



# How Do EFL Students Perceive Group Work Activity in EFL Classes? A Survey Study

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**Abstract.** Teachers' interaction and students' perceptions toward their favorable teaching style may elevate students' motivation. Thus, the current study aims to investigate senior high school students' perceptions toward group work in EFL classes, recruiting senior high school students and distinguishing them from the previous studies. The current study plotted a survey design underpinned by class observations (field notes) to witness the authenticity of the survey data. A convenience sampling technique was also schemed, recruiting a hundred students from a state senior high school in Malang, with fifty-one students willing to complete the questionnaire. Moreover, the study unpacked that senior high school students have a positive attitude toward the positive and negative statements about the advantages and disadvantages of students' interpersonal group work. The students positively perceived all given items. Finally, the students' perceptions supported their achievements since the participants drew significant scores on both aspects. Knowing the students' perceptions may minimize misunderstandings between teachers and students and create a conducive situation for achieving learning goals. Since the present study focuses on describing students' perceptions of the advantages, disadvantages, and the influence of perception on students' achievement, it provokes the teachers to elaborate on other teaching techniques to elevate the motivated and unmotivated students' proficiencies.

**Keywords:** Students' Perceptions; Group Work; EFL Classes; Survey Study

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Interaction can play an essential role in addressing the issue of students' group work and teaching and learning process. Good interaction between students and teachers will construct good chemistry and create a conducive class situation. Teachers cannot only apply the available theory to teach, but they should also know the actual class conditions to adjust with the students. Teachers' interactions may effectively elevate students' motivation and compliance with a course that the teachers give [1]. The students' naturalistic learning conditions can be seen from their perceptions of their EFL experiences, opinions about teachers, views of instructional activities and approaches, and expressions of satisfaction with their progress in the classroom [2]. Mismatches between teachers' intentions and learners' interpretations may occur due to distinctive preferences concerning classroom aims and events; thus, harmonizing students' and teachers' agreements is prominent because the perceptions have crucial theoretical, pedagogical,

and programmatic implications [3]; [4].

Knowing the benefits of students' perceptions in EFL class brings a decent consideration to the teacher in planning their classroom management instead of the teachers' views. Nowadays, education is facing the 21st century. Based on the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2015), 21st-century skills encompass critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation. They are increasingly being recognized as attributes that separate students who are prepared for a more complex life and work environment in the 21st century from those who are not.

Those challenges seem to fit with modern teaching techniques such as group work or interchangeably cooperative or collaborative learning, which can be considered to fulfill the demands of the challenges mentioned above. Group work is aimed at being an effective method to be applied in the class since it has many benefits. [5] believed that group work facilitates students' learning and helps the language class become more motivating for students. Based on her teaching experience, she believes group work can help students enjoy language classes and learn more than individual activities. [6] uttered that students, working in groups, may acquire better achievement and satisfaction with their own learning experiences than those who do not. Group work may also create supportive and comfortable teaching and learning environment [7]; [8]. Moreover, it boosts critical thinking, reasoning, problem-solving strategies, self-accountability, and willingness to cooperate as a team.

However, it is undeniable that some students do not feel the benefits. The active students may enjoy group work, where they can discuss their academic issues. However, the active students may feel annoyed due to the same marks regardless of the unequal contribution [7]; [9]. The active students also believe that group work is their handicap because the unmotivated students flaunt laziness and irresponsibility in their sacrifices [10]; [11].

Knowing the privilege and drawback of group work mentioned above, this paper aims to investigate senior high school students' perceptions of group work in EFL classes since myriad studies on students' perceptions regarding group work have previously been investigated by recruiting university students. The current study also plays a significant role in the class environment to decrease the misunderstanding of teachers' exemplary implementation in their classes. Yet, students' perceptions of group work are essential to investigate. Furthermore, this study is designed to examine the issues, advantages, and disadvantages of senior high school students' perceptions of group work in English classes, the conditions for successful group work, and the influence of their perception on their achievement.

The present study aims to investigate senior high school students' perceptions of group work in EFL classes to decrease the misunderstanding of teachers' good implementation in their classes. Senior high school students were taken as the samples since many studies take university students as their samples, yet their perceptions should also be considered. "What are students' perceptions toward group work?" was raised as the primary research question, divided into four branches of research questions to explore the students' perceptions toward group work. Those were students' perceptions toward

the advantages of group work, students' perceptions toward the disadvantages of group work, students' certain conditions for successful group work, and students' perceptions toward group work in English classes, which influenced their achievement in English.

Henceforth, the study recruits diminutive participant scales of students (51) at a state senior high school in Malang, East Java using a convenience sampling technique. Thus, the study cannot portray vast perceptions of a population [12]. The current study also only focuses on cooperative learning group work.

## 2 METHOD

The current study investigated students' perceptions of group work activity in EFL class, piloting a survey design with a convenience sampling technique [12]. An offline questionnaire adopted from [13] was administered to a hundred senior students at a state senior high school in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Nevertheless, only fifty-one students filled out the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to express their perceptions of the 22 questions in Bahasa Indonesia to help them understand and avoid misunderstandings in each given statement.

The first questionnaire session provided a short researchers' prefaces, the aim of the study, and information that the questionnaire would not affect their scores and that their names would be recorded as anonymous. The 22 items encompass 21 close-ended items using the Likert scale and one regular close-ended item. The items were implicitly categorized under four themes: 1-7 interpreted social or interpersonal, 8-13 talked about academics, 14-16 talked about fairness in group work, and 17-22 items were about how they perceived some conditions for successful group work.

The second session inquired about the respondents' demographical information (age, gender, the spectrum of studying English, and the spectrum of their experience in group work learning strategy in the school). In addition, the last session inquired about the respondents' names and phone numbers (optional). This information would be used later to communicate personally with some respondents to inquire about profound data. Furthermore, the researchers underpinned the questionnaire data by observing how the students worked in the group through field notes. The students, however, did not realize that they were being observed to maintain the natural condition of what was going on in the group. Thus, the students could naturally do the activities while working in the group. [14] said that it is important to proceed with observation to authenticate what students said and what the students actually did.

The data from the questionnaire were presented as percentages and shown clearly in tables and diagrams. There were positive and negative statements in the questionnaire. In analyzing the result of the questionnaire, the researchers coded the positive statements as: "4" strongly agree, "3" agree, "2" disagree, and "1" strongly disagree. Reversely, for negative statements, the scoring system was "4" for strongly disagree, "3" for disagree, "2" for agree, and "1" for disagree.

After knowing the average of each question, the researchers grouped the responses under each aspect (social, academic, fairness, and conditions for successful group work). Since the questionnaire was close-ended, the responses were quantitatively

interpreted. In addition, data observation (field note) was also inserted to strengthen the data and report the natural group conditions.

### 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The current study discussed students' perceptions of group work in EFL classes. The findings will be discussed, encompassing social, academic, fairness, and conditions for successful group work.

#### 3.1 Interpersonal Aspect

**Table 1.** The average score of the social or interpersonal aspects

No	Question	Average score
1.	Group work allows me to know my friends better.	3.48
2.	Working in a group helps me improve my communication skills.	3.29
3.	I can respect others' opinion through group work.	3.40
4.	I frequently experience alienation from my group's dominating members.	2.74
5.	Working in group tends to waste more time to talk than to work.	1.62
6.	I frequently argue with my team member due to different working styles.	2.18
7.	I can hone my leadership abilities through group project	3.07

The respondents (students) were questioned about their interaction with their friends through group work activities. The finding reflected that the highest spot was placed by question 1, which talked about "having group work may make students know their friends' better," with the percentage either 'agreed' (51.86%) or 'strongly agreed' (48.14%) that group work makes them know each other better. It means that all of the students (100%) showed a positive attitude toward the question. The findings showed that students' perceptions should be taken into account because students' perceptions is part of evaluative dimensions [15]. Moreover, group members may communicate and establish relationships with some development in time [16]; [17].

The second position was placed by question 3 as the advantage of having group work. Although the favors differed from one another, it still claimed the positive attitude toward group work was very high. Group work means they may train to communicate and solve problems in time [18]; [19]. Therefore, they can develop their public speaking and communication skills. Collaboration implies direct interaction among individuals to produce a product and involves negotiations, discussions, and accommodating others' perspectives [20]; [21]. The top three chart was question 2, where 70.37% agreed, and 29.63% strongly agreed with the statement, "Having group work may make their communication skill better." Their compactness may lead them to the idea on questions 3 and 2 that by having group work, students might able to appreciate others' ideas and develop their communication skills that include the leadership category.

Moreover, the students chose "through group work, my leadership skills can be more developed" (question 7) as the next advantage the percentage of agree 55.56% and strongly agree 25.92% because group work may foster critical thinking skills, accountability, problem-solving strategies, and reasoning [22]; [7]; [23].

However, the active students might overcome the problem easily and exclude their teammates, as in question 4. It is true that the students often focus on the task given by the teacher and do the task individually as they please, which is against the principle of group work itself (teamwork) [5]. It will make some of the students feel frustrated and underrated by the others.

### 3.2 Academic Aspect

**Table 2.** The average score of items under the academic aspects

No	Question	Average score
8.	When I study in a group, I can effectively understand the material.	2.81
9.	Studying in a group helps me tackle any problems with the material.	3.07
10.	Studying in a group helps me think more critically than studying alone.	3.18
11.	Studying in a group help me feel more motivated than studying alone.	3.00
12.	Working in a group helps me retain the material better than studying alone.	2.92
13.	My English skills improve more when I study in a group.	2.96

The finding portrayed that group work can boost the student's critical thinking and problem-solving as the highest advantage (questions 10 and 9). Thus, having group work validated the students' achievements and critical thinking skills [24]. [25] also confirmed that group work might pave the way to argue, defend an argument, question, and convince others. Furthermore, the claims also confirmed the fieldnote that the students tried to think about finishing the work and discussing it with each other through the group work.

Furthermore, item 11 was placed third with the percentage of agree (48.14%) and strongly agree (25.93%) that the students feel more motivated through the existence of group work. However, more than a quarter of the students (25.93%) denied that group work can motivate them. Some factors might bother their feeling that some students get the same rewards for doing trivial work, misconception, students may not take the work seriously, and certain students in a group only work with their partners, leaving other group members [26]; [27].

Next, the students perceived that group work might improve their English and material understanding in items 12 and 13. Finally, the last items under the education aspect indicated that 40.74% of students 'agreed' and 22.22% 'strongly agreed' with question 8 about understanding the lesson more effectively while working in a group. The findings, in line with [28], indicated that students who had previously experienced group work proved significantly more durability in memorizing the lesson than those

who had not experienced group work. The result indicated that group work could be one of the advantageous resources for lifelong education [13]. [29] also believed that group work may assist the students to enhance their material understanding efficiently.

### 3.3 Fairness Aspect

**Table 3.** The average score of items under fairness aspect

No	Question	Average Score
14.	I believe that there is always at least one friend who does not work in a group.	2.07
15.	The workload between group members is frequently unequal.	2.18
16.	I hate when the teacher assigns equal grades to all group members.	2.92

In this aspect, the respondents were questioned about whether they hated it if all the members were given the same grading (question 16). It is important to note that all items in this aspect are negative statements coded reversely. The students negatively perceived their attitude toward the statement. 51.86% of students disagreed, and 25.93% strongly disagreed with the statement that they hate it if all the members get the same score, confirming that teachers should not give equal scores to unmotivated students in group work [30]; [31].

The students also perceived item 15 (the workload between group members is frequently unequal) as their second place in this aspect, followed by the last item (question 14), talking about at least a student who does not work in the group or has the least workload than others. The students believed that the workload among the members is often unequal, confirmed by [32] and [25] that some students work more while working in groups because some students get praise for doing trivial work.

### 3.4 Condition for Successful Group Work

**Table 4.** The average score of items under the conditions for successful group work

No	Question	Average Score
17	Group work will be more effective when the teacher selects the group members.	2.92
18	I am pleased to collaborate with group members of different competency levels.	3.14
19	I believe that creating a unique form to evaluate each student's performance in secret (only the teachers know) is necessary to be more equitable.	2.77
20	Group work is more productive in school hours than after hours.	3.22

21	I believe that educators should supervise the students in creating a productive group work.	3.14
22	The optimal group members, in my view, is typically.... a. 2-3 b. 3-4 c. 4-5 d. Other, please specify	

The students also perceived item 15 (the workload between group members is frequently unequal) as their second place in this aspect, followed by the last item (question 14), talking about at least a student who does not work in the group or has the least workload than others. The students believed that the workload among the members is often unequal, confirmed by [32] and [25] that some students work more while working in groups because some students get praise for doing trivial work.

The finding under the conditions for successful group work reflected that the students promoted question 20 (time efficiency) as the highest advantage. 62.96% of students agreed, and 29.63% strongly agreed that group work is more effective during school hours. [33] pointed out that group work during school hours is more effective since scheduling meetings with other members is more accessible. Then, the students perceived that they favored having different levels of team members in a group in question 18. The result found that 44.45% of students agreed, and 37.04% strongly agreed that they favored having group members with different levels. Students with low ability need higher-level students to discuss. It allows low achievers to learn from higher achievers, eventually improving their performance [32].

Hence, 62.50% of the students agreed, and 25% strongly agreed with question 21 as they preferred teachers' instruction about practical group work. It reflects how important students' perception is in preventing misunderstandings between teachers and students and in building an effective class environment. Mismatches between teachers' intentions and learners' interpretations may occur due to distinctive preferences concerning classroom aims and events; thus, harmonizing students' and teachers' agreements is prominent because the perceptions have crucial theoretical, pedagogical, and programmatic implications [3]. Thus, by knowing the teachers' instructions, students will have concepts that match the teacher's.

The fourth position was question 17, which discussed teachers' selection on group work. The students perceived that 48.15% agreed, and 22.22% strongly agreed that the teacher should select the group members because they preferred to work with their friends and excluded others [24]. Next, question 19 confirmed a positive attitude, with 40.74% of students agreeing and 22.22% strongly agreeing that a special sheet should be used to assess individual performance in secret (only teachers know) to maintain fair scoring and students' motivation to involve the group discussion intensively [34].

The last item discussed students' preferences for having ideal group members to have an ideal group work. The students favored having 4-5 persons as the ideal quantity to have group work. Students' favor of having the quantity of group work must be considered since the larger the number of members, the more inefficient group work they had. As [35] stated, more prominent groups may decrease each member's opportunity to participate and often result in some members not actively contributing. Moreover, some

students put up their preferences for individual work because they perceive their group members will get the same praise for their minimal effort [36]; [32].

### **3.5 Students' Perception and Their Achievement**

Finally, the researchers integrate the students' perceptions and achievements to witness the authenticity of the data. The result showed that the average score toward the students' perception was 2.87, indicating a positive attitude. Then, the average achievement score was 87, indicating a decent score. The finding demonstrated that having group work was beneficial for students' achievement, confirmed by the field note. Students who participated in group work tended to have better grades than they who did not [37]; [38]. Therefore, many teaching environments nowadays involve their students in student-centered learning, making them more active in classroom activities. The students may learn effectively when actively involved in the classroom group work activity [39].

## **4 CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, senior high school students have a positive attitude toward the positive and negative statements about the privilege and drawbacks of students' in-terpersonal group work presented in the first aspect of the questionnaire. In the academic aspect (positive statements), the students positively perceived the items as the advantages of group work. The next aspect is fairness, in which all statements are negative. The fairness aspects enacted were that the students despised when the teacher gave equal scores to the careless students and imbalanced the workload among members. The last aspect led to the advantages of group work. The students positively perceived some conditions for successful group work. Finally, the students' perceptions supported their achievement since they drew high scores on both aspects (questionnaire and achievement). Therefore, the ex-istence of students' perceptions needs to be considered for the activities in group work, which might be valuably advantageous for students to unpack the genuine students' interest and to avoid misunderstanding of teachers having good implementation in their classes. Yet, the students feel unhappy with the decisions made by their teachers.

In addition, the current study focuses on portraying the students' perspective on the advantages, disadvantages, and achievements of having collaborative work. Moreover, many aspects should be reconsidered for future researchers willing to examine further the perceptions of senior high school students on having group work. Not stopping only exploring the perceptions of the senior high school students on having group work is suggested to future researchers. It is suggested that the correlation method be included after surveying to determine the correlations between males and females in group work.



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