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## Participatory Approach from both Teachers and EFL Learners' perspective

Neda Fatehi Rad<sup>1</sup>, Rahman Sahragard<sup>2\*</sup>, Seyed Ayatollah Razmjoo<sup>3</sup>, Alireza Ahmadi<sup>4</sup>

1. Department of English Language, Qeshm Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qeshm, Iran
  2. Department of English Language, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
  3. Department of English Language, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
  4. Department of English Language, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
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### Abstract

**Purpose:** In participatory approach to second language teaching and learning, students actively engage in their own learning process and collaborate with others (Cobb, 1994; Greeno, 1998) to achieve their goals. Also, collaborative learning has been shown to encourage the growth of student interdependence (Bruffee, 1999), responsibility (Totten, Sills, Digby, & Russ, 1991), interpersonal skills (Rymes, 1997), and cognitive and critical thinking skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1986).

**Methodology:** Adopting a sociocultural perspective, the present study has attempted to explore the attitude of teachers and learners toward the effectiveness of the method. In so doing, 60 Iranian EFL learners from two intact classes participated in the study, in which the learners from the two classes were randomly assigned to one control group and one experimental group. For fourteen sessions, the researcher in the control group class followed her regular teaching practice through the conventional book-based method of conducting an English class. In the experimental group class, however, the researcher adopted the participatory approach tasks and activities, in which she applied various participatory approach-based techniques, activities, role play, and problem solving activities, group work and collaborative tasks in the classroom instruction. **Findings:** Results of the comparison of the effects of the experimental participatory group and the control conventional group revealed that although the students in both groups improved their scores on the IELTS posttest, there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental group's overall performance and that of the control group. **Discussion:** Results of the interview with the students and teachers also revealed that both the students and the teachers had positive attitudes towards implementing the participatory approach and they were willing to use at least some of the tasks and activities in their future courses.

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\* Corresponding author email: [rahman.sahragard@gmail.com](mailto:rahman.sahragard@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

Significant changes have occurred in the field of language teaching and second language acquisition within the last 20 years, such as using task based strategy for teaching and learning, which are the consequences of communicative language teaching trend (Chastain, 1988, p. 163). The main focus of these new methods has been to provide the deserved attention to all four skills of language, i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing by involving EFL learners in teaching and learning process in order to improve their learning performances. Drawing upon findings of the previous studies in the related literature, the present study's concern is to investigate the potential effects of participatory approach on academic achievement of EFL learners. Roschelle and Teasley define collaboration as "mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem together," (cited in Dillenbourg et al., 1996, p. 2).

Roschelle (1992) frames collaboration as an exercise in convergence or construction of shared meanings and notes that research on conversational analysis has identified features of interactions that enable participants to reach convergence through the construction, monitoring, and repairing of shared knowledge. In participatory approach to teaching and learning, students are actively engaged in their own learning process and collaborate with others (Cobb, 1994; Greeno, 1998; cited in Handelzalts, McKenney, Pieters, Voogt, Vries, Westbroek, Walraven, 2011). Collaborative learning has been shown to encourage the growth of student interdependence (Bruffee, 1999), responsibility (Totten, Sills, Digby, & Russ, 1991), interpersonal skills (Rymes, 1997), and cognitive and critical thinking skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). Recent second language acquisition research has demonstrated a need for classroom activities that promote communicative interaction in second language classrooms (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2003, 2005; Williams, 2005). One way of promoting such opportunities is through pedagogical tasks that encourage negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 2003; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). In this relation, classroom tasks that require learners to work together and produce output collaboratively have been suggested to provide effective opportunities for peer feedback and scaffolding (Lapkin & Swain, 2000; Swain, 2001, 2005).

From a sociocultural perspective, social interaction and collaboration are important requirements for learning. According to Vygotsky (1986), individual cognitive development cannot be achieved by isolated learning and that learning is in essence a social enterprise. Central to the Vygotskian sociocultural theory is the notion of ZPD (zone of proximal development), which refers to "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 86). The notion of ZPD highlights the importance of collaborative work because it is believed that when learners collaborate within their ZPD, they use their existing knowledge to develop what they have not yet mastered independently (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Nassaji & Swain, 2000). Also, when learners interact, particularly with a more knowledgeable learner, a supportive environment can be created in which the less capable participant can be helped to expand and elevate his or her language skills to higher levels of competence (Appel & Lantolf, 1994).

Meanwhile, the more capable participant is likely to consolidate his or her existing knowledge when using it to provide help and assistance. Much of the research on collaborative and participatory approach is rooted in the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (Dillenbourg et al., 1996). In fact, socio-constructivists borrow Piaget's system of developmental stages describing children's cognitive progress, as well as her ideas related to

cognitive conflict, which refers to the sense of dissonance experienced when one becomes aware of the discrepancy between one's existing cognitive framework and new information or experiences. Adopting a sociocultural perspective, the present study attempts to explore how participation in collaborative learning tasks can impact EFL students' achievement and performance. In so doing, the researcher will try to explore the issue both from the teacher's and from the students' perspectives.

With the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the early 1980's and emphasis on learners' communicative abilities over the last two decades, the term participatory approach or collaborative language teaching and learning came into prevalent use in the field of second language acquisition in terms of developing process-oriented syllabi and designing communicative tasks to promote learners' actual language use (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Participatory approach is based on the constructivist theory of learning. Ellis (1999), on the other hand, pointed out that the theoretical base of participatory approach is Input and Interactions Theory. Yet, it is clear that the current interest in tasks stems largely from "the communicative approach" to language teaching (Cheng-jun, 2006). Participation, as Ellis (2003) indicated, forms an important component of the language learning environment, and holds a central place in second language learning process. It is important to find out learners' interests and provide them with various methods and techniques to overcome their proficiency related problems. It can be argued that using participatory approach in teaching English skills seems to have the potentials to shed some light on the issue at stake. This study aims to examine the probable effects of participatory approach on EFL learners' and teachers' attitude in Kerman Azad University. While collaborative learning models have been utilized and studied in language learning classrooms, little research has focused on the attitude of both teachers and learners toward the method. Engaging students when learning, building an environment that allows for collaboration and teamwork, and implementing approaches towards learning via problem-solving activities is not an easy feat in teaching a second language (Kalyuga, Mantai, Marrone, 2012). "Traditional methods of teaching have not produced graduates with the kinds of skills they need to be effective engineers e.g., working in teams; applying scientific and engineering theory and principles; solving unstructured, practical problems, and communicating with others" (Bjorklund, Cabrera, Colbeck, Parente, Terenzini, 2001, P.2). It has often been argued by language scholars that knowledge cannot be acquired passively by the learner. In order to learn, however, students must expend energy in the thinking process and not simply be present during the class. Small group collaboration encourages students to think for themselves with little or no input from the teacher (Lord, 1994). Because collaborative learning has proved, in some of the previous studies, to positively impact learner attitudes and enthusiasm towards their target language (Kohonen, 1992), the implications for collaboration in English instruction would have tremendous potentials to foster motivation and enthusiasm for current and future study of the target language.

Objective of the Study: Drawing upon some of the basic principles of the socio-cultural theory, the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of participatory approach implementation from both teacher and students points of view. The present work of research is also aimed at exploring the potential effects of different types of collaborative tasks, in the sense used by Swain (2000, 2001, 2005) and Nassaji and Tian (2010), in fostering Iranian EFL learners' academic achievements and developing language proficiency in the acquisition of English as a second language. The results might help teachers and adult learners better understand these findings to enhance classroom learning. Moreover, the findings of the present research

might lead to a better understanding of the influence of participatory approach on developing English language skills of adult learners.

**Significance of the Study:** The significance of the present study can be discussed from two perspectives, theoretical and practical. In terms of theoretical perspective, as participatory strategies are used for teaching English skills. However, although much effort has been made to explore the theoretical accounts of collaborative language pedagogy (e.g., Willis, 1996; Skehan, 1998; Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2000), the results are not still definite. Thus, testing whether participatory approach is effective in enhancing EFL students performance is supposed to be considered as a tentative contribution to pedagogical theories pertinent to the participatory teaching of EFL students. In terms of practical significance, it can be stated that currently participatory learning strategies are applied in many universities and colleges worldwide. However, teachers and students still have serious concerns toward the practical influence of these learning strategies. Therefore, the results of the present study might shed more lights on the nature of participatory strategies in terms of their influence on EFL learners academic achievement. The present study is also important in that it adopts a sociocultural perspective in terms of using collaborative tasks for the purpose of practicing the participatory approach to improving language proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. The participatory learning model involves the placement of students in pairs or small groups to collaborate to achieve a common linguistic goal in learning a language (Huffman, 2010). A collaborative learning method is a well-studied and documented pedagogical strategy and has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement. Literacy skills like other aspects of language learning can be facilitated when done through cooperative learning. Participatory approach facilitates and deepens learning. It results in higher levels of understanding and reasoning, the development of critical thinking. In this method when the teacher gives a task, the members of the group work together towards certain shared learning goals. With this in mind, this study refers to an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The students are responsible for each other's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one student helps other students to be successful.

## 2. literature Review

The theoretical foundations and the historical development of participatory approach: Participatory approach is an approach to organizing classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences. It differs from group work, and it has been described as "structuring positive interdependence". Students must work in groups to complete tasks collectively toward academic goals. Unlike individual learning, which can be competitive in nature, students learning cooperatively capitalize on one another's resources and skills (asking one another for information, evaluating one another's ideas, monitoring one another's work, etc.). Furthermore, the teacher's role changes from giving information to facilitating students' learning. Everyone succeeds when the group succeeds. Ross and Smyth (1995) describe successful cooperative learning tasks as intellectually demanding, creative, open-ended, and involve higher order thinking tasks. Prior to World War II, social theorists such as Allport, Watson, Shaw, and Mead began establishing cooperative learning theory after finding that group work was more effective and efficient in quantity, quality, and overall productivity when compared to working alone (Gilles and Adrian, 2003). However, it wasn't until 1937 when researchers May and Doob (1937) found that people who cooperate and work together to achieve

shared goals, were more successful in attaining outcomes, than those who strived independently to complete the same goals. Furthermore, they found that independent achievers had a greater likelihood of displaying competitive behaviors. Philosophers and psychologists in the 1930s and 40's such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Morton Deutsh also influenced the cooperative learning theory practiced today (Sharan, 2010). Dewey believed it was important that students develop knowledge and social skills that could be used outside of the classroom, and in the democratic society. This theory portrayed students as active recipients of knowledge by discussing information and answers in groups, engaging in the learning process together rather than being passive receivers of information (e.g., teacher talking, students listening). Lewin's contribution to cooperative learning was based on the ideas of establishing relationships between group members in order to successfully carry out and achieve the learning goals. Deutsh's contribution to cooperative learning was "positive social interdependence", the idea that the student is responsible for contributing to group knowledge (Sharan, 2010). Since then, David and Roger Johnson have been actively contributing to participatory approach theory. In 1975, they identified that cooperative learning promoted mutual liking, better communication, high acceptance and support, as well as demonstrated an increase in a variety of thinking strategies among individuals in group (Johnson and Johnson, 1975). Students who showed to be more competitive lacked in their interaction and trust with others, as well as in their emotional involvement with other students.

**The Merits of Participatory Approach:** According to proponents of participatory approach, the fact that students are actively exchanging, debating and negotiating ideas within their groups increases students' interest in learning. Importantly, by engaging in discussion and taking responsibility for their learning, students are encouraged to become critical thinkers (Totten, Sills, Digby & Russ, 1991). Many researchers have reported that students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is being taught. Moreover, they retain the information longer and also appear more satisfied with their classes (Beckman, 1990; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Goodsell, et al, 1992). For an approach to be effective, there should be both "group goals" and "individual accountability" (Slavin, 1989). This means that the collaborative learning task must ensure that every group member has learnt something. Ideally, a collaborative learning task would allow for each member to be responsible for some concept necessary to complete the task. This implies that every group member will learn their assigned concept and will be responsible for explaining/teaching this to other members of the group. As most teachers have discovered, we usually learn more by teaching than we ever learnt as "learners"! Indeed, this sentiment is backed up by research - it has been consistently found that students who learn most are those who give and receive elaborated explanations about what they are learning and how they are learning it (Webb, 1985).

**Learners' Attitude Toward Participatory Approach:** PA is a successful teaching technique in which small groups, each with students of various levels of ability, use a multiple of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is answerable not only for what is taught but also for helping other team members to learn, thus developing an environment of success. Students work from beginning to end the assignment until all group members successfully comprehend and complete it. They work in group to gain from each other's efforts; they share a common fate, work in cooperation and feel proud for group success. Collaborative learning has group goals that create what is known as positive interdependence. Positive interdependence is when students believe they can reach their learning goals only when other students in their cooperative group also reach their goals (Johnson and Johnson, 1986). Positive

interdependence means that individual accountability must occur. Cooperative groups work together to earn rewards, grades and recognition. There is consensus among cooperative learning reviewers that individual accountability and positive interdependence are actually essential components for successful cooperative learning (Slavin, 1989). Research findings show that PA sponsors student learning and educational attainment, amplifies student maintenance, improves student satisfaction with their learning experience, helps students develop skills in verbal statement, increases students' social skills, enhances student self-esteem and help to promote positive race relations (Kagan, 1994). A basic difference between cooperative learning and traditional group work is that in classical group work, students are asked to work in groups with no attention given to group functioning, whereas in cooperative learning, group work is carefully organized, planned, and examined (Jacobs, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Instructional models and structures have been designed, which teachers can adopt and adapt, to help the group work operate more successfully by creating an atmosphere that can foster interactive learning (Abrami et al, 1995).

Studies on Participatory Approach: A number of researchers have examined the effects of collaborative learning on second language acquisition (Barnes & Todd, 1977; Bejarano, 1987; Gunderson & Johnson, 1980; McGroarty, 1989; Rowell, 2002; Sharan, 1990). In an overview of research involving collaborative learning, McGroarty (1989) proposed that group work supports the creative use of students' L1 in a manner that enhances the development of L2 verbal communication skills and comprehensible output, helps clarify meaning, builds content knowledge, and supports active learning processes. McGroarty (1989), Neves (1984), and others further determined that such learning provides a way to use students' L1 as a bridge rather than a barrier to L2 mastery and that the frequency of talk between peers, even if in the first language, can directly enhance students' L2 comprehension. Barnes and Todd (1977) examined conversations between students working in small groups in which hesitant and sometimes confusing talk prompted abrupt changes in the ongoing dialogue. This reshaping of the conversation eventually led to the development of new ideas and better understanding of the content. Sharan (1990) and Bejarano (1987) both compared group work to whole class learning and reported that group learning led to higher student motivation, higher student achievement, higher language achievement in terms of grammar and vocabulary learning. They argued that more positive collaborative learning is also consistent with the interactionist perspective on social relations between peers. In light of the above theoretical arguments, several studies have empirically examined the role of collaborative output tasks in L2 learning (Kowal & Swain, 1994; Kuiken & Vedder, 2002; Leeser, 2004; Nabei, 1996; Storch, 2005, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 2002). One of the first studies of this kind was Kowal and Swain (1994), which investigated a particular type of collaborative output task called dictogloss: a pedagogical task in which learners are encouraged to work together to reconstruct a text after it is presented to them orally. The researchers collected data from intermediate and advanced French learners. Their results showed that when learners were involved in the co-production of language through such tasks, they noticed gaps in their knowledge of language, their attention was drawn to the link between form and meaning, and they obtained feedback from their peers. Nabei (1996) conducted a similar study with four adult ESL learners who worked in pairs to complete a doctorless, and found similar results. She found many instances where the activity promoted opportunities for attention to form, scaffolding, and corrective feedback. Swain and Lapkin (2001) compared the effectiveness of a doctorless with a jigsaw task (in which pairs of students created a written story based on a series of pictures). The participants were two grade 8 French immersion classes. Each class completed one of the tasks. The learners' interactions during the tasks

were analyzed in terms of language related episodes (LREs), defined as episodes in which learners talked about, questioned, or self-corrected the language they produced. The results showed that both tasks generated a similar and substantial amount of language related episodes. However, there was no significant difference between the two types of tasks in terms of the overall degree of the learners' attention to form as reflected in their LREs. No significant difference was found between the two groups' post-test scores either, suggesting that the two types of task produced comparable degrees of language gains. García Mayo (2002b) compared the effectiveness of a doctorless with a text reconstruction task (a text that had certain grammatical words missing, such as articles, prepositions and function words, and the learners had to supply them). The participants were seven pairs of high intermediate to advanced EFL learners. The data were analyzed both quantitatively in terms of the frequency of LREs and qualitatively in terms of learners' focused attention to forms. The results indicated that the text-reconstruction task generated more LREs than the dictogloss. García Mayo (2002b) concluded that the text-reconstruction task was an effective form-focused task in her study, but she stressed the need for further research in this area. A number of other studies have also compared the effectiveness of individual versus collaborative pair work. Kuiken and Vedder (2002), for example, examined the effects of collaborative pair work by comparing the learners' performance on completing a dictogloss. The participants were 34 Dutch high school ESL students. The focus was on learning English passive forms. The learners' knowledge of the passive was measured by means of a pre-test administered before the task and a post-test administered after. The results of the qualitative analyses showed many instances where the interaction drew learners' attention to form. However, their results did not show a significant effect for collaborative interaction. Storch (2005) examined the effectiveness of collaborative pair work when students produced a written text either in pairs or individually. The study examined both the product of their writings (in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity) as well as the nature of interaction during collaboration. The results showed that the collaborative pair work led to many opportunities for exchanging ideas and peer feedback. The results also revealed that students who produced the texts collaboratively wrote shorter but grammatically more accurate and more complex texts in comparison to those who produced them individually. But the difference between the individual and pair work was not statistically significant. Storch (2005) suggested that the reason for this lack of significance might have to do with the short length of the texts and the small sample size, and then called for further research in this area. Nassaji & Tian (2010) compared the relative effectiveness of two types of output tasks (reconstruction cloze tasks and reconstruction editing tasks) for learning English phrasal verbs. Of interest was whether doing the tasks collaboratively led to greater gains of knowledge of the target verbs than doing them individually, and also whether the type of task made a difference. The effectiveness of the tasks was determined by how successfully learners completed the tasks and also by means of a vocabulary knowledge test administered before and after the treatment. The results showed that completing the tasks collaboratively (in pairs) led to a greater accuracy of task completion than completing them individually. However, collaborative tasks did not lead to significantly greater gains of vocabulary knowledge than individual tasks. The results, however, showed an effect of task type, with the editing tasks being more effective than the cloze tasks in promoting negotiation and learning. The findings contribute to the research that has examined the effectiveness of pedagogical tasks in L2 classrooms. Within Iranian context, Abadikhah & Shahriyarpour (2012) investigated the role of output tasks in individual and collaborative setting in learning English passive verb forms. They investigated this issue by comparing individual and collaborative

completion of an output task. Results of their study demonstrated that among the three treatment groups, input enhancement with text editing task completed individually and in collaboration were effective in promoting learners acquisition of passive forms. They concluded that that the development of L2 grammatical competence can be influenced through output and collaborative output techniques, but input enhancement, by itself, could not be regarded as an effective technique in the development of L2 English passive forms, though it can draw learners' attention to form. In the same vein, Jabbarpour and Tajeddin (2013) compared the effects of three focus-on-form tasks (input enhancement, individual output, and collaborative output) on the acquisition of English subjunctive mood. Ninety freshmen from a B.A. program in TEFL were engaged in three different tasks that involved textual enhancement, individual dictogloss collaborative doctorless. A time-series design was used to measure progress in the participant's production of the target feature; in conjunction with a pre-test and a post-test, three production tests were given to assess the trend of development in each group. The study revealed that the impact of input and collaborative output tasks was greater than that of the individual output task. Moreover, the findings showed that the trend of development in the individual output group was not a linear additive process, but a rather U-shaped one with backsliding. This study supports the importance of the effectiveness of collaborative interaction in the acquisition of English structures.

### 3. Methodology

**Design:** The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of participatory approach implementation on EFL students' achievement and performance and its effectiveness on teaching and learning from both teachers' and students' point of views. The study is a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research method (MMR). In fact, a triangulation procedure has been adopted through using tests, and two interviews with the students and teachers to collect data. The study involves a mixed method design, including an experimental phase pre-test, treatment, post-test, plus a qualitative procedure that includes an interview with the students participating in the study plus an interview with the teachers observing the experimental group's class.

**Participants:** This study was conducted with a total of 60 EFL students in two intact classes. The participants attended at Azad University of Kerman, English department as EFL students. All of them had studied English translation at the Azad University for one academic year. Both male and female students participated in the study. Students' age, gender, social and educational backgrounds are not taken into consideration. Out of the original 60 students, 39 participants whose scores on the language proficiency test fell within  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the mean score, attended all treatment sessions and completed all test booklets were included in the final analyses. Moreover, the attitudes of the students who participated in the study were considered in an interview. The faculty members you observed the class during sessions were also interviewed to be aware of their attitude toward the method.

**Instruments:** Before the treatment session began, all participants took part in a paper-based TOEFL proficiency test from ETS administrated in 2004. This test was used to check the homogeneity of the group in terms of their entry proficiency level.

As the main purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of participatory approach on the academic achievement of Iranian EFL learners in terms of their language proficiency test, a standard IELTS test has been used as the instrument for pre-test and post-test to collect data on their performances.



Student interview and teacher interview: Drawing on the previous studies in the related literature, two interviews were designed by the researcher, one for the learners and one for the teachers who participated in the study in order to include their attitudes towards the implementation of the participatory approach in Iranian EFL context. The questions were designed carefully by the researcher and checked by the members of the English Department at the same university where the study was conducted.

Procedure: As it was mentioned earlier, two intact classes took part in the study. As mentioned above, out of the original 60 students, 39 participants whose scores on the language proficiency test fell within  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the mean score, attended all treatment sessions and completed all test booklets were included in the final analyses. In the first step, before the treatment sessions began, all participants took part in a paper-based TOEFL proficiency test. The test was used to check the homogeneity of the group in terms of their entry proficiency level. Then, in the experimental phase of the study, the participants completed the four sections of the IELTS test. The test was used as the pre-test to examine their entry-level proficiency in English. Before they completed the test booklet, however, the researcher gave them an orientation to the test as to how to complete the different sections on it. The two classes were then randomly selected as the control group and the experimental group. For the next fourteen sessions, the researcher in the control group class followed his regular teaching practice through the conventional method of conducting an English class. In the experimental group class, however, the researcher adopted the participatory approach tasks and activities for the next fourteen sessions until the end of the semester. First, she gave them a thorough introduction to the basic principles of the approach and tried to make them familiar with different types of activities they were supposed to have in the following sessions. For the following fourteen sessions, breaking away from the traditional book-centered method of teaching language skills, the researcher applied various participatory approach-based techniques, activities, role play, problem solving activities, group work and collaborative tasks in the classroom instruction. In order to include the attitudes of the teachers in the study, five members of the English department at the same university were invited to regularly observe the participatory class so that they could share their ideas about this approach. In the next step, the students in the control and experimental group took part in the IELTS post-test in order for the researcher to examine their comparative achievement at the end of the project. Finally, half of the students took part at the interview designed to elicit the learners' opinion about the effectiveness of the participatory approach. Also, the faculty members who observed the intervention session were interviewed to check their attitudes toward the participatory approach.

Data Analysis Method: With regard to the data collected during the experimental phase of the study, the raw scores obtained from the proficiency test, the pre-test and post-test were submitted to statistical analyses. Mann-Whitney test was conducted in order to compare the results of IELTS pretest scores of the experimental and the control groups. Also to have comparison of the two group's scores on the IELTS posttest, another instance of Mann-Whitney test was utilized. In addition, two other Paired Samples Tests were run to compare the performances of the experimental and control groups. As regards to the descriptive data collected through the qualitative research procedure including results of the interview with the students and the teachers, the qualitative analysis proceeded coding the information into categories or levels looking for similarities and differences among data. Similarly, in this study, qualitative data was gathered by interviews and was compiled and coded in order to find out answers to the research questions. This method of triangulation, in fact, is expected to further confirm the results achieved through the experimental phase of

the study. Thus, paired sample t-tests were run to analyze the quantitative data including pre-test and post-test results, and coding data was applied to analyze the qualitative data gathered through interviews.

#### 4. Finding

The first research question was: Will the employment of Participatory Approach in EFL classes be effective in terms of improving intermediate EFL learners' academic achievements? In order to answer this research question, the scores obtained from the IELTS administration before and after intervention were considered. In order to test the hypothesis, the researcher compared the pretest and posttest scores of the participatory group and the control group. Moreover, the pretest and posttest scores obtained from each group were compared. The results are shown in the following tables.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for IELTS pretest scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IELTS Pretest	Experimental	19	3.8947	.20943	.04805
	Control	20	3.8000	.37697	.08429

The mean score for the participatory group was 3.89 on a nine-point scale and the standard deviation was 0.20. Moreover, the mean score of the control group on the same test was 3.80 and the standard deviation was 0.37. The results show that the control group's mean score is slightly lower than that of the participatory group and the standard deviation statistic shows that the control group is a little more heterogeneous than the participatory group.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for IELTS posttest scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IELTS Posttest	Experimental	19	4.2632	.53667	.12312
	Control	20	4.0250	.63815	.14269

The mean score for the participatory group was 4.26 on a nine-point scale and the standard deviation was 0.53. Moreover, the mean score of the control group on the same test was 4.02 and the standard deviation was 0.37. The results show that the control group's mean score is lower than that of the participatory group and the standard deviation statistic shows that the control group is more heterogeneous than the participatory group.

**Table 3.** Mann-Whitney test for comparing pretest scores of the experimental and control groups

	IELTS Pretest
Mann-Whitney U	176.500
Wilcoxon W	386.500
Z	-0.516
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.606
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	0.708 <sup>a</sup>

It can be inferred from Table that the difference between the IELTS pretest mean scores ( $U= 176.00$ ,  $p=.60$ ) was not statistically significant since the obtained  $p$  value is more than 0.05. Therefore, the difference seen in table 3 is negligible. In other words, there was no statistically significant difference between the performance of the experimental group and that of the control group on the pre-test.

**Table 4.** Mann-Whitney test for comparing posttest scores of the experimental and control groups

	IELTS Posttest
Mann-Whitney U	154.000
Wilcoxon W	364.000
Z	-1.113
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.266
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.322 <sup>a</sup>

It can be understood from Table that the difference between the IELTS posttest mean scores ( $U= 154.00$ ,  $p=.26$ ) was not statistically significant since the obtained  $p$  value was less than 0.05. Therefore, the difference seen in table 4 is negligible. In other words, it can be concluded that the second null hypothesis of the study which holds that “there is no statistically significant difference between the performance of the participatory approach group and the conventional approach group on the language proficiency test” was rejected regarding the fact that the participatory approach did not lead to a statistically significant difference on the IELTS posttest for the experimental group as compared with the performance of the control group who were treated with the conventional approach. However, further analysis showed that this approach was similar to the conventional approach in improving the learner's general language ability suggesting that both approach had positive effects on learners' language improvement as compared with their performance on the pretest.

**Table 5.** Progress in IELTS scores in the experimental and control groups

	IELTS Pretest for Experimental Group - IELTS Posttest for Experimental Group	IELTS Pretest for Control Group - IELTS Posttest for Control Group
Z	-2.640 <sup>a</sup>	-2.121 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.034

Table 5 shows that participatory groups' scores improved significantly ( $Z= 2.60$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and the control group's scores ( $Z= 2.12$ ,  $p=.03$ ) on the posttest and the IELTS posttest scores were significantly higher than the pretest for both groups. In other words, it can be claimed that both interventions, participatory and conventional ones, were similarly effective in improving the IELTS scores of the learners in this study. As a result, the first hypothesis holding that “the employment of Participatory Approach in EFL classes will not be effective in terms of improving intermediate EFL learners' academic achievements was accepted. However, the difference between the performance of the experimental group and that of the control group on the posttest was not statistically significant.

The third research question was posed above as to the learners' perspective on the implementation of the participatory approach that is “What are the effects of applying Participatory Approach on learning English at intermediate level from the learners' perspective?”

In order to answer this research question, the qualitative data from the interview were analyzed. The interpretation of data related to each research question is presented in this section. Regarding the third research question, an interview was conducted to explore the attitudes and reactions of the participants regarding the type of instruction they had received during the course. This interview consisted of six items and results are shown below according to each item posed in the interview.

1. What is your idea about the group activities you have had during this course? Regarding the first question of the interview it should be mentioned that the learners in the participatory group found the group activities both fun and useful in encouraging them to take part in class activities. They believed that the feedback they received from the teacher and their classmates were constructive and three out of five participants explicitly stated that they had never had such an experience of receiving feedback in their classes. Although some participants perceived some tasks hard to follow, others found them comprehensible and easy to follow. For example, a student stated that “the tasks were at the normal level as one expected from such courses; that is to say, some of them were useful while he found the other ones a little vague.” However, another student stated that the collaborative tasks were clear to her so that she could easily participate in the activities and cooperate with other students. Overall, the majority of the learners were satisfied with such group tasks they practiced during the course.

2. To what extent were your errors corrected? What do you think of the feedback you received from the teacher and from other students? Four out of five learners believed that they could fully understand the source of their errors from the feedback they receive from others. They mentioned that through dialogic interaction with their teacher and their classmates they could understand both the grammatical points and the vocabulary use better. They said were able to understand better how meaning of a sentence affected the grammatical elements and the vocabulary use in a given sentence. For example, a student mentioned that to her, the amount of time spent on clarifying the reason behind the errors she made was unique in this participatory course since she had enough time to analyze her errors together with the teacher. Three participants stated that the role of feedback was highly essential for them regarding the vocabulary use. They believed that the feedback they received on word usage affected their attitude on the way they needed to learn lexical points in order to be fully applicable to their speaking and writing tasks in future. For example, one of the interviewees believed that it affected the way she would use dictionary and other learning strategies she would use in future. Moreover, another student stated that his attitude towards using words in combination and using collocations has changed since he received such feedback.

3. What is your idea about the exploratory nature of participatory approach? What types of instructions do you prefer to receive in future classes? Among the learners, four learners stated that the type of interactive activities as presented in their classroom tasks were far more useful for them than their usual, regular individual activities used in similar courses. And that they were interested to continue to have similar instructions and activities in future courses they were going to have. For example, a student stated that though the regular book-based, test-dependent courses with check marks and scores from the tests could be beneficial for final achievement judgment, they were not useful for learning. Another student believed that teachers, due to shortage of time or the number of students in a class, may use scores they do not help the learners understand why they should use a specific form. It seemed that most learners welcomed the exploratory nature of the dialogic interaction of the teacher and learners.

4. What is your idea about the types of feedback from the teacher and from other students? In the future classes, what type of feedback do you prefer to receive? Most of the learners were interested in the exploration of the reasons behind their errors in writing and speaking activities. They also welcome the type the so-called reading aloud activities they practiced during other classroom exercises. The learners were feeling ambiguous regarding the reason behind using a specific structure or a given word in a specific situation. A student argued that if they were not given the source regarding the specific grammatical point such as the use of verb tenses, or the exact use of vocabulary items, they might have committed the same errors in the future assignments. It can be concluded that the learners attending such courses would welcome the feedback through interaction since it could enlighten them about how phrases and sentences and the overall meaning are developed in a writing task or in a speaking activity.

5. What areas of language do you think are more important and you prefer to be more emphasized in such classes? All in all, the majority of the interviewees put special emphasis on combinations of vocabulary items, every day conversational expressions and useful phrases and idioms, pronunciation, intonation, basic grammatical points and frequently used structures. For example, a student claimed that grammar and vocabulary are the building blocks of the meaning I am going to transfer to others and it would be impossible to imagine speaking or writing without mastery over grammar and vocabulary. They explained how they had serious problems in the same areas and components of language and how they were able to deal with their weak points with assistance and corrective feedback they received from their teacher and their classmates. It seems that receiving dialogic feedback in collaborative activities could considerably help learners notice their weak points and then pay more careful attention to their problems and make an attempt to come up with solutions.

6. Do you believe you have been able to achieve your expectations in this course? Are you satisfied with the outcome of the course? Four of the learners stated that the course was constructive for them and they were interested to take part in such classes if available. A student stated that since such types of group activities are not commonly used in their regular courses at the university, he would certainly attend future courses if they were available. However, the other two interviewees did not state their deep satisfaction, but they were satisfied with what they learned since they stated that the course had many new things for them. For example, a student stated that the course was informative especially regarding the use of vocabulary in context and using grammatical points in contexts. Overall, results of the interview shows that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the variety of the group activities, their interactions with the teacher and their classmates and particularly, the feedback they received during classroom interactions. The ideas are in line with principles of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, holding that learners learn from the other better knowers, be it a native speaker, the teacher, or other learners in a group activity.

The Fourth research question posed above was concerned with the teachers' attitude towards implementing the participatory approach that is "What are the effects of applying Participatory Approach on learning English at intermediate level from the teachers' perspective?"

In order to find answers to this research question, the qualitative data from the interview the visiting teachers were analyzed. The interpretation of data related to each research question is presented in this section. Regarding the Fourth research question, an interview was conducted to explore the attitudes and reactions of the teachers who observed the participatory class. This interview consisted of six items and results are presented below according to each item included in the interview.

1. What is your idea about the group activities the participants have had during this course? All teachers who were asked to have regular visits of the participatory approach group activities announced that they found the group activities, collaborative tasks and role plays very useful in encouraging the students to have more participation in classroom activities. They added that teachers do not usually include such group tasks in their regular classes, and they find the students usually reluctant to take part in such activities. After having observed the class activities for a few sessions, most of them came to the conclusion that such participatory activities can have innumerable benefits both for the learners and for the teachers, and they agreed that they would try to implement some of those activities in their future classes.

2. What do you think of the ways students' errors are dealt with? What do you think of the feedback the students received from the teacher and from other students? Three out of five teachers had a favorable attitude towards correcting students' errors directly as they believed the procedure often lead to their understanding the source of errors and correcting themselves, though there were instance where they repeated the errors again while talking to others. Two other teachers were of the opinion that more indirect ways of correcting students' error would be more effective and less threatening to students' face. All five teachers, however, unanimously agreed that that in writing exercises the participatory approach teacher's correction of students' errors in writing often bore good results in their writing. They mentioned that through dialogic interaction between the teacher and students and between students and students, the learners were given the chance to understand both the grammatical points and the vocabulary use better while participating in speaking activities and while completing writing assignments.

3. What is your idea about the exploratory nature of participatory approach? What types of instructions do you think the students should receive in such classes? All teachers who observed the participatory classroom activities were of the opinion that the group activities and collaborative tasks in which the learners took part often lead to increasing motivation among learners as they would often want to continue the same activities longer and longer, and they would never get bored of getting involved such activities. Two of the teachers, however, added that because of the novelty of the tasks for the students, some of them sometimes felt confused as to what to do or how to complete a task. The teachers believed that students needed more orientation and more preparatory sessions before getting involved in such group activities, which they said would definitely result in better achievement among the students.

4. What areas of language do you think are more important that need be more emphasized in such classes?

The ideas expressed by the teachers were not much different from those expressed by the students. Much the same way like the students, the visiting teachers also believed that special vocabulary chunks, collocations, every day conversational expressions and useful phrases and idioms should be emphasized in such classes. They further added that pronunciation, intonation, more frequently encountered grammatical points and structures should receive more attention. Two of the teacher, however, were of the opinion that it was more important to encourage the students develop the ability to express their ideas more fluently that emphasizing on points of pronunciation or intonation. To them, more energy and effort should be devoted to communication skills rather than spending time on details of pronunciation or detailed grammar points.

5. What do you think of the outcome of such course for the students? All the teachers who had regular observations of the participatory approach classroom activities unanimously agreed that the results of the group activities were incredible. They mentioned that in spite of some problems that the activities sometimes created both for the learners and for the teacher, the results were extremely satisfactory as they could easily

notice the students' satisfaction of participating in such group tasks. They added that no matter what the result of the posttest would be, the encouragement among the students to participate in classroom activities and their involvement in negotiation of meaning with the teacher and with other students were beneficial for the learners beyond measure. This participation of the students would also lead to more motivation for the teacher to spend more time and energy for such activities.

Overall, it can be concluded from the results of the interview that the almost all of the five visiting teachers had favorable opinion about the variety of the group activities, the learners' interactions with the teacher and their classmates and particularly, the participation of the students in group activities. There was overall consensus over the effectiveness of the participatory approach on encouraging interactions among the students, sharing their ideas and taking initiatives in conversational activities. This positive attitude by the teachers made good sense as they were well aware of the theoretical underpinnings of the participatory approach and collaborative tasks, and thus could better realize the positive outcome of the activities better than the students. This can also account for the results achieved on the IELTS posttest, based on which the participant in the participatory group outperformed the control group. The results are consistent with principles of Swain's (2000) Output Hypothesis, as she states that one of the effects of the output is that it helps learners understand the gap between what they say and what they need to say as they learn from the native speaker, their teacher or their peers.

## 5. Discussion

As it has been shown above, although both the participatory approach and the conventional approach had positive effects on the participants performances on the IELTS posttest in comparison with their scores on the IELTS pretest, the findings in this study seem to suggest that the implementation of the participatory approach and collaborative activities did not prove a statistically significant effect on the performance of the experimental group on the IELTS academic test as compared with the performances of the control group. The results are in line with results of a number of previously conducted research in the related literature (e.g., Kuiken & Vedder, 2002; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2002; Tocalli-Beller, 2003). A number of reasons may account for this lack of significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. Some of the previous studies (Storch, 1997, 2005; Kuiken & Vedder, 2002) also suggested that although collaboration may lead to better task performance, it may not necessarily lead to subsequent learning of the target forms. Thus, the findings do not support the presumed advantage of collaborative pair work over individual work or the idea that collaborative tasks are necessarily more effective than individual tasks. Drawing on some of the previous studies that came to similar results (Kuiken & Vedder, 2002; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2002; Tocalli-Beller, 2003), there might be several reasons for such findings. One reason might be related to the nature of the interaction that took place during group work. Analyses of the written transcriptions of learners' interaction showed that although there were interactions among learners, there were many cases where these interactions were brief and limited. Thus, although the learners were fairly successful in completing the tasks during interaction, the interactions may not have been rich enough to lead to the internalization and acquisition of the target forms. The most important reason seems to be related to the limited period of practice with the participatory approach. If there had been a longer period of practice with the approach, the researcher would probably have achieved more promising results for collaborative activities as compared with individual conventional activities. Another reason might have been

the unfamiliar nature of the approach and collaborative activities. Since most of the activities were mostly new to the learners, it might have been difficult for the learners to provide each other with constructive scaffolding and peer feedback during the tasks, and when they did so, it positively influenced their immediate task completion, but did not help improving their achievement on the proficiency test. Another reason could be related to the nature of the IELTS academic test, with which the participants were not much familiar, though they were given some orientation as how to complete the test. It seems that the learners might have needed longer introductory sessions. Another reason could be related to the learners' limited skills of how to collaborate effectively with peers. Previous research has shown that the effectiveness of learner collaboration depends on learners' ability to work and solve language-related problems collaboratively. Berg (1999), for example, found that training learners prior to collaborative activities made a substantial difference in the effectiveness of collaborative work in promoting scaffolding and learning. In our study, before each task, we made efforts so that learners had adequate direction and instruction about how to complete the tasks. The participant, however, did not go through a training session. It might be more effective, as suggested by Nassaji & Tian (2010), if learners are taught first how to collaborate or before implementing the collaborative task. This can be done in different ways, such as by showing students video-tapes of learners working collaboratively on similar tasks (Swain & Lapkin, 2001), explaining to and discussing with the learners how to participate in collaborative tasks and collectively solve their problems in task completion, or the teacher's going through a collaborative session together with students.

There are other factors that can influence the nature of interaction such as the composition of the group (Bennett & Cass, 1988; Tocalli-Beller, 2003), participants' shared goals and assumptions, learners' strategies, and their cognitive and developmental readiness (Nassaji & Cumming, 2000; Leaser, 2004). These factors may all interfere with the effectiveness of collaborative group work and hence should be considered when designing, researching, and using group activities in L2 learning. All these suggest that it is not the collaborative work (or the individual work) itself, but how and under what conditions it is conducted that determines its beneficial effects for language learning. All in all, all these findings appear to suggest to the potential positive effects of the participatory and collaborative activities. Both teachers and learners had a positive attitude toward the method because it makes learners autonomous and encourage them to learn in group.

Findings of the present study are significant in that very few studies of have dealt with the effects participatory approach on language achievement. Thus, findings of the present study might be inspiring both for second language learners and teachers, and for material designers. Also, the findings of this study contributed to the research that has examined the effectiveness of pedagogical collaborative tasks. The findings showed that collaborative group work led to better task completion and more interactions among language learners but not necessarily higher overall scores on the IELTS exam. Findings related to collaborative output tasks revealed that they were very effective in completing classroom output tasks. The results provide some grounds for their potential use in creating negotiation of ideas while doing group work in classroom. The results, however, showed that such tasks have not been very effective in leading to higher overall scores on the proficiency test. The findings were not consistent with some of the previous research, which found positive effects for collaborative group work on L2 learners' language skills improvement. This shows that the presumed effectiveness of collaborative task on learning linguistic forms should be taken with more caution. Thus, further investigation in the related area is needed to find out whether participatory approach



and collaborative output tasks are really influential in this regard or, if not, what the possible causes are. But what is clearly obvious is that the method has a positive effect on both teachers and learners' point of view.

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