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Original article

An Investigation of the Effect of Cooperative Learning on EFL Student Proficiency Level and Attitude in a Sample of Libyan Students

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Abstract
The new school system in Libya comes with a lot of potential changes to the traditional way of teaching. One of them is using cooperative learning as the basic learning strategy in the classroom. The study aims to explore whether cooperative language learning in the school system is feasible and whether it enhances the proficiency level and the attitude of students' English proficiency as revealed by their abilities. The study also aims to measure the students' attitudes towards cooperative learning. Data was collected using Google Forms via a questionnaire consisting of 8 questions. The first question addresses gender, while the remaining questions consist of a single item each—with the exception of the fifth question, which contains 5 items; the seventh question, which includes 4 items; and the final question, which comprises 9 items. The total number of respondents was 101 students at a secondary school (Ajelaty City). The data were analyzed by using SPSS program software. Quantitative data were analysed using frequency and percentage (demographic variables). The findings show that most respondents were female, accounting for 57.4% of the total sample. Also, the findings show that most participants hold a positive attitude towards students' perceptions when learning English. Also, the data reflect a strong positive trend in student participation, suggesting that the vast majority of students engage effectively within the English language learning environment. According to the reason you take English classes were skill improvement, represented by (54.5%), then want to know more about English, represented by (22.8%). On the other hand, the main reason why you rarely participate in class the main reason was language proficiency; a very large proportion of participants (84.2%) attribute the lack of classroom participation to the belief that their language knowledge is insufficient. Overall, the data reveal a highly positive attitude among students toward cooperative learning, as reflected by a strong composite mean score of 3.67. Notably, there is a complete absence of "strongly disagree" responses (0%) across all criteria, suggesting that students generally reject any negative view of cooperative work.
Keywords. Libyan Education System, Cooperative Learning, Students' Perceptions.

Introduction

At present, Libyan high school students seek to develop their English language proficiency. Many educational institutes in Libya still use traditional teaching methods where teachers focus more on some language skills like writing and reading, ignoring some other important skills. Some new approaches and methods are required to enhance the communicative ability of the students by developing their writing, reading, listening and speaking abilities in English. In contrast with other subjects, teaching English is a complicated task that needs a skilful teacher who can create different techniques and methods. Regarding language skills, both teachers and students make efforts to develop and integrate the four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Sometimes it is hard to make students master the four skills and the social skills at the same time. Proficiency in learning a foreign language differs from one individual to another. Therefore, teachers need to develop and create various methods, techniques, and approaches which can reduce or minimise the differences within a classroom. Some students encounter some challenges such as low self-esteem, inability to work cooperatively and underachievement in academic work. Such challenges can be removed when students work together [1].

Learning a new language makes students learn a new culture; otherwise, social interactions in this language can be difficult for them. More to the point, students of English as a Second Language (ESL) do not have that sufficient social skills to be able to help and ask others for help, participate actively, respect others, describe feelings, take turns, share ideas and opinions, encourage others' participation, and stay on task. All of that is because it is a new language with many difficulties. Students suffer from low academic achievement caused by their low English proficiency. Cummins attributes the failure of language skills development to the traditional methods used by teachers, such as teacher-centred methods. In contrast, classrooms that provide interaction can develop students' cognitive and social skills related to language learning. There are various approaches that teachers use to teach writing in the classroom, among which "cooperative learning" is frequently recommended [2]. Examining the perspectives of students learning English as a foreign language is considered highly significant, given its substantial impact on the goals teachers strive to achieve within the classroom [3]. Student perspectives play a fundamental role; beyond merely receiving instructional content, learners require motivation to develop their expertise and foster a positive attitude toward writing. Numerous studies

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have explored student perspectives on cooperative learning within the context of writing skills, with the aim of examining the impact of this approach on the teaching of writing [4].

Problem of The Study

For decades, the educational field has not shed light on research that enhances the idea that students learn more when they work together. In Libya, not too many methods and approaches have been adopted by Libyan English language teachers to obtain better achievements in terms of teaching language. In order to ensure students' mastery of the English language, teachers need to employ methods and approaches which produce positive outcomes in students' learning. Most teachers and educators are in doubt about the students' ability to acquire knowledge on their own. Most of the time, many teachers treat the students as empty vessels which need to be filled with facts in order to make them skilled students. As a result, this leads many schools to implement a teacher-centred approach more. It also leads the majority of students to depend on the teachers' shoulders, which means students' dependency on the teachers.

