

Question 4:

In pair work, how often do you...?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Ignore your partner,	71	13	14	2	0
Talk about something else in Farsi,	9	35	34	22	1
Sleep,	91	8	1	0	0
Read the next few pages of your textbook,	39	35	17	8	1
Do other homework,	81	13	2	2	2
Look at your diary,	68	15	14	2	1
Look out of the window,	44	37	14	5	0
Sit quietly and do nothing,	52	23	19	5	0

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	mean
About the students	1	2	3	4	5	
Did they like the course,	0	1	7	10	5	3.8
Enthusiasm in studying?	0	3	6	6	8	3.8
Did they preview the material?	2	5	8	6	2	3.4
Did they understand content?	0	4	7	9	3	3.7
Were they satisfied?	0	2	4	7	10	3.7

Appendix

Questionnaire

Question 1:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
■ I like to learn by... Reading.	20	32	23	5	1
Studying grammar.	8	39	21	28	4
Talking with the teacher.	32	40	19	6	1
Listening to the tapes.	20	42	28	8	3
Repeating after the teacher.	18	37	34	11	1
Pair work.	35	42	21	3	1
Translating from Farsi.	7	32	43	15	4

Question 2:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
■ Pair work is good because I can practice new words and grammar.	11	47	27	13	0
■ Pair work is not good because I don't like talking in English with a Iranian person.	1	5	19	53	22
■ Pair work is good because I can learn new words from my partner.	10	40	34	16	1
■ Pair work is not good because my mistakes are not corrected.	4	22	26	33	16
■ Pair work is good because I can choose the words I want to say.	29	46	24	8	1
■ Pair work is not good because I like working alone.	0	4	8	45	43
■ Pair work is good because I learn better by doing something.	19	61	17	3	19

Question 3:

In the pair work when you or your partner don't understand, what do you do?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Give up.	12	34	43	11	1
Try to find a different word.	4	14	29	42	11
Speak in Farsi.	1	8	39	45	8
Guess your partner's meaning.	0	10	37	40	12
Start the conversation again.	2	22	36	32	8
Gesture or mime.	11	24	29	29	8
Translate from Farsi into English.	3	22	41	30	3
Use a dictionary.	0	4	8	45	43
Just wait. Maybe your partner will help.	8	25	40	24	4

Conclusion

Questionnaire data can yield varied interpretations, along the lines of the half full or half empty glass, and indeed looking at the tables one could be optimistic about student's beliefs about the value of pair work tasks. However the tendency to give up or to speak in Farsi indicate perhaps that some students do not have a clear grasp of the key reason for pair work: that languages are not learned through memorization of language, but internalizing language that is made comprehensible through persistence and an emphasis on understandable conversational interactions. Therefore, the classroom teacher needs to raise student's awareness of the importance of pair work and to teach strategies enabling the student to continue the conversation. After all, simply put, one learns how to "do" conversation by practicing it, and it is only when there is an incentive and a need to communicate that the necessary communicative "charge" is introduced.

References

- Allright, D. & Bailey, K. (1994). *Focus on the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Bervick, R. & Ross, S. (1989). *Motivation after matriculation. Are Japanese learners of English still alive after exam hell?* *JALT Journal*, 11(2), 193-210.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by Principles*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: PrenticeHall Regents.
- Ellis, R. (1988). *Classroom second language development*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.
- Good, T. & Brophy, J. (1990). *Educational psychology*. New York: Longman.
- Hancock, M. (1997). *Behind classroom code switching: Layering and language choice in L2 learner interaction*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(2), 217-235.
- Hyland, B. (1994). *Learning styles of Japanese students*. *JALT Journal*, 16(1) 55-74.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (1991). *Language-learning tasks: teacher intention and learner interpretation*. *ELT Journal*, 45(2), 98-107.
- Long, M. & Porter, P. (1985). *Group work, interlanguage talk and second language acquisition*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(2), 207-228.
- Monbusho (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture) (1997). *Remaking universities: Continuing reform of higher education*. <http://www.monbu.go.jp>.
- McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1990). *Hidden agendas: The role of the learner in programme implementation*. In R. Johnson (ed.), *The second language curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. et. Al. (1992). *Language learning styles: Research and practical considerations for teaching in the multicultural ESL/EFL classroom*. *System*, 20(4), 437-456.
- Ozeki, K. (1995). *Learning styles of Japanese students*. *Proceedings of the 1995 JALT conference* pp. 120-125.
- Pica, T. (1987). *Second language acquisition, social interaction, and the classroom*. *Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 3-21.
- Prabhu, N. (1987). *Second language pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Reid, J. (1987). *The Learning Style Preferences of ESL Students*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(1), 87-111.
- Richards, J. & Schmidt, R. (1986). *Conversational analysis*. In J. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-29). London: Longman.
- Rogers, C. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80's*. New York: Macmillan.
- Stevick, E. (1980). *Teaching language. A way and ways*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Tarone, E. & Yule, G. (1989). *Focus on the Language Learner*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Templin, S. (1997). *Mombusho-Approved Textbooks*. *The Language Teacher*, 21(6), 7-15.
- Varonis, E. & Gass, S. (1985). *Non-native/non-native conversations: A model for negotiation of meaning*. *Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 71-90.

low on-task persistence. Although there is a sense of pleasure in stating meaning that is felt to be one's own, there is a danger of frustration as meanings are neither well-defined nor easy to articulate. Both Prabhu (1987) and Pica recommend information-gap activities, involving the transfer of information in front of each student, rather than having them always come up with their own. The participants must work equally and cooperatively to complete the task, and to reach a successful conclusion, individual participants cannot withhold information, nor can contributions be ignored. A classroom event is created in which students strive to make themselves understood.

Hancock (1997) has noted that during pair work of participants of the same mother tongue, the speakers switch between a "literal frame" as their normal selves and a "non-literal frame" when they are speaking the target language. The latter implies a performance and is "on record," suggesting that it is for an audience. When participants are tape-recorded they attempt to keep off record asides off the tape, and so during regular pair work practice there is a need to heighten task-awareness to encourage extended discourse. The idea of an audience keeping the student "on record" is crucial, yet it is impossible for the teacher to be everywhere at once. An idealized listener needs to be created, with tape recorders one solution. If using recorders is not practical, using dummy microphones or appealing to imagination to create such an idealized audience can also be tried.

Keeping the students in English

Pair work does not always succeed in creating natural patterns, as task design often makes learners so intent on "formulating their contributions as determined by the activity rubric" (McCarthy, 1991, p.128), that they pay little attention to the contributions of others. This leads to students ignoring the natural patterns of back

channel and utterance completion. Richards and Schmidt (1983) show that pair work conversations consist of Q-A-Q-A exchanges. Learners need to answer, then give extra information and then follow up by asking another question. Awareness training in how turns are given and gained may help sustain on-task concentration, and tape recording of pair work interactions may be useful here as well. Students can be asked to consider communicative problems and evaluate the success of various strategies. Lexical realizations of turn management can be taught directly, and paralinguistic drop in pitch, head turning, eye contact and gesture can all be made apparent through authentic video highlighting the student's own communicative lack and significant cultural differences. The teaching of "conversation" requires more than parroting dialogues, in lip service to communication through situational encounters; it also must focus on strategies for conversational interactions requiring more than correct, grammatical sentences. Elicitation devices to receive topic clarification, echoing parts of sentences for recycling and topic shifts can be covered by considering both the transactional and interactional uses of language.

Before undertaking a role-play exercise, brainstorming and topic generation through whole class discussion of related language establishes schemata and should cover vocabulary that the student will want to say. After introductory activities, the students practice a dialogue that serves as a model, and then performs a role-play with cue cards that have been prepared by the teacher from authentic dialogues. The students then listen to, or preferably view on video, native speakers performing a role-play and then compare the differences between language functions and meanings. Feedback leads to heightened awareness and the learners can introduce effective means and a range of expressions into their strategic competence.

would encourage greater on-task persistence.

The results here can be interpreted positively with only a small percentage of students claiming that they never use strategies when there are misunderstandings in pair work. However a majority of students admitted they at least sometimes gave up and over 90% spoke in Farsi. In other words, most learners at some point can not adjust their speaking to make the speech production comprehensible to the listener and are thus reducing chances of language acquisition. Varonis and Gass (1985) note that learners will not acquire language by being talked at, they have to be actively involved in negotiation both the quality and the quantity. Comprehensibility is crucial in determining whether spoken language works as input.

Letting the students into the picture

Looking back, Class A fulfilled the task-goals and was highly motivated. They perceived the similarities between pair work and "real world" dialogues, while Class B was unaware of the objectives at either the curriculum or individual lesson levels. Although they have preconceptions about what form a learning experience should take, they may be ambivalent about what form a learning experience should take, they may be ambivalent about expressing them, in the belief that it is the teacher's job to teach. If the teacher adopts a less authoritarian role, the students may feel that the teacher is not doing the job properly. Since students often translated or talked about something else during pair work, they may well have felt that the purpose of the activity was relaxation rather than promotion of language acquisition. Therefore it should be no surprise for learners to let FL communicative opportunities pass if it is more convenient to use Farsi. Yet by doing so, they are missing opportunities to create modified output.

In addressing a range of learning styles which are modified by the teacher when explaining the

value of "communicative" activities, Tarone and Yule (1989, p.9) talk of ways in which both teacher and student can fulfill their expectations of what counts in the learning experience: "fight 'em, join 'em, or channel 'em, "with the last being perhaps the most effective, Brown (1994, p. 176) refers to "setting the climate": impressing on the students the necessity of pair-work practice for future success. When students feel that the directions for a task are not clear, or are unsure of the purpose, "you are inviting students to take short cuts via the native language." Therefore, the teacher needs to encourage knowledge of the most frequently used rubrics and using them in an initial learning exercise or game should ensure future understanding. Brown goes on to say that appealing to motivational factors is necessary for the learners to see the real uses of English in their own lives. Stevick (1980) has noted that successful communication is dependent on attentiveness and involvement in the discourse by all the participants, leading to necessary "charge."

As learning takes place through voluntary interaction, the threat of the classroom can be alleviated if learners are psychologically prepared. In order to impress upon students the importance of practice for success, the teacher could prepare a handout for the first class written in the native language for the students to read because they will be more willing to participate if they understand how classes operate.

Appropriate pair work tasks

Interestingly, Pica (1987) shows that modified social interaction was not an inevitable outcome of student's working together, but instead was conditioned by the nature of the classroom pair or group work activities in which they participated. During the "penguin in a tuxedo" activity, participants did little work to clarify or confirm message content, or check comprehensibility. This leads to nonparticipation, truncated dialogues and

Student Mismatch

Some students in class B were ignoring their partners, displaying a lack of "learner receptiveness" (Allright and Bailey, 1994, p. 158), whereby "able" students may feel "they have nothing to gain" from interacting with "less efficient" students who in turn feel demoralized by the perceived superior performance of their partner.

Motivational Mismatch

Berwick and Ross (1989) write that the pressure of university entrance exams channels motivation to learn into proficiency with little communicative value. This extrinsic motivation drops off when the student enters a university and English is often seen as having little purpose.

"Mug and Jug" Theory

Arguably, previous learning experiences during high school with the near synonymous grammar-translation approach with its overemphasis on language rules have influenced the students. Even though the Monbusho seems to support more communicative teaching (Ministry, 1997), teachers have complained that approved textbooks are boring and lack authentic language and communicative activities (Templin, 1997). High school education is based essentially on the traditional "mug and jug" theory (Rogers, 1983, p. 136), in which the teachers ask themselves, "How can I make the jug hold still while I fill it from the jug with these facts that the curriculum planners and I regard as valuable?" The student may see the role of the teacher to impart knowledge, and so the communicative classroom, where feedback and correction play less of a role, may call for a cultural leap and thus disconcert students.

The Rationale for the Questionnaire

To get some tentative data about these

questions, the researcher decided to give a questionnaire based on attitudes towards pair work to the students. Would the students, as Hyland (1994) observed, be more accepting of pair work over a period of time, or would the findings back up the observations of Class B that pair work is not always seen as a valid learning instrument? recent interest in learner-centered education implies that all who participate in learning have a legitimate interest in its quality and progress. Students are often the most logical evaluators of the quality and effectiveness of course elements. The Monbusho (1997) also recognizes that improvements in both lesson content and teaching method rely on self-monitoring by teachers and student evaluation of the extent to which classes are meeting their expectations.

Results

There were 161 replies, which were converted to percentages. Due to rounding, the figures do not always total 100%. After 15 weeks the students appear to have become acclimatized, to a degree, to the teaching methods of foreign teachers. There is a spread of learning styles with only translation being seen as less than beneficial. It is clear that the preferred learning instrument is talking to the teacher, with pair work also highly favoured. In the absence of direct contact with the teacher, pair work is seen as the next best option.

This seemingly contradicts Reid's (1987) results that students had a dislike of group work, as 80% stated that they learned better by doing something, with 88% disagreeing that working alone is good. However, over 40% doubt whether pair work provides sufficient practice, and 48% saying that they doubt whether they could learn new words from their partner, indicating that they perhaps undervalue, or are unaware of, the benefits of negotiating meaning. Perhaps students need to be shown the cognitive benefits of negotiation, which

replied that he did not know for sure but it could mean a public restroom, or a refrigerated area or perhaps directions to a ballroom for social gathering. This was evidently an unsatisfactory answer for some students, one of whom flung down his pen in exasperation as if to say, "Now, what was the point of that exercise?"

Why is there a gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation?

Nunan (1990) writes that the effectiveness of a programme depends on the expectations of the learners, and if their subjective needs and perceptions related to the learning process are not taken into account, there can be a "mismatch" of ideas. Kumaravadivelu (1991) in agreement notes that "the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation of a given task, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes" (p.98). Class B, therefore seemed to have misconceptions and some possible explanations are summarized below:

Strategic Misconception

This refers to teacher and learner perceptions of the objectives of learning tasks. Ellis (1998, p. 202) draws a distinction between a "content" syllabus which states the target knowledge as a product, and a "procedural" syllabus which describes the kind of behaviour which the learner will have to undertake in order to develop second language knowledge. In the "penguin in a tuxedo" exercise, learning was seen as a cognitive task which needs automaticity and integration of skills through meaningful opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of modals and adverbs. The aim of the task was to generate discussion and negotiated conversation. All too often the students used the simplest strategies to reach a conclusion as quickly as possible, since they interpreted the accomplishment of the task to be its successful

completion, rather than sustained discussion.

Pedagogic Misconception

The students' observed confusion of process and final product led them to perceive me as the ultimate supplier of the correct answer at the end of the task. Therefore, the students felt that they did not have to try very hard or persist in coming up with an answer during the exercise. This led to the frustration the researcher noted earlier of a student flinging down his pen when the researcher stated that the researcher was unsure of a symbol's meaning. The students did not have the satisfaction of a concrete answer in front of them.

Methodological Mismatch

Good and Brophy (1990, p. 409) note that task relevance is the learner's perception of how instruction is related to their personal needs or goals. Those instrumental needs are served when the content of the lesson matches what the students themselves believe they need. Some students may prefer traditional types of learning with a desire for accuracy and a clear sense of progression. When students value error correction highly, the communicative approach, with its game-like activities and pictures, may seem artificial and be relatively unpopular.

