



STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN ENGLISH CLASSES

PERCEPCIONES ESTUDIANTILES SOBRE EL APRENDIZAJE COLABORATIVO EN CLASES DE INGLÉS

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Abstract

Limited local evidence on how students appraised collaborative learning in English classes justified examining their experiences of working with classmates. The objective was to describe the perceptions of 40 seventh-grade students aged 11–12 regarding enjoyment, confidence to attempt speaking English, peer support, and willingness to continue collaborative activities. A quantitative, nonexperimental, cross-



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sectional, and descriptive study was conducted at Escuela de Educación Básica “Miguel Heredia Crespo” in Camilo Ponce Enríquez, Azuay, Ecuador. Between November and December 2024, an ad hoc six-item questionnaire with yes, no, and maybe response options was administered through Google Forms. Frequencies and percentages were calculated. A total of 72.5% considered learning with classmates more enjoyable, and the same percentage reported greater confidence to attempt speaking English. Seventy-five percent wanted to continue group activities, while affirmative responses concerning vocabulary, lesson preparation, and peer explanations ranged from 62.5% to 67.5%. The results showed a predominantly positive appraisal; however, they represented self-reported perceptions and did not demonstrate improvements in English proficiency.

Keywords: *collaborative learning; English as a foreign language; peer support; student perceptions; basic education*

Resumen

La limitada evidencia local sobre cómo los estudiantes valoraban el aprendizaje colaborativo en las clases de inglés justificó examinar sus experiencias de trabajo con compañeros. El objetivo fue describir las percepciones de 40 estudiantes de séptimo año, de 11 a 12 años, sobre el disfrute, la confianza para intentar hablar inglés, el apoyo entre pares y la disposición a continuar con actividades colaborativas. Se realizó un estudio cuantitativo, no experimental, transversal y descriptivo en la Escuela de Educación Básica “Miguel Heredia Crespo”, ubicada en Camilo Ponce Enríquez, Azuay, Ecuador. Entre noviembre y diciembre de 2024 se administró mediante Google Forms un cuestionario ad hoc de seis ítems con opciones sí, no y tal vez. Se calcularon frecuencias y porcentajes. El 72,5 % consideró más divertido aprender con compañeros y el mismo porcentaje señaló mayor confianza para intentar hablar inglés. El 75,0 % deseaba continuar con actividades grupales, mientras que las respuestas afirmativas sobre vocabulario, preparación de lecciones y explicaciones entre pares oscilaron entre 62,5 % y 67,5 %. Los resultados mostraron una valoración predominantemente positiva, aunque representaron percepciones autoinformadas y no evidenciaron mejoras en la competencia en inglés.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje colaborativo; inglés como lengua extranjera; apoyo entre pares; percepciones estudiantiles; Educación Básica

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Introduction

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) requires more than exposure to vocabulary and grammar. Learners also need opportunities to interpret meaning, test language choices, negotiate understanding, and communicate despite incomplete linguistic resources. For the seventh-grade cohort examined here, participation involved using developing language resources in front of peers. In many school classrooms,



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however, interaction remains concentrated between the teacher and individual students. When speaking time is limited, students may understand course content without developing the confidence to use English with others. Collaborative classroom activity is therefore relevant because it distributes opportunities to speak, ask for clarification, explain ideas, and receive support from classmates.

Collaborative learning is used in this article as a broad term for learning situations in which students work with peers toward a shared classroom task. Cooperative learning is a more structured form of group learning grounded in social interdependence theory. It normally requires positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, interpersonal skills, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Gillies (2016) similarly emphasizes that productive cooperation depends on deliberate task structures and teacher support; simply seating students together does not ensure cooperation or learning. Because the study examined students' experiences of group work without verifying all formal elements of cooperative learning, the broader term collaborative learning is used throughout the manuscript.

Peer interaction has particular pedagogical potential in second-language learning. Through interaction, learners can notice gaps in their knowledge, request help, reformulate messages, and provide explanations that make language more accessible to other students. The empirical work assembled by Sato and Ballinger (2016) shows that peer interaction can create opportunities for language-related dialogue, although the quality of those opportunities depends on proficiency, task design, roles, and classroom relationships. Accordingly, positive student perceptions matter because students who regard peer activity as safe and useful may be more willing to participate. Perception alone, however, is not proof that proficiency has improved.

Student perceptions are not peripheral to this process. They can influence whether learners enter a group task, take linguistic risks, ask classmates for help, and remain engaged when communication becomes difficult. A student may have access to the same task as the rest of the class yet participate minimally if the activity feels unsafe, confusing, or dominated by other group members. Conversely, enjoyment and perceived peer support can make participation more acceptable. Descriptive perception data can therefore serve as an initial needs assessment. Their function is diagnostic: they identify the experiences students associate with collaboration and reveal where uncertainty or rejection persists. Research connecting peer relationships with willingness to communicate, perceived support, and engagement reinforces the relevance of these perceptions (Han & Li, 2025; Van Ryzin et al., 2020).

Perception data are useful, but their evidential limits must remain clear. A student who believes that group work supports vocabulary learning may have benefited from repetition or explanation, yet that belief does not show how many words were retained or for how long. Likewise, feeling more confident about speaking does not demonstrate gains in pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, or interactional competence. For this reason, a descriptive survey can document students' appraisals without being treated as a measure of language achievement.

Recent evidence presents both opportunities and cautions. Tamimy et al. (2023) found that cooperative learning was present in EFL classes, but implementation frequently lacked full fidelity to its defining principles. Their findings reinforce the distinction between ordinary group work and systematically structured cooperative learning. In an intervention study, Alzubi et al. (2024) reported gains in English learning and social interaction among university EFL students exposed to a collaborative program. That design included



pre- and post-assessments and a comparison group, which made outcome claims possible. A descriptive classroom survey such as the present study answers a different question: how students appraise their collaborative experiences.

Affective perceptions are particularly relevant when students are asked to speak. Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) examined collaborative tasks and speaking anxiety in face-to-face and online environments. Their results suggested changes in some face-to-face conditions but did not establish uniform effects across learning environments. More recently, Han and Li (2025) found that university students' perceptions of peer relationships and cooperation positively predicted willingness to communicate in a second language, although the relationships differed by activity type. These studies support the importance of examining speaking confidence and willingness while also cautioning against treating them as equivalent to measured speaking performance.

Research with secondary-level learners provides additional context. Van Ryzin et al. (2020), using a cluster-randomized design in middle schools, found that cooperative learning supported peer relations, perceived academic support, and engagement. Sukdee (2024) reported favorable attitudes among 40 twelfth-grade students who participated in collaborative language-game activities, including perceptions of enjoyment, participation, and vocabulary support. In a Latin American high-school context, Alvarado-Martínez and Islas-Castillo (2024) implemented cooperative activities in a multilevel English group and emphasized the need for carefully planned tasks and continuing teacher development. Together, these studies suggest that students may value collaboration for both affective and academic reasons, but the evidence comes from different populations and research designs.

The relationship between favorable perceptions of collaboration and achievement is not automatic. Bećirović (2023) reported different relationships among cooperative learning, EFL motivation, achievement, and grade point average. This finding is important for interpreting perception surveys: enjoyment, confidence, and peer support can be valuable classroom indicators, but they should not be used as substitutes for tests of vocabulary, speaking, reading, or writing.

The value of collaborative tasks also depends on inclusion. Students differ in language level, sociability, pace, prior relationships, and willingness to seek assistance. A favorable majority may therefore coexist with learners who prefer individual work or receive limited benefit from a particular group. Reporting yes, maybe, and no responses separately helps identify the dominant pattern without overlooking students whose experiences were uncertain or unfavorable.

This issue was especially relevant to the participating 11- and 12-year-old students. Speaking English made their developing linguistic resources visible to classmates. Collaborative activities could distribute speaking opportunities across small groups, but they could also reproduce unequal participation when roles and expectations were unclear. A local perception survey cannot resolve these classroom dynamics, although it can indicate whether students generally experienced peer work as supportive enough to merit closer instructional attention.

At Escuela de Educación Básica "Miguel Heredia Crespo" in Camilo Ponce Enríquez, Azuay, Ecuador, the available evidence consisted of a six-item perception questionnaire rather than a language test or a comparison of instructional conditions. The study therefore provided a local diagnostic of how students experienced



collaborative activities. This descriptive focus made it possible to identify the aspects of peer work valued by most students, as well as responses that remained uncertain or unfavorable, without presenting the survey as an evaluation of instructional effectiveness.

The study addressed the following research question: How did seventh-grade students perceive enjoyment, speaking confidence, peer support, and willingness to continue collaborative activities in English classes? Accordingly, the objective was to describe their perceptions of collaborative learning, with attention to enjoyment, confidence to attempt speaking, perceived support for vocabulary and lesson preparation, comprehension through peer explanations, and willingness to continue group activities.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The study used quantitative, nonexperimental, cross-sectional, and descriptive survey design. Data were collected at one point in time to characterize students' perceptions of collaborative learning in English classes. No variables were manipulated, no comparison condition was established, and no English-language performance measure was administered. The design therefore supported a description of students' responses but not the estimation of effects on English proficiency or communicative competence.

Setting and Participants

The accessible population consisted of 40 seventh-grade students aged 11–12 who were enrolled at Escuela de Educación Básica “Miguel Heredia Crespo” in Camilo Ponce Enríquez, Azuay, Ecuador. All members of the accessible group completed the questionnaire; therefore, no sampling procedure was applied. The findings refer specifically to this cohort and educational setting.

Instrument

Data were collected using an ad hoc questionnaire developed in Spanish for this study. It consisted of six closed-ended items with three response options: yes, no, and maybe. The items assessed students' perceptions of (a) enjoyment when learning English with classmates; (b) confidence to attempt speaking English despite making mistakes; (c) learning and remembering new English words through teamwork; (d) remembering content and preparing for lessons through peer discussion; (e) understanding English concepts through peer explanations; and (f) willingness to continue collaborative English activities. No documentation of expert review, pilot testing, or psychometric validation was available. The questionnaire was therefore not treated as a validated scale; the items were analyzed separately, and no composite score was calculated.

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms between November and December 2024. Students answered the items in relation to their classroom experiences of learning English with classmates. Before data collection, written authorization was obtained from the institutional authorities, and written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians. No standardized intervention or language-outcome assessment was conducted; accordingly, the research was analyzed as a descriptive survey rather than as an evaluation of an instructional intervention.



Data Analysis

Absolute frequencies and percentages were calculated for each item using $(n/40) \times 100$. All six items contained 40 recorded responses, and each response distribution summed to 100%. Only aggregate item-level results were available, so participant-level response patterns could not be examined. Because the response categories were not numerically scored and the purpose was descriptive, no means, standard deviations, composite scores, reliability coefficients, subgroup comparisons, association tests, or inferential analyses were calculated.

Resultados y discusión

Responses to the six items showed a predominantly favorable, but not unanimous, response pattern. For every item, yes was the most frequent response. Affirmative responses ranged from 62.5% for perceived comprehension through peer explanations to 75.0% for willingness to continue collaborative English activities. Table 1 presents the complete item-level distributions.

Table 1. Seventh-grade students' responses to the collaborative learning questionnaire.

Survey indicator	Yes n (%)	Maybe n (%)	No n (%)
Enjoyment when learning with classmates	29 (72.5)	9 (22.5)	2 (5.0)
Confidence to attempt speaking despite mistakes	29 (72.5)	6 (15.0)	5 (12.5)
Perceived support for learning and remembering vocabulary	27 (67.5)	9 (22.5)	4 (10.0)
Perceived support for remembering content and preparing lessons	27 (67.5)	9 (22.5)	4 (10.0)
Perceived comprehension through peer explanations	25 (62.5)	10 (25.0)	5 (12.5)
Willingness to continue collaborative English activities	30 (75.0)	3 (7.5)	7 (17.5)

Note. N = 40 for each item. Percentages were calculated within items. The indicators are concise English renderings of the original Spanish items.

Enjoyment and speaking confidence shared the same affirmative response rate (72.5%). Affirmative responses were lower for the three academic-support indicators, reaching their minimum for comprehension through peer explanations (62.5%). Willingness to continue collaborative activities had both the highest proportion of yes responses (75.0%) and the highest proportion of no responses (17.5%). This combination indicates an overall favorable pattern while showing that positive perceptions were not uniform.

The "maybe" category accounted for between 7.5% and 25.0% of responses. Because the questionnaire did not define maybe as a midpoint or ask respondents to explain their choices, these responses cannot be interpreted as mild agreement, indecision, limited experience, or dissatisfaction. They were consequently retained as a separate category. Similarly, the seven students who did not want to continue group activities should not be obscured by reporting only the modal response. The results support a description of predominantly favorable perceptions rather than universal acceptance.

The favorable response concerning enjoyment is consistent with Sukdee (2024), whose secondary students reported positive attitudes toward collaborative language-game activities, including enjoyment and participation. Alvarado-Martínez and Islas-Castillo (2024) also reported increased involvement and favorable



disposition during cooperative activities in a multilevel high-school English group. These comparisons provide relevant context but are not direct replications: both studies documented instructional activities and additional evidence in greater detail, whereas the present study retained only students' item-level perceptions from one seventh-grade cohort.

The result of confidence is also compatible with research on affective conditions for second-language communication. Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) found that collaborative instruction was associated with changes in speaking anxiety in some face-to-face conditions, although the findings varied by learning environment. Han and Li (2025) reported that perceived peer relationships and cooperation predicted willingness to communicate among university EFL students, with differences according to activity type. In the present study, the 72.5% affirmative response indicates that most students perceived group work as supportive of their confidence to attempt speaking. Nevertheless, one ad hoc item cannot be interpreted as a validated measure of speaking anxiety, self-confidence, willingness to communicate, or actual speaking behavior.

Responses concerning vocabulary, lesson preparation, and peer explanations suggest that many students regarded classmates as possible academic resources. Peer interaction can create opportunities to request clarification, repeat language, compare interpretations, and explain meanings (Sato & Ballinger, 2016). Van Ryzin et al. (2020) similarly found that structured cooperative learning supported perceived academic support and engagement in a middle-school sample. In the current survey, however, between 32.5% and 37.5% selected maybe or no on the three academically oriented items. Thus, perceived support was not uniform. Differences in group composition, task clarity, peer explanations, proficiency, or individual preference are possible interpretations, but the fixed-choice questionnaire did not collect evidence capable of testing them.

These findings should not be treated as evidence of instructional effectiveness. Alzubi et al. (2024) could assess learning outcomes because their collaborative intervention included pre- and post-performance measures and a comparison condition. No equivalent outcome measure was used in the present study. Bećirović (2023) likewise demonstrated that cooperative learning can relate positively to motivation without translating straightforwardly into higher achievement or grade point average. The current findings therefore support claims about perceived enjoyment, confidence, peer support, and willingness to continue, but not about vocabulary retention, communicative competence, or English proficiency.

Implementation quality also matters. Tamimy et al. (2023) found that cooperative learning was often used without full fidelity to its defining elements. Clear goals, individual accountability, opportunities for each student to contribute, manageable roles, and group reflection are central considerations in structured cooperative learning (Gillies, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). These features were not documented or tested in the present study; accordingly, they should be understood as literature-based considerations for future instructional planning rather than findings derived from the survey.

At the classroom level, the results may be used as a preliminary needs assessment. Pair or small-group activities could be accompanied by explicit roles and opportunities for every student to speak or explain meaning. Teachers could also use an anonymous open-ended question or brief follow-up conversation to investigate why some students selected maybe or no, particularly regarding peer explanations and willingness to continue. Such follow-up would help distinguish uncertainty, unequal participation, interpersonal



discomfort, task difficulty, and preference for individual or teacher-led work. These possibilities require evaluation and should not be presumed from the current data.

Because only item-level totals were retained, the distributions cannot establish whether the same students were uncertain or negative across several questions. It is therefore impossible to identify stable response profiles—for example, students who enjoyed group work but questioned its academic usefulness—or to determine whether speaking confidence and willingness to continue occurred in the same respondents. This distinction matters for instructional decisions: item-level majorities describe the cohort, whereas support for specific students would require linked individual responses. The present interpretation consequently remains at the level of each question and does not infer respondent subgroups.

A feasible next research cycle could retain the descriptive scope of the study while strengthening its evidence. Before implementing a defined sequence of collaborative speaking or vocabulary tasks, researchers could specify the duration, group size, roles, and teacher support. A brief validated perception measure and a direct pre- and post-assessment of one language outcome could then be administered. Preserving an anonymized individual dataset would allow response patterns to be examined and linked across time, while a small number of student interviews could clarify why some learners selected maybe or not. Such a design would remain manageable in a school context while distinguishing students' experiences, the quality of implementation, and learning outcomes.

The study has several limitations. It involved one accessible cohort of 40 students at a single school, which restricts generalizability beyond this group. The six-item questionnaire was developed ad hoc, used three broad response categories, and had no documented validation. Two items combined more than one judgment, such as learning and remembering vocabulary or remembering content and preparing for lessons. Only aggregate response distributions were available, preventing participant-level analysis, reliability estimation, and examination of relationships among items. Finally, the study measured perceptions rather than observed interaction or English-language performance. Future research should preserve individual anonymized data, document the collaborative activities, use a validated perception measure, and combine the survey with observation, interviews, or a pre- and post-assessment of one clearly defined language outcome.

Conclusions

The seventh-grade students expressed predominantly favorable perceptions of collaborative learning in their English classes. Most respondents associated working with classmates with greater enjoyment and confidence to attempt speaking English. Majorities also perceived support for vocabulary learning, lesson preparation, and comprehension through peer explanations. The strongest preference concerned continuation: 75.0% wanted to participate in more collaborative English activities.

The findings provide a classroom-level diagnostic that can guide the planning of structured peer activities at Escuela de Educación Básica “Miguel Heredia Crespo” in Camilo Ponce Enríquez, Azuay, Ecuador. They do not demonstrate that collaborative learning improved communicative competence, vocabulary retention, or academic performance. Such claims would require direct language assessments and a design capable of comparing change over time. The study's contribution is therefore descriptive and contextual: it documents





which aspects of collaborative English learning were valued by most students while also recognizing uncertain and negative responses.

Future classroom research should preserve the individual dataset, document the collaborative tasks, use a validated instrument, and measure one clearly defined language outcome. These steps would make it possible to move from a useful perception diagnosis to a stronger evaluation of instructional effectiveness.

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