Statement of The Problem

This study aims to understand the experiences of students using cooperative learning in an English language classroom in Libya. It aims to identify the benefits of using cooperative learning because as much as teachers understand cooperative learning, it will be used more and more. Also, education decision makers will provide a syllabus implementing cooperative learning.

Objectives of The Study

This study identifies the proficiency and attitudes of students who have been taught and learnt in English language classrooms by using cooperative learning. Also, it will investigate how the use of cooperative learning helps students to develop social and interactional skills as well as their English language skills.

Significance of The Study

The significance of this study stems from several considerations. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, it is the first attempt to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in the teaching of English at the high school level among Libyan students in Ajelaty City. The findings of this research will hopefully encourage other researchers to examine the different methods of teaching English as a second language in Libyan high schools and to explore ways of developing these methods. Furthermore, the results will shed light on the effectiveness of using cooperative learning and on the possibility of applying it in all Libyan high schools rather than limiting it to selected schools. Finally, the study will demonstrate to educators how various teaching trends can be used in the classroom to help students acquire and practice language.

Literature Review

English Language Learning

English language learning is what people do when they want to learn how to speak and understand the English language. People learning English often learn to read and write English at the same time. A lot of people learn English at school, where English is a common subject. Many people also want to spend their own personal time to learn English. Some of these people may not know any English, while others will have learned some English in school, and will want to advance their knowledge of it.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning refers to a variety of teaching methods in which students work in small groups to help one another learn academic content [5]. It is described at length by [6] as follows: Cooperative learning is a group learning activity organised so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. Furthermore, cooperative learning falls under the umbrella of "collaborative learning", a term defined by Goodsell [7] in which students work together to achieve a common goal. Cooperative learning is considered a broader classification within the category of collaborative learning, which describes students working in groups consisting of two or more individuals.

Motivation

Motivation is the desire that fuels a person to do certain things based on his wants and needs. If a person wishes to meet these wants and needs, then it necessitates him to motivate himself so that he can make certain moves. A person is

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unique and apart from another, so his wants and needs vary greatly from those of the other. The same is true for people's levels of motivation.

Attitude

An attitude is an expression describing someone's favour or disfavour toward a person, place, thing, or event.

Belief

The mental act, condition, or habit of placing trust or confidence in another, e.g. I say: My belief in you is as strong as ever. Belief also describes someone's mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something, as when we say: His explanation of what happened defies belief. It refers to something believed or accepted as true, especially a particular tenet or a body of tenets accepted by a group of persons.

Questions of The Study

This research aims to answer these questions:

- Does the implementation of cooperative learning activities lead to improvement in the proficiency level of students?
- What are students' attitudes towards using cooperative language learning?

Methodology of The Study

This section presents and analyses the research design and methodology employed in this study. It begins with the research design, where justification is provided for choosing qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Design of The Study

Research is an activity characterised by intellectual curiosity, using systematic planning to collect facts, performing objective analysis through logical thinking, and ending with a new truth or verification of an existing one. In the field of research methodology, there are many types of research. They are qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. This study adopts quantitative research. I chose this type of research because it is widely used in the education field. Stated that quantitative research is a method of investigation used in many different academic areas, basically in the social sciences such as education [8].

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected via a Google Form using an 8 questions. The first question addresses gender, while the remaining questions consist of a single item each—with the exception of the fifth question, which contains 5 items; the seventh question, which includes 4 items; and the final question, which comprises 9 items. questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The items were drawn from a study conducted by Phan Thi [9].

Results and Discussion

Respondents Genders

(Table 1) and (Figure 1) showed the demographic distribution of the study participants by gender. A total of 101 students took part in the study; the sample showed a higher representation of females compared to males. Specifically, females accounted for 57.4% of the total sample, while males constituted the remaining 42.6%. This distribution indicates that the study sample is relatively balanced, albeit with a slight skew towards the female group.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Respondent Characteristics		**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	43	42.6%
	Female	58	57.4%

