



## **Participatory Approach in Context of EFL Learners- A Study on Perception of Teachers and Learners**

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### **ABSTRACT**

"The participatory approach" is a method of instruction that allows students to focus on topics and material of personal interest. According to Freire, illiteracy is the root cause of oppression, and the goal of education should be to equip students to take charge of their own liberation from oppressive social conditions (Spencer 1992). The participatory method is classified as "content-based instruction" (CBI) since it employs predetermined subjects. Rather than being abstract, the themes are grounded in the lives of the students and focus on how language study can be utilised to address societal challenges. The purpose of this research was to examine how using a participatory approach affected EFL students' linguistic competence. In addition, this research set out to determine if and how a more interactive classroom setting affected students' ability to pick up grammatical and lexical basics. The survey also aimed to investigate the perspective held by educators and students with regards to this matter. Along with the survey, pretested questionnaires were given to 49 students. These questions took into account numerous relevant characteristics. The data that was collected was measured, and the information that was obtained from those instruments was examined. According to the findings, participatory learning entails students actively engaging

in the learning process, taking part in it, and constructing their own knowledge. All of these activities contribute to the rich experiences that students gain as part of the language acquisition process.

**Keywords:** Participatory approach, language acquisition, EFL teachers, EFL learners, learner-centered.

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## **1. Introduction**

Education should be viewed as a means of creating meaning. It is impossible to attain such profound learning unless the process is both active and constructive. Thus, the fundamental steps in the generation of new knowledge should be geared toward helping the subjects build their own meaning. New methods of instruction are needed to equip students with the resources they need to establish their own set of learning strategies, which will ultimately enhance their holistic education. It is commonly held that effective methods of instruction:

- a) allow students to effectively acquire knowledge and skills specific to the module in which they are enrolled;
- b) encourage students to actively engage in the learning process;
- c) fortify students' capacity for independent study;
- d) promote the integration of theoretical contents with their practical applications; and
- e) encourage students to work together to achieve their educational goals.

The Participatory approach to learning English incorporates these features extensively.

In recent years, participatory learning has arisen as an important development in the field of English language teaching. Collaborative learning, or Cooperative learning, is another name for this kind of teaching. According to Panitz, T (1996), there is a distinct difference between the two concepts of collaboration and cooperation. Collaboration is an interpersonal and lifestyle philosophy in which each person takes ownership of their own actions and those

of their peers, including learning from and building upon the strengths of others. The model groups in The Collaborative take on practically all of the responsibilities, while cooperation is a structure of interaction that helps people work together to achieve a common goal. Researchers Johnson and Johnson (1986) found that students who worked together in groups outperformed those who studied alone and retained more material. As a result of participating in collaborative lessons, students are encouraged to think critically about the material they are learning (Totten, Sills, Digby, & Russ, 1991). According to recent studies on second language learning, there needs to be more work done in the classroom to encourage students to engage with one another (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2005;). Pedagogical activities that promote compromise can help to create such settings (Ellis, 2003; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). It has been argued that students benefit greatly from opportunities for peer feedback and scaffolding when they are involved in classroom activities that call for them to work together and produce output jointly (Lapkin & Swain, 2000; Swain, 2001, 2005)

According to the sociocultural theory, learning can't take place in a vacuum; it requires people to communicate and work together. Vygotsky (1986) argued that learning is fundamentally a social endeavour, and that the development of an individual's cognitive abilities is impossible through solitary learning. The "zone of proximal development," often known as the "ZPD," is at the centre of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. In addition, when students work together, particularly with a more advanced student, a nurturing environment is established in which the less proficient student is given the opportunity to develop and improve his or her language abilities (Appel & Lantolf, 1994). As a result, the concept of ZPD emphasises the significance of teamwork to accomplish goals.

The theories of Piaget and Vygotsky provide a foundation for much of the study of collaborative and participatory approaches to learning (Dillenbourg et al., 1996). Actually, socio-constructivists use her concepts about cognitive conflict and her description of the

cognitive stages children go through to explain their own learning process. Cognitive conflict is the feeling of incongruence that comes from realising that new information or experiences don't fit with what you already know. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of group work on the academic success of EFL students. The study adopts a sociocultural perspective in order to do so.

Since the debut of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the early 1980s, the phrase participatory method has been used to describe how teachers and students engage together to design process-oriented curricula (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Learners can be helped to overcome obstacles to competency if we take the time to discover their areas of interest and equip them with a variety of tools and strategies. One possible solution to the problem could be to use a more interactive method of teaching English as a second language. The purpose of this research is to analyse how a participatory method could influence the outlook of both students and faculty at Bharat Institute of Engineering and Technology who are studying English as a foreign language. There has been little research on how teachers and students feel about collaborative learning strategies in language classes. Teaching a second language is challenging because of the need to keep students interested in the material, create a setting that promotes group work, and adopt strategies for learning through activities that require them to solve problems (Marrone, Kalyuga, Mantai, 2012). Unfortunately, graduates from traditional engineering programmes lack the abilities necessary to be successful in the field, including the ability to work effectively in teams, apply scientific and technical theory and concepts, solve unstructured, practical issues, and communicate effectively. (Cabrera, Colbeck, & Terenzini, 2001). Academics in the field of languages have suggested that students simply cannot learn anything by sitting back and absorbing it passively. However, learning requires students to make an active effort in the thought process, not just showing up to class. When students collaborate on projects in small groups, they are more inclined to put

up their own ideas without much guidance from the teacher (Lord, 1994). Considering that previous research has demonstrated that collaborative learning has a positive effect on learners' mindset and curiosity for their source language (Kohonen, 1992), incorporating it into English classes could significantly increase students' motivation and interest in learning English.

**Objective of the Study:** Drawing on some of the key ideas of socio-cultural theory, this research intends to examine the effects of adopting a participatory approach from the perspectives of both educators and students. The study's other goal is to investigate how various collaborative tasks may help EFL students improve their English language skills and improve their academic performance. (Swain, 2000; Nassaji and Tian, 2010). These findings may prove useful in helping educators and adults learn more effectively in the classroom. In addition, the findings of this study may help throw light on how a participatory approach to education might help adult students improve their command of the English language.

## **2. The origins and evolution of the participatory approach**

The term "participatory strategy" refers to a method of structuring scholastic and social activities for maximum student engagement. Students are required to perform group projects in order to progress toward learning objectives. While students work together to learn, they are able to draw on each other's strengths and talents which is not possible when working alone. In addition, the function of the teacher shifts from imparting knowledge to that of a facilitator of learning. According to Ross and Smyth (1995), effective cooperative learning activities are those that require high levels of critical thinking and creativity. Cooperative learning was pioneered by pre-World War II social theorists - Allport, Watson, Shaw, and Mead, who argued that teamwork is more productive than individual effort. The concepts of what is now known as the Cooperative and Collaborative Learning Theory were not compiled

until 1937, nevertheless, by scholars Mark Arthur May and Leonard William Doob. May and Doob (1937), uncovered the fact that people who work together towards a common objective have a better chance of success than those who work alone. In addition to this, they discovered that those who achieved success on their own had a higher propensity to engage in competitive behaviours. John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Morton Deutsch were among the philosophers and psychologists of the 1930s and 1940s who had a significant impact on the development of the cooperative learning theory that is used today (Sharan, 2010; Neda et al., 2017). David and Roger Johnson found that cooperative learning increased group members' liking, communication, acceptance, and support, as well as their range of thinking processes (Johnson and Johnson, 1975). It was found that pupils who were more competitive lacked interpersonal skills, such as trusting people and getting emotionally invested in their schoolwork.

Cooperative learning gives communicative language teachers a set of classroom techniques for executing group-based activities (Richard, 2006). Cooperative learning in EFL classrooms was anchored in social, developmental, and cognitive psychology and motivational theory and humanist education. Cooperative learning is group-based. Cooperative learning is focused on theory, research, and practise to maximise student-student interaction (Richard, 2006). Research conducted in the fields of social psychology, developmental psychology, and cognitive psychology, as well as motivational theory and humanist education, provided the theoretical foundation for the implementation of cooperative learning in EFL classrooms. At its core, cooperative learning is a method of studying in groups. The term "cooperative learning" refers to the results of continuing research based on theory, research, and experience into how to optimise the benefits of student-student interaction (Richard, 2006).

According to Alport (1954), there are three necessary criteria for contact to result in higher levels of harmony and more fruitful relations: The three conditions necessary for a successful interaction are 1) both parties' position should be equivalent, 2) both parties' interests should be aligned, and 3) the interaction should be formally recognised. Aronson et al. (1978) took these three factors and developed “Jigsaw” activity. When playing Jigsaw, each player has a unique piece of information that they need to share with their teammates. Each player in Jigsaw then exits the quad and joins one of several specialised teams. Students in an expert team have already demonstrated mastery of the content and are now tasked with coming up with innovative approaches of delivering that knowledge to others. When the quad reunites, everyone shares what they've learnt with the others.

### **Research Questions**

1. On the test of linguistic competence, was there a statistically significant difference between the results obtained by the group using the participatory approach and those obtained by the group using the conventional technique?
2. From the point of view of learners, how does implementing a Participatory Approach influence English language acquisition at the intermediate level?
3. From the point of view of teachers, how does a Participatory Approach affect EFL Learners?

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Study Design**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the participative approach to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) from the point of view of EFL teachers, specifically with regard to their students' success and achievement in the classroom. Mixed qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this investigation. In fact, a triangulation method, combining standardised assessments with instructor interviews, was used to gather information. Both quantitative techniques (testing students before and after intervention) and qualitative methods (interviews with instructors who watched the Treatment's class) were employed in

this study. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed on the data. The study's quantitative analyses explore the relationship between the ratio-scaled dependent variable of EFL students' accomplishment and the independent variable of the study's implementation of participatory method in EFL classrooms. When conducting qualitative research, it is customary to look at the data gathered through content analysis and describe its significance (Barnes, D. 1977; Ericsson & Simon, 1984). Similarities and differences between data sets can be discovered through categorising the information into categories or levels, as detailed by Miles and Huberman (1994). As stated by Munn and Drever (1990), data reliability increases when people answer consistently across instruments.

### **3.2 Participants**

Ten faculty members and 49 first-year engineering students from five departments at Bharat Institute of Engineering and Technology, participated in the study. They spend roughly ten years learning English at school on average. All of the participants were undergraduates in engineering programmes, and their majors ranged from Computer Science, Information Technology, Electronics and Communication to Electrical and Electronics Engineering. Both male and female students participated in the study. Language achievement was measured independently of demographic factors such as student age, gender, and socioeconomic status (Brown, 2010, Munoz & Singleton, 2011, Kobayashi, 2002; Oxford, 1993).

### **3.3 Instruments**

#### **3.3.1 Pre-Test and Post-Test**

Since investigating how the participative method affects students' performance in the classroom, the researchers used the standard academic IELTS exam to administer pre- and post-tests. The researcher drew from the existing literature to craft interview guidelines for both the students and the teachers who took part in the study, with the goal of eliciting their thoughts on the implementation of the participatory approach in the EFL context. The



researcher took great effort in developing each question, and the questions were vetted for accuracy by members of the English Department at the same institution where the research was carried out.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection Procedure**

At the outset, before any sort of therapy sessions began, all individuals involved, completed the TOEFL paper exam to determine their level of English ability. The purpose of the exam was to ensure the group had a similar competency level at the outset. Then, during the study's experimental phase, the individuals took the four portions of the IELTS. As a screening device, the test was given to evaluate their baseline English skills. However, before taking the test, the researcher briefed them about the format of the test and how to answer the various questions. After that, a randomised selection was made to create a Comparison group and a Treatment group out of the students. In the class that served as a Comparison group, the researcher carried on with her customary methods of instruction by utilising the time-honoured strategy of managing an English class for the subsequent fourteen sessions. However, during the remaining fourteen sessions of the semester, the researcher in the Treatment class used the participatory approach tasks and activities. At the outset, the researcher acquainted them with the approach's foundational concepts and the variety of exercises that would be taking place in subsequent sessions. Over the course of the next fourteen sessions, the researcher veered away from the textbook-centric approach to language training by incorporating a number of techniques, exercises, role playing, activities to solve problem, collegial work, and collaborative assignments based on the participatory approach. Ten English teachers from the same college were asked to witness the interactive class on a regular basis and fill out surveys regarding their thoughts on the participatory method. The next step was to administer the IELTS post-test to the Comparison group as well as Treatment group so that the researcher could compare their final scores. Finally, 50 percent of the class

participated in an interview aimed to gauge the students' impressions on the participatory method. Researchers also conducted interviews with professors who had seen the intervention session to gauge their views on using a collaborative strategy.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

Statistical analyses were performed on the grading rubric that were acquired from the pre-test, and the post-test during the empirical phase of the investigation. These grades were determined using information amassed throughout the study's experimental stage. The results of the IELTS practise tests were compared between the Treatment group and Comparison group using a Mann-Whitney test. After taking the IELTS, the two groups' post-test scores were compared using the Mann-Whitney test. Further, two Paired tests were conducted to compare the Treatment group and Comparison group results. The qualitative data for this study was gathered through interviews and then compiled and coded to provide responses to the research questions. The purpose of this type of triangulation is to provide additional support for the results of the study's experimental part. The quantitative data under discussion were obtained through pre- and post-tests, and were compared using Dependent Sample t-test. The qualitative information gathered during the interviews was also analysed by means of coding data.

#### **5. Implication of Analysis**

As such, the primary aim of this study was to determine whether or not using the Participatory Approach in EFL classrooms would be beneficial for intermediate-level EFL students' academic performance. The results of the IELTS test given both before and after the intervention were taken into account in order to provide a response to this study topic. The researcher analysed the difference in test scores between the Treatmentgroup and the Comparison group at the beginning and end of the study to answer the research question. Additionally, there was a comparison made between the before and post test results of each group. The outcomes are displayed in the tables below.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of IELTS Pre-test Score

IELTS	Group	Total Participant	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Pre-Test	Treatment	24	3.520833	0.714435	0.145833
	Comparison	25	3.520000	0.603462	0.120692

On a scale from 0 to 9, the average score for the treatment or participatory group was 5.14, with a standard deviation of 1.075884. As a further point, the mean score of the Comparison group was 4.21, with a standard deviation of 0.742451 on the same exam. The results demonstrate that the Comparison group has a somewhat lower average score than the Treatment group as measured by the standard deviation statistic.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of IELTS Post-test Score

IELTS	Group	Total Participant	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Post-Test	Treatment	24	5.041667	1.160179	0.23682
	Comparison	25	4.420000	0.702377	0.140475

On a scale with nine points, the Treatment group received a mean score of 5.041667, and the standard deviation was 1.160179. Whereas for the same test, the mean score of the Comparison group was 4.42, and the standard deviation was 0.702377. The results show that the Comparison group has a lower mean score than the Treatment group, and that the Comparison group is more diverse than the Treatment group, as measured by the standard deviation statistic.

Consequently, the first hypothesis, which stated that "the use of the Participatory Approach in EFL classes will not be useful in raising intermediate EFL students' academic progress," was accepted. On the post-test, the results of the Treatment group and the Comparison group were compared; however, there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups<sup>7</sup>.

This led us to our second study question, “From the point of view of learners, how does implementing a Participatory Approach influence English language acquisition at the intermediate level?” The qualitative information gathered through interviews with the guest educators was evaluated to provide insight into this research question. There were five questions in this interview, and findings are broken down by question below.

**How are student mistakes handled? Do you like the instructor and student feedback?**

About 80% of students said they improved their understanding of their mistakes after receiving comments from teachers and peers. They felt that they gained a better grasp of the grammar issues and the terminology through conversation with the teacher and their peers. One student commented on how the comments altered his perspective on using collocations and other combinations of words. In terms of terminology, five participants highlighted the importance of receiving feedback. Students reported that the feedback they received on their word usage changed their mind-set on how they should study linguistic points in order to completely apply them in future speaking and writing assignments.

**Which parts of the language do you believe should be stressed more in school programmes like these?**

Most of the students who were interviewed placed a significant amount of importance on pronunciation, intonation, word combinations, and structure of sentences, common phrases and idioms. They shared that they had struggled with similar linguistic issues, but that with the help of their instructor and peers, they had been able to overcome their weak spots and make progress. Students may benefit greatly from getting dialogic feedback in collaborative activities, as it may prompt them to reflect on their own strengths and areas for improvement.

**What are your thoughts on the group activities that have been conducted throughout this course for the participants?**

The students in the Treatment group found the group activities to be both enjoyable and beneficial in getting them involved in the classroom. Five out of eight students said that it was the first time for them to receive positive comments from a teacher and peers in a classroom setting. A few tasks were difficult to some of the students; on the other hand, the same task was understandable and simple to carry out for other students. The majority of students enrolled in the class expressed their contentment with many group activities.

**How do you consider the different kinds of comments you and your classmates might make? How would you like to be evaluated?**

Students' were keen to investigate the causes of their mistakes in writing and oral presentations. They enjoyed the activities on speaking that they have participated in before in class. The students had doubts about the logic of adopting a particular tense or phrase in a given context. A student asserted that they would have repeated their mistakes in future assignments had they not been given the source about the precise grammatical point. Therefore, it can be deduced that students enrolled in such courses would appreciate the feedback provided through interaction, as it would shed insight on the way phrases, sentences, and the overall meaning are produced in a writing work or a speaking activity.

**Isn't it true that a participative approach encourages people to try new things? In your opinion, what sort of teaching methods would be most effective in these types of courses?**

Six students said they benefited much more from the interactive exercises offered in class than they would have through individual work in a similar course. And said they hoped to see similar assignments in future classes. One student expressed his belief that traditional, textbook-based classes that rely on standardised examinations and provide feedback in the form of checkboxes and letter grades were not helpful for his education. Another student voiced concern that instructors would not adequately explain why students should follow a

certain procedure owing to time constraints or class size. It appeared that the majority of students enjoyed the opportunity to learn through dialogue with their instructor.

The third question above aimed to elucidate the stance taken by educators towards implementation of the participatory approach. This study investigated the qualitative data collected through interviews with instructors to answer this research issue. There were 5 questions in this interview, and findings are broken down by question below

**Which parts of the language do you believe should be stressed more in schools, and why?**

The visiting instructors felt that it was important to place an emphasis on specific vocabulary chunks, collocations, ordinary conversational expressions, and helpful phrases and idioms. They also mentioned that greater emphasis should be placed on pronunciation, intonation, and the more commonly used elements and structures of grammar. However, three of the educators believed that helping learners acquire a more natural way of expressing themselves via speech was more crucial than focusing on specifics of pronunciation and intonation. They feel that more time and effort should be spent on communication skills rather than perfecting speech or grammar.

**What are the corrective measures to address students' mistakes? How did the students react to the comments given by teachers?**

Four teachers felt that students would get benefitted if their mistakes are corrected when they do it. Three teachers were of opinion not to correct mistakes of the students in front of everyone. And three teachers agreed that interactive activities carried out in the class helped the students grasp the grammar points and vocabulary.

**What are your thoughts on the group projects that were assigned to the students of treatment group?**

The teachers, who attended the participatory approach group activities stated that group exercises, collaborative work, and role-plays helped them encourage student participation in classroom activities. They also mentioned that teachers rarely assign such group projects during regular sessions since the students are hesitant to participate. Most of the teachers agreed to adopt this approach having influenced with the result of participatory activities being carried out during the sessions.

**How do you imagine the students might benefit from taking such a course?**

Teachers who regularly observed classrooms using the participatory approach all agreed that the outcomes of the group activities were phenomenal. They noted that, despite the difficulties that the exercises occasionally presented for both the students and the instructor, the outcomes were quite encouraging, as it was easy to see the delight that the group work had brought to the students. They stated that regardless of the post-test results, the students got benefited greatly by encouraging them to take part in class activities. The teacher's enthusiasm for the project would rise as a result of the students' engagement with it.

**Do you have any thoughts on the fact that the participative method is inherently exploratory? How would you recommend teaching these courses?**

Teachers who kept an eye on student participation in class agreed on one thing: when students worked together on projects, they were more likely to want to keep working on them, and they were less likely to become sick of them. However, three of the educators noted that, due to the novelty of the assignments, some students occasionally felt puzzled as to what to accomplish or how to finish a task. Teachers felt that students would benefit greatly from extra orientation and preparation sessions before engaging in such group activities.

The results of the interview showed that, on the whole, the 80% guest educators had a positive impression of the range of group activities, the learners' contacts with the teacher and their classmates, and the students' active engagement in group activities. Students, teachers,

and administrators all agreed that using a participatory method was the best way to get everyone talking to one another, thinking creatively, and taking initiative in group discussions. This may also explain why the experimental group did better on the post-test than the control group in terms of IELTS scores. These findings are in line with Swain's (1985, 2000) Output Hypothesis, which claims that one effect of output is to help learners bridge the gap between what they say and what they need to say as they pick up language from the native speaker, their teacher, or their peers.

## **6. Conclusion**

The results of this research have a few different repercussions for the field of education.

The positive benefits of collaborative activities identified in this study on increasing speaking competence as well as acquiring vocabulary in the design of L2 reading materials. However, the implementation of this strategy requires additional evidence demonstrating its usefulness, which might be provided by further study conducted in the same field. Recent years have seen an increase in the amount of focus placed on collaborative classroom activities that promote student involvement and language component understanding. The current study appears to lay some factual groundwork for the implementation of the participatory approach principle and collaborative tasks in L2 classroom activities.

However, the findings of this study suggest that participants' IELTS post-test scores have increased when compared to their IELTS pre-test scores because of the participatory approach and collaborative activities. Activities like this can do more than just get EFL students talking to one another; they can also help them acquire and practise important language skills like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. The results of this research could aid language teachers and educators in their quest to discover engaging classroom activities for their students.



In addition, the findings from the current study may help curriculum and courseware designers make more informed decisions when choosing word-focused assignments for EFL courses. Several recommendations can be made in light of the study's findings and the literature on the topic of using a participative method to teaching English as a second language. First, the practical results of the participatory approach can be studied in relation to many learner factors including risk-taking, self-regulation, readiness to communicate, motivation, etc. Second, there are a wide range of possible methodological approaches when a participatory approach is adopted in relation to various theoretical and pedagogical frameworks, such as the Freirean framework, socio-cultural theory, etc. Consequently, we may expect a range of outcomes and, perhaps more importantly, responses from students and instructors, all of which will contribute to our growing appreciation for the complexity of EFL classroom dynamics when a participatory approach is employed. Third, given the constraints imposed by the short duration of the intervention, it is recommended that a similar study be conducted under conditions where participants receive a more extensive training period.

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