Learning Style Mismatch

Oxford et al. (1992, p. 440) write that learning styles "biologically and developmentally imposed sets of characteristics that make some teaching methods wonderful for some and terrible for others." Reid (1987), Hyland (1994), and Ozeki (1995) conducted questionnaire surveys and concluded that students prefer visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and individual learning to pair or group work. Many of the students' classroom orientation influenced their behaviour particularly in terms of value placed on, and attention given to learning tasks.

the teacher to have a rest from doing the talking? Are our students in Iran often using pair work dyads, equally convinced of its value? Many come through a rigorous university entrance exam, preparation for which often entail traditional, teacher – fronted lessons, and so perhaps have not been socialized to pair work as a learning tool. This action research aims to examine learner perceptions and attempts to explain teacher and learner mismatches.

Key Words: task, perception, questionnaire, dyad, attitude, action research.

Backgrounds

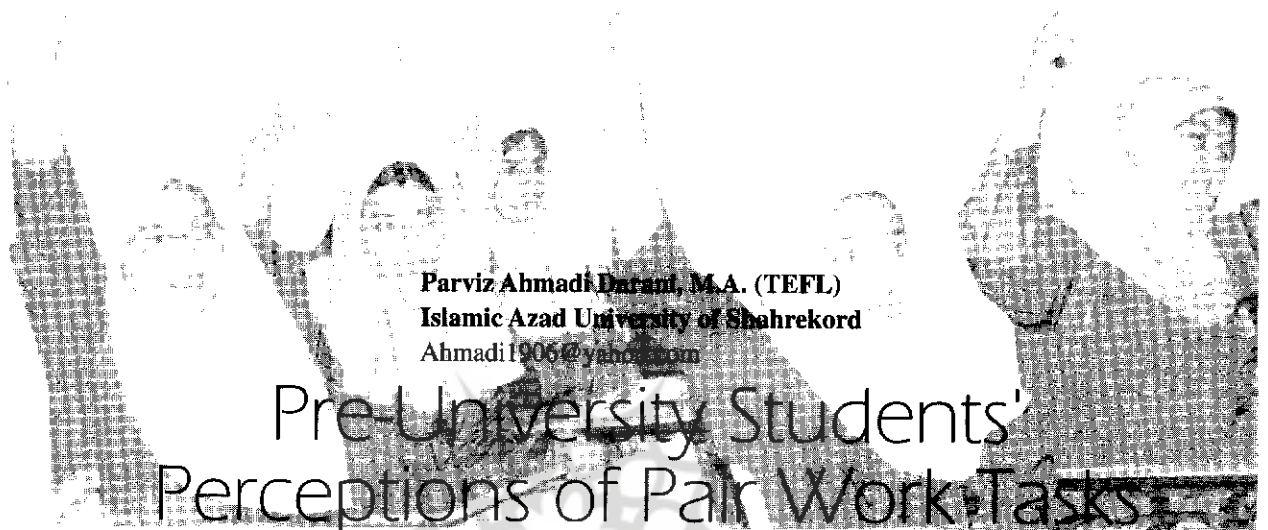
Long and Porter (1985) outline some arguments for pair work, noting that it gives students greater practice opportunities, and allows students to escape from traditional teacher – fronted lessons where the teacher often asks questions to which the answer is already known. It also individualizes the lesson, as the student is away from the public arena and is thus free to speak without inhibition with classmates rather than practicing language for its own sake. Slightly more complicated is the claim that pair work involves negotiation of meaning or communicative consensus which leads to grammatical learning. Arguing that "attentiveness and involvement" are necessary for successful communication Gass and Seliger (1991) maintain, "it is precisely active involvement that is the facilitator of communication in that it charges the input and allows it to penetrate deeply" (p.219).

In two English classes at different high schools the researcher assigned the same pair work activities in the same week. Students each received a hand - out which the researcher had prepared of symbols ranging from everyday traffic signs to fairly obscure symbols found on packaging. The object of the task was (in pairs) to use modals (such as may, might, could, etc.) and adverbs (probably, perhaps, and maybe). The students were to ask and answer agree and disagree, concede opinions and explain interpretations and generally to "negotiate meaning."

Students in Class A attend a small, private high

school. There were twenty five students, studying English. Class B consisted of forty two. A managed to fulfil the goals of the activity most satisfactorily. The researcher had to draw the exercise to a close, as the students were so engrossed in attempting to communicate their ideas and to share opinions that the exercise went over the allotted time. It created a humorous atmosphere and the task obviously stretched their imagination. A symbol of a penguin wearing a bow tie and tuxedo led to some interesting speculations. The students were aware of, and sympathetic towards their partners, attempted to keep conversations going and paraphrased when misunderstandings occurred.

However, in contrast, many students in Class B seemed to display a poor motivation to learn. Using Good and Brophy's definition, (1990, p. 47) this meant a tendency to find the task meaningless, which led to a low persistence in on-task behaviour. In short, many students did not seem to want to put their language skills to communicative use, consistently choosing the quickest route to close the conversation, often without any negotiation. The researcher did observe students engrossed in conversations, but in their mother tongue, and not about the task, while many were desultorily flicking through pages of their textbook or looking out of the window. Perhaps most unfortunate of all, some were studiously ignoring their partners, indicating that they probably had not even attempted to start the task. Overall, they seemed to be waiting for the "proper" lesson to resume. During the subsequent class discussion the researcher was asked for his interpretation of the penguin in a tuxedo. Recalling the imaginative responses of Class A, the researcher



Parviz Ahmadi Darani, M.A. (TEFL)
Islamic Azad University of Shahrekord
Ahmadi1906@yahoo.com

Pre-University Students' Perceptions of Pair Work Tasks

چکیده

با توجه به تحولات شگرف در نظریات زبان آموزی و تمایل معنادار به سمت دانش آموز محوری، به جای معلم محوری در سال های اخیر، هیچ برنامه ی آموزشی پویا نمی تواند خود را از این روند فزاینده مستثنا ببیند. بی شک کارایی برنامه ی آموزشی، به انتظارات دانش آموزان آن وابسته است و اگر این نیازها و تصورات که مربوط به فرایند یادگیری هستند، مورد توجه قرار نگیرند، ممکن است به نبود تجانس در امر یادگیری منجر شوند. این ناهمخوانی را می توان به نبود تجانس راهبردی، آموزشی، روش شناختی، یادگیری، دانش آموزی و انگیزه ای تقسیم کرد. هدف اصلی از این اقدام پژوهشی، بررسی درک دانش آموزان پیش دانشگاهی از تکالیف درسی در گروه های دو عضوی در کلاس، و همچنین توضیح فقدان تجانس انتظارات معلم و دانش آموزان از یکدیگر است. به منظور دستیابی به داده های احتمالی، پرسش نامه ای تهیه شد که حاوی سؤالاتی مربوط به نگرش دانش آموزان نسبت به تکالیف جفتی در کلاس بود. جامعه ی آماری این تحقیق را ۶۴ دانش آموز مرکز پیش دانشگاهی در دو دبیرستان دولتی و غیرانتفاعی در شهر اصفهان (ناحیه ۳) تشکیل می داد. جمعاً ۱۶۱ پاسخ جمع آوری شد که نتایج آن برای سهولت به صورت درصد ارائه شد. بیش از ۴۰٪ دانش آموزان شک داشتند که تکالیف جفتی می تواند مفید باشد و هم چنین ۴۸٪ آن ها نسبت به فراگیری واژگان جدید از این طریق مردد بودند که این امر می تواند مربوط به عدم آگاهی آن ها نسبت به کارایی این تکنیک باشد. در دبیرستان دولتی بیش از ۹۰٪ دانش آموزان تلاش برای ایجاد ارتباط را زود رها کرده و ترجیح می دادند به زبان فارسی ارتباط ایجاد کنند.

کلیدواژه ها: تکالیف، درک، پرسش نامه، گروه دو عضوی، نگرش، اقدام پژوهشی.

Abstract

Teachers have for many years used pair work as a panacea for large classes and the accompanying problem of individual speaking time. However, do your students share our enthusiasm for the pedagogical and psychological reason for pair work, or do they see it in such terms as the chance for