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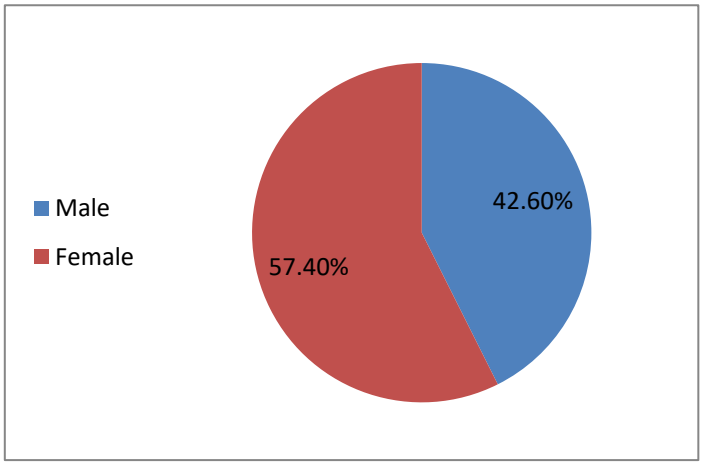


Figure 1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

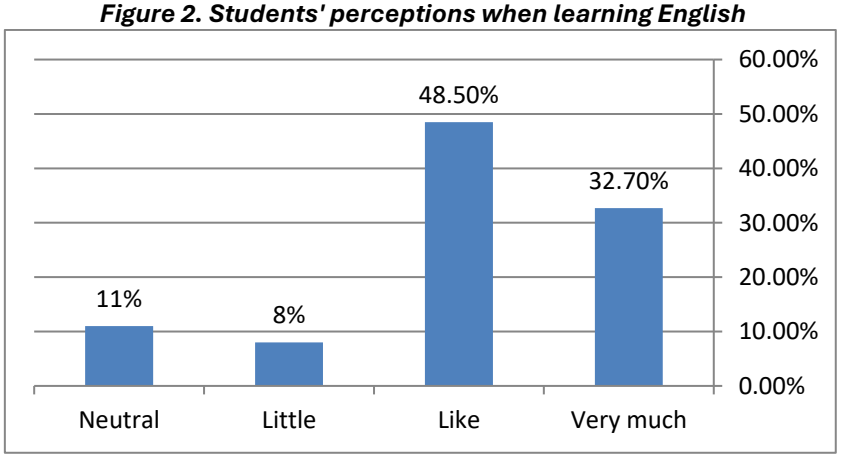
Students' Perceptions When Learning English

(Table 2) and (Figure 2) present students' perceptions regarding English language learning, measured by percentage across four distinct attitudinal categories: "to a very great extent," "I love it," "to a small extent," and "neutral." The data indicate highly positive attitudes toward English language acquisition among the surveyed group. The concentration of responses within the positive range (81.2%) reflects a high level of learner motivation or a strong appreciation for the importance of mastering English; indeed, combining the categories "to a very great extent" (32.7%) and "I love it" (48.5%) reveals that a total of 81.2% of participants hold a positive attitude. Conversely, the low percentage recorded in the "to a small extent" category (8%) suggests that negative perceptions or resistance toward learning English are virtually non-existent among the participants.

Table 2. Students' perceptions when learning English

Items	**Answers (%)**			
Students' perceptions when learning English	Very much	Like	Little	Neutral
	32.7	48.5	8	11

Figure 2. Students' perceptions when learning English



I Actively Participate in English Classes

(Table 3) and (Figure 3) the rate of active student participation in English language lessons, categorised into five response levels: "Always," "Usually," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never." Regarding high levels of participation, the results indicate that the vast majority of surveyed students demonstrate a high degree of engagement; 43.6% reported participating "Usually," and 41.6% reported participating "Always," meaning that these two categories combined account for 85.2% of the total sample. As for moderate to low levels of participation, the results show that a small percentage of students participate less frequently: 6.9% participate "Sometimes," while 7.9% participate "Rarely." Furthermore, regarding a complete lack of participation, it is noteworthy that 0% of respondents selected the "Never" option, indicating that all students in the sample engage with English language lessons to at least some degree. Overall, the data reflect a strong

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positive trend in student participation, suggesting that the vast majority of students engage effectively within the English language learning environment.

Table 3. I actively participate in English classes

Items	**Answers (%)**				
I actively participate in English classes.	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	41.6	43.6	6.9	7.9	0

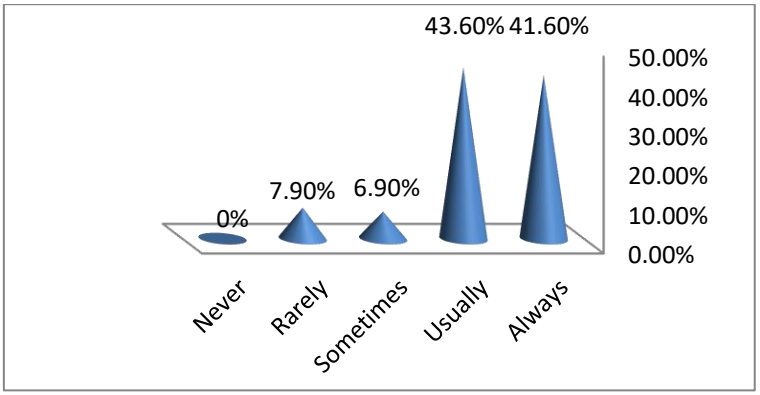

Figure 3. I actively participate in English classes.

The Reason you Take English Classes

(Table 4) and (Figure 4) illustrate several key findings regarding learners' motivations. Skill improvement emerges as by far the largest category, accounting for 54.5% of responses, which reflects a strong orientation—whether intrinsic or instrumental—in which learners focus on practical communication and personal competence rather than merely obtaining a formal certificate. Curiosity and the deepening of knowledge constitute the second-largest group at 22.8%, indicating an intrinsic, intellectual drive whereby students view English as a window to accessing broader content and cultures and to gaining a deeper understanding. Passing school exams represents a small-to-medium-sized category (12.9%), highlighting short-term external academic pressures linked to the requirements for success during the academic year. Obtaining academic degrees or qualifications forms the smallest category on the list (9.9%), reflecting a focus on long-term credentials in which English is viewed as a step toward earning diplomas or achieving academic standing. Finally, the category of other reasons accounts for 0%, as none of the participants selected motives outside the listed categories or other miscellaneous reasons.

Table 4. The reason you take English classes

Items	**Answers (%)**				
The reason you take English classes	Because I want more degrees	Because I want to pass the exams during the school year	Because I want to improve my skills	Because I want to know more about English	Another idea
	9.9	12.9	54.5	22.8	0

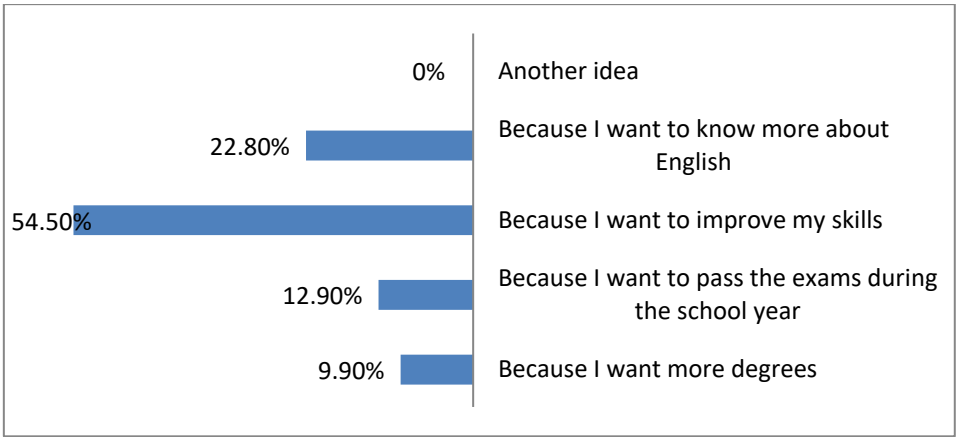

Figure 4. The reason you take English classes

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The Reason Why You Rarely Participate in Class

(Table 5) and (Figure 5) illustrate the primary reasons for low student participation in the classroom. The data reveal a clear and very strong consensus regarding the most significant barrier to student interaction. Responses can be categorised into psychological factors, language proficiency, and comprehension of the instructional explanation, and can be summarised as follows. Language proficiency emerges as the dominant barrier, with a very large proportion of participants (84.2%) attributing the lack of classroom participation to the belief that their language knowledge is insufficient. In an academic context, this indicates a severe lack of linguistic confidence, suggesting that language-related anxiety or a perceived lack of proficiency constitutes a fundamental obstacle to student interaction. Interestