons in the base of these elements in order to implement the cooperative learning strategies effectively in classroom activities. Figure 1 based on (Johnson et al., 2007; Neo et al., 2012), connects the five elements to the outcomes or behaviors

that can be accomplished in the application of cooperative learning approaches in the classroom activities.

**Figure 1: Five elements of cooperative learning**



### 2.3 Benefits of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning strategies have been defined by language teaching scholars as to the effective pedagogical procedures, and learning strategies in developing students' engagement skills, critical thinking skills, social communication skills, problem-solving skills, and many more skills that are the requirements of the ongoing 21st-century (Estrada et al., 2019; Garcha & Kumar, 2015; George, 2017; Healy et al., 2018; Indrayati, 2019; Ismail & Al Allaq, 2019; Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Oxford, 1997; Slavin, 2015; Yusuf et al., 2019) and the application of such teaching and learning approaches have helped students universally in different periods of time and a variety of contexts. Moreover, both teachers and learners are having agreed to claim that using cooperative learning strategies should be embodied in the educational curricula and should be emphasized by school and faculty.

Healy et al. (2018) conducted research, and their findings indicate that implementing cooperative learning strategies benefited learners in terms of social interactions, peer learning, and transferable skills. They added that even where the manner of implementation was not fully prepared for the ideal framework of cooperative learning, using CL was effective in teaching and learning. Within that, implementing cooperative learning strategies can improve students' motivation as well. Like in the study of Fernandez-Rio et al. (2017) where the summary concluded that the implementation of cooperative learning strategies caused a considerable increase in the self-determined motivation and intrinsic motivation in the learners of secondary education. Schipke (2018) found out that using the

socio-instructional approach of cooperative learning allows for social interaction and communal knowledge-making. In this case, a socio-instructional approach of cooperative learning fosters students' social interactions, so this causes students to develop their skills in a shared-community. Similarly, Parsazadeh et al. (2018) found that interactive and cooperative settings in learning environments can enhance students' motivation and foster greater student communication. Additionally, cooperative learning strategies can be used for many other skill-developments as well.

Besides, when compared with the conventional methods, cooperative learning may benefit students to a great extent and may have the most positive effects on the proficiency level of the students (Darmuki, 2018; Lu et al., 2019; Lucha et al., 2015; Sijali, 2017). As Sijali (2017) conducted a longitudinal research to find out whether cooperative learning strategies improve students' proficiency level or not. The findings of the study revealed that using cooperative learning strategies were effective and increased the level of proficiency among learners. The difference among the results of the experimental group ( $M = 26.71$ ,  $SD = 4.478$ ) and control group ( $M = 16.50$ ,  $SD = 5.619$ ) with the p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicated a greater variance among the mean and standard deviation of the quantitative results.

The researcher emphasized that based on their findings of the study, they recommend ELT teachers to utilize cooperative learning strategies that improve student's English language proficiency instead of using conventional teaching method(s). Finally, as stated earlier that in the cooperative learning approach, the emphasis is on enabling learners to not only achieve their learning goals and objectives but to strengthen their skills of leadership, social-communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and almost all of the requirements of the 21st-century.

#### **2.4 Attitudes of Students towards Cooperative Learning**

General literature about students' attitudes towards cooperative learning shows that its implementation has positive attitudes of students towards it. They viewed such kinds of strategies as one of the useful teaching and learning techniques, and they recommend teachers to use them in classrooms activities and to emphasize on it (Capar & Tarim, 2015; Farzaneh & Nejadansari, 2014; Hossain & Tarmizi, 2013; Kyndt et al., 2013; Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014; Zakaria, 2010).

Kyndt et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis study of the effects of cooperative learning strategies in all the levels; primary, secondary, and tertiary from 1995 onwards. The study explored the impact of cooperative learning in all the levels as mentioned above of education into three categories as achievement, attitudes, and perceptions. The results from all the 65 research articles reveal that the students of all three levels of education have positive attitudes towards cooperative learning strategies, and they recommended such kinds of learning techniques as the useful procedures in the process of teaching and learning in different educational contexts. Similarly, Capar and Tarim (2015) investigated the effectiveness of implementing cooperative learning strategies and the attitudes of

students and their achievement in mathematics studies. They reviewed many reports, research articles, and master and Ph.D. theses and selected 26 studies in total. The results of their meta-analysis research showed that when compared with the classical (teacher-centered) methods, cooperative learning is considered as one of the more successful teaching and learning methods that not only affect the achievement of the learners positively but their attitudes as well.

## **2.5 Critique on the Research Findings of Cooperative Learning**

Researchers conducted a variety of research studies that display the usefulness of cooperative learning and recommended that it can benefit learners in many social, interactive, critical, problem solving, and other skills. However, some of the studies indicate that if cooperative learning strategies are not structured to be socially and culturally fit with the social and cultural norms of an educational context, it might not be as successful as thought. George (2017) opine that if we want to implement cooperative learning effectively, they should be used correctly in order to raise the academic performance of the students. It means that if the language instructors fail to use them correctly during classroom activities, cooperative learning will lead to negative results.

Moreover, within the positive aspects that cooperative learning strategies have, some research studies found that there are some drawbacks during implementation as well (Deiglmayr & Schalk, 2015; Hänze & Berger, 2007; Hsiung et al., 2014a; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Kshetree, 2019; Mesfin, 2015; Pescarmona, 2011; Sabah & Du, 2018; Scherman & Du Toit, 2008; Stiles, 2005). The researchers proposed some of the solutions to avoid the obstacles towards implementation, which includes both instructors' expertise and institution follow up in order to make sure that CL strategies are socially and culturally fit with the norms, structured well, and are going well.

Chen and Goswami (2011) opine regarding the factors impacting cooperative learning implementation in English learning that the learners might have been confused by experiencing two changes; 1) the format which is unfamiliar to them and 2) the role of the teacher as 'simply the facilitator' in the classroom. They further added that the cultural aspects must also be taken into account, and it is that 'cross-cultural adjustments' should be made while implementing cooperative learning strategies in the classrooms.

Likewise, Celik et al. (2013) conducted a study to find out the perspectives of Turkish teachers regarding the implementation of cooperative learning in language classrooms. The findings reveal that although the teachers had positive beliefs about cooperative learning strategies and stated that group learning strategies are beneficial for their students, the practical implementation of so-called strategies caused a failure in the process. They pointed out some of the factors to be considered as the main challenges in this regard. One of them is the standard curriculum of educational institutions. It means, the participants of the study are facing with difficulties while applying cooperative learning and group working as such most of the students were not participating during group activities because one particular student in a group was doing all the task, which was avoiding other students' participation and a fixed ELT curriculum made it

problematic to implement group working strategies in the Turkish context. The second one is the traditional manners of students about cooperative learning strategies. It means that such kinds of students were still in a traditional manner and were not mentally ready to work in cooperative groups.

Similarly, Ferguson-Patrick (2018) pointed out the importance of the teacher's role in the process of implementing cooperative learning strategies in the classrooms. The study added that if teachers fail to understand the roles of being a facilitator and being organizer, it means that cooperative learning can also be failed because of the incorrect structure. It is further recommended that teachers must play a significant role in terms of facilitating students, assisting them in the small groups, and resolving the confusion that learners may have. It will help learners to go on the right path and to develop their cognitive and social skills, which is only possible when the teacher performs the role of a successful facilitator and an enthusiastic helper with students.

### 3. Research Design

Researchers employed descriptive survey research design. The aim of the study is to investigate the attitudes of students towards CL and whether it increases the classroom participation of the students, so researchers have found this design suitable for the study. Creswell (2014) views survey design as a part of quantitative research design to be used in order to find out the attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, or characteristics of both population and sample.

#### 3.1 Target Population

The target population for the current study is the undergraduate students of the Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Kandahar University, Afghanistan. The total number of students enrolled in the Department of English is two-hundred and ninety (290), and all of them are studying in the day shift. Among them, male students comprised the majority in the number 273 while the females are 17, and they included the minority in the number.

#### 3.2 Sampling

Table 1 draws a summary of the process of how the researcher determined the sampling size regarding the population size of the total numbers of the target population.

**Table1: Sampling Method of Participants**

Class	Students	N	Total	
Freshmen	Male	106	N=290	
	Female	8		
Sophomore	Male	71		
	Female	4		
Juniors	Male	42		
	Female	3		
Seniors	Male	54		
	Female	2		
				S=165

Table 1 shows that there are two hundred and ninety (290) students in the target department ( $N=290$ ), so accordingly, based on the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for determining the sample size from a population, the sample size for ( $N=290$ ) is ( $S=165$ ), and this number of students in the target population participated in this study. After that, the researcher then used a random sampling method. Creswell (2014) views simple random sampling as one of the most-used techniques commonly used by researchers.

### 3.3 Research Instrument

Creswell (2014) states three ways that researchers can use regarding research instruments; the first one is that when the researcher develops a new instrument for a research study (but it takes much time), the second one is to locate, and the third way is to modify an existing instrument. In the case of the current study, an existing instrument (questionnaire) has been used as a primary data collecting tool for the same issue (cooperative learning) but a different context (Afghanistan). The researcher adapted the sections of the questionnaire developed by (McLeish, 2009) and Reda (2015). The reason why the researcher chose existing instruments is that all the items closed-ended and open-ended in both of the questionnaires were closely appropriate for the research questions and research objectives of this study, and they have been organized by the originators to find out the attitudes of students towards cooperative learning. The questionnaire of (McLeish, 2009) consists of 23 items, both open-ended and closed-ended items, where the closed-ended questions are in a 5-point Likert scale of measurement ranging from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree." In addition, the questionnaire consists of four parts where the first part is 'demographic'; the second is 'the assessment of group involvement'; the third is 'attitudinal scale', and the last is 'free response'. Similarly, the questionnaire of Reda (2015) consists of 21 questions, and only 4 items in regard to the attitudes scale have been used. In the case of the measurement scale of the questionnaire, the researcher used the same Likert scale of measurement for the closed-ended questions starting from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The questionnaire was then shared with the participants using Google Form.

The validity and reliability of each questionnaire were already tested by the originators of both questionnaires. However, for the current study, the questionnaire was re-tested in SPSS in order to indicate the validity and reliability in calculating the Cronbach's alpha level for the new sample of participants. The Cronbach's alpha level attained from the new sample, is (.824) reliability coefficient. The value achieved suggests that all the Likert scale items have relatively higher internal consistency. It means that the test is acceptable, and the tool selected for the current study is reliable and validated enough for this sample.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

For the current study, a survey questionnaire was used for collecting the data. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package in Social Sciences (SPSS 26.0) in order for the outputs of frequency distribution, descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage, and tabulations.



#### 4. Results and Analysis

Table 2. shows the demographic data of all the respondents who participated in the study. The total number of the participants who took part in the current study was 165, and all of them were pursuing bachelor studies in the Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Kandahar University.

**Table 2: Demographic Information**

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<20	24	14.6%
20 - 25	136	82.4%
26 - 30	2	1.2%
>30	3	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	155	93.9%
Female	10	6.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Year of Study</b>		
Freshmen	50	30.3%
Sophomore	44	26.7%
Juniors	40	24.2%
Seniors	31	18.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 highlights that the majority of the respondents, 82.4% were in the age of 20-25, and 14.6% of them were below 20 years of age. However, a very small number of them were between the age of 25-30 and above. Within the majority of the respondents 93.9% were male students, and a small number 6.1% of them were female students. Looking into the attitudes of students towards cooperative learning strategies, the following Table 3. presents the results regarding the attitudes of students towards CL. Attitudes mean that what students think and feel about cooperative learning, as in table 3 below.

**Table 3: Students' Attitudes Towards CL**

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. When I work together, I achieve more than when I work alone.	116 (70.3%)	40 (24.2%)	5 (3%)	4 (2.5%)	0 (0%)
2. I willingly participate in cooperative learning activities.	107 (64.8%)	48 (29.1%)	9 (5.5%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)
3. Cooperative learning can improve my attitude towards work.	104 (63%)	55 (33.4%)	4 (2.4%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)
4. Cooperative learning helps me to socialize more.	100 (60.6%)	56 (33.9%)	8 (4.9%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)
5. Cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among students.	109 (66.1%)	49 (29.7%)	6 (3.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>64.97%</b>	<b>30.06%</b>	<b>3.88%</b>	<b>0.97%</b>	<b>0.12%</b>
<i>Note: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree &amp; SD=Strongly Disagree</i>					

Table 3 shows that most of the attitudes of the students are so favorable towards cooperative learning strategies. It seems that overall, 64.97% strongly agreed, and 30.06% agreed with the items about attitudes in this section. However, 3.88% of the students remained neutral. In addition, a very small percentage of the respondents 0.97% disagreed and strongly disagreed with 0.12% with the items asked regarding their attitudes.

Also, 70.3% of the respondents strongly agree, and 24.2% agree they can achieve more while working in groups than working alone. However, a very small number of the 3% remained neutral, 2.5% disagree, and no one strongly disagrees with this item. Furthermore, 64.8% strongly agree, and 29.1% agree that they have the willingness to participate in cooperative learning activities. On the other hand, still, a small number of 5.5% remain neutral, with 0.6% disagree. To add more, 63% of the respondents strongly agree, and 33.4% agree that they can improve their attitudes towards work through cooperative learning. However, 2.4% remain neutral, 0.6% disagree, and the same number strongly disagree that they cannot improve the attitudes of work via cooperative learning.

Moreover, 60.6% of them strongly agree, and 33.9% agree that they can improve their social skills with the help of cooperative learning strategies. On the other hand, 4.9% remain neutral, and 0.6% disagree that cooperative learning can socialize them. In the last item, it is about whether cooperative learning strategies enhance good working relationships in students or not, so it seems that 66.1% of the respondents strongly agree, and 29.7% agree that yes, cooperative learning can increase the working relationships among students. However, 3.6% remain neutral, and 0.6% disagree with that they cannot improve working relationships with their peers through cooperative learning strategies.

Now, how does CL influence students' participation in the classroom activities? The following Table 4. presents the percentage of their responses, whether classroom participation is increased by cooperative learning.

**Table 4: Does CL increase classroom participation?**

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Cooperative learning increases class participant.	106 (64.3%)	53 (32.1%)	5 (3%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)
2. Creativity is facilitated in the group settings	91 (55.2%)	58 (35.1%)	12 (7.3%)	3 (1.8%)	1 (0.6%)
3. Group activities make the learning experience easier.	115 (69.7%)	44 (26.7%)	5 (3%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)
4. It encourages teachers to prepare themselves well and deliver effective information	94 (57%)	50 (30.3%)	13 (7.9%)	6 (3.6%)	2 (1.2%)
5. It makes both you and your friends have a good relationship.	118 (71.5%)	37 (22.5%)	8 (4.8%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0%)
6. It enables you not only to depend on the result rather it helps to have a good knowledge	96 (58.2%)	57 (34.5%)	9 (5.5%)	3 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
7. It makes or creates self-confidence.	111 (67.3%)	42 (25.4%)	10 (6.1%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>63.29%</b>	<b>29.52%</b>	<b>5.36%</b>	<b>1.55%</b>	<b>0.28%</b>
<b>Note:</b> SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree & SD=Strongly Disagree					

Table 4 presents their overall percentage of agreement and disagreement and shows that 63.29% of the students strongly agree, 29.52% agree that cooperative learning increases classroom participation, creativity, relationships among students, and self-confidence. However, a very small number of the students, 5.36% remain neutral, 1.55% disagree, and 0.28% strongly disagree with the role of cooperative learning in increasing classroom participation and other social skills.

In addition, 64.3% of the respondents strongly agree; 32.1 % agree that cooperative learning increased their classroom participation. However, 3% remain neutral, and 0.6% disagree. Within, 55.2% of the students strongly agree, and 35.1% agree that cooperative learning can facilitate the creativity of the students in the group setting. However, remaining are 7.3% neutral, 1.8% disagree, and 0.6% strongly disagree with. In terms of group activities, whether they make learning easier or not, 69.7% strongly agree, 26.7% agree that yes, group activities make it easy. On the other hand, remaining are (3%) neutral and (0.6%) disagreed with it.

Similarly, students strongly agree with 57% and 30.3% that cooperative learning activities can encourage teachers to be fully prepared for their teaching. However, 7.9% stay neutral, and the other 3.6% disagree, and 1.2% strongly disagree with this. It will make the classroom environment have good relationships among students; 71.5% strongly agree, 22.5% agree with this. Though 4.8% stay neutral and 1.2% disagree with this. In addition, 58.2% of students strongly agree, 34.5% agree that while working in cooperative learning activities will not only depend on the result but rather can help students to have good knowledge as well. Still, 5.5% remain neutral, and 1.8% disagree with it. In terms of self-confidence, around 67.3% of the students strongly agree, 25.4% agree that their self-confidence improved working in cooperative learning strategies. On the other hand, the remaining 6.1% of them stay neutral, and 1.2% disagree that their self-confidence was not improved.

## 5. Discussion

Results indicated that the tertiary level students in the Afghan EFL context expressed their very positive attitudes towards cooperative learning strategies. As presented in Table 4, it shows that students have positive attitudes towards all the items in this section. As the study of Thompson (2018) also found that students who worked in cooperative learning had very positive attitudes towards this method. Within, the study indicated that students also performed well after working in a cooperative classroom environment. The study of Reda (2015) also found that the students have positive attitudes towards cooperative learning methods. The study also indicated that although students have positive attitudes towards cooperative learning methods, they stated some of the suggestions as well for the better implementation of cooperative learning methods. As well, in the meta-analysis study of (Kyndt et al., 2013), the findings from 65 research articles in regard to the attitudes, perceptions, and achievements of the students towards cooperative learning show that students have positive attitudes towards implementing cooperative learning strategies. They recommended cooperative learning strategies to be used in the process of teaching and learning to a greater extent.

The current study also shows that Afghan students gained other skills such as communication skills, socialization skills, group working skills, and other skills as well after working in cooperative learning group activities and assignments. Similarly, the findings of the Healy et al. (2018) also show that utilizing cooperative learning not only improved social interactions but peer learning and as well as transferable skills as well. Also, Fernandez-Rio et al. (2017) state that implementing cooperative learning has a tremendously positive influence on students' self-motivation. In addition, Quines (2017) conducted a study and found out that cooperative learning strategy improved greater attitudes of the students while compared with the teacher-discussion method. It means that cooperative learning improved college students' linguistic competence in a greater influence.

In terms of whether cooperative learning strategies increase classroom participation or not, Table 4 shows their overall agreement that implementing cooperative learning increased their classroom participation. Within classroom participation, most of the students strongly agree and agree that cooperative learning helps them in terms of creativity, making the learning experience easier, encourages the teacher to be well-prepared, improves good relationships among students, improves to have a good knowledge rather than depending on your exam results and increases self-confidence. As in the study of Healy et al. (2018), the findings show that the implementation of cooperative learning improved peer learning, transferable skills, and social interactions skill. They further added that within these skills, the motivation of the students was also improved even though the framework used by the teacher was not entirely the same as cooperative learning. The study of Paksi (2017) also suggests that using the jigsaw method of cooperative learning increased students' classroom participation. Researchers recommend teachers use this cooperative method in order to increase their students' participation in the classroom activities. It is also supported by the study of Fitriasari (2019) that team games tournaments of cooperative learning increased the classroom participation of the students. Thus, using different types of cooperative group works ensures that student's participation in classroom activities will be increased noticeably.

To sum up, cooperative learning strategies helped all types of students to increase their classroom participation. Either in large or small groups, they will have the chance to work in different tasks inside the group and outside the groups as the group leader/presenter in order to share their group work with other classmates. For this reason, the results showed that cooperative learning, in any mean, increased the classroom participation of the Afghan EFL students during working in cooperative groups in the classroom.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper, the attitudes of Afghan tertiary level students towards cooperative learning and whether implementing cooperative learning increases participation in classroom activities from the perspectives of students in the Afghan EFL context were investigated. Using a descriptive survey design, the study used a questionnaire to collect data from 165 undergraduate students. The paper established the pedagogical effectiveness of implementing cooperative learning

in the classroom environment. The findings indicated that overall students have very positive attitudes towards cooperative learning. The result confirmed the findings from Thompson (2018), Reda (2015) and Kyndt et al. (2013) that students have positive attitudes towards implementing cooperative learning strategies. Literature recommended cooperative learning strategies to be used in the process of teaching and learning to a greater extent. The study also embarked on investigating whether implementing cooperative learning increases participation in classroom activities from the perspectives of students in the Afghan EFL context. It was found that students also agreed that implementing cooperative learning increases students' participation in classroom learning activities. It was found that using cooperative learning activities can positively influence students' communication skills. Students were able to interact better with peers in completing tasks. This is similar to the claim in the literature that cooperative learning effective in promoting group working skills and interpersonal skills (Healy et al., 2018; Fernandez-Rio et al., 2017; Quines, 2017). Students also agreed that cooperative learning activities conducted in the classroom enhanced their self-confidence. In conclusion, implementing cooperative learning encourages interactions among students which promotes self-motivation, social interaction skills, self-confidence, and classroom participation skills. Therefore, it is recommended for the teachers to implement cooperative learning in the classroom and could be used as a form of meaningful learning experience for the students.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess or gather information about the attitudes of students towards cooperative learning in Afghan EFL context. The students belong to English Department, Faculty of Languages & Literature, Kandahar University, Afghanistan. The success of the current study is highly depending on the accurate and relevant information that you will provide. So, you are kindly requested to read each question carefully and to give your genuine response to each item of the questionnaire. I would like to assure you that response will be used only for the purpose of the current research and will keep confidential.

**Instruction:** Read the following questions carefully and select the best answer for each question.

**Cooperative Learning:** cooperative learning is a type of group learning where students work with other classmates to achieve the group goal(s). For example, A Freshmen class of English Department with (45) students may be placed in groups to discuss a reading passage in (Reading Textbook) and to share each students' understanding about the passage with all the group members in the classroom.

#### Section I

- 1- Gender
  - Male
  - Female
- 2- Age
  - Under 20                       20-25                       26-30                       Over 30
- 3- To which year group do you belong?
  - 1                       2                       3                       4
- 4- Have you ever participated in a group activity/assignment?
  - Yes                       No
- 5- If yes, where do you usually participate in group activities/assignments?
  - In class                       Outside of class                       Both
- 6- What has been the typical size of your group?
  - 2-4                       5-7                       8-10                       Other please specify -

\_\_\_\_\_

### Section II

Read the following and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements.

SA-Strongly Agree

A - Agree

N - Neutral

D - Disagree

SD - Strongly Disagree

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1- When I work together, I achieve more than when I work alone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2- I willingly participate in cooperative learning activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3- Cooperative learning can improve my attitude towards work.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4- Cooperative learning helps me to socialise more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5- Cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please read the following items and answer accordingly.**

- 6- Do you prefer to work on your own rather than in a group? If so Why?
  - 7- Name the course/courses in which you believe greater learning could be facilitated via group activities.
  - 8- Do lecturers give clear guidelines for the completion of group activities/assignments whether in/outside of the class setting? If yes, do these guidelines enable the task to be clearly understood and completed in the specified time?
  - 9- If no, how are you able to complete your assignments?
  - 10- Would you prefer if your lecturers used more group activities/assignments? Please give a reason/reasons for your answer.
  - 11- Would you be more comfortable if more group activities were incorporated in your course of study? Give a reason for your answer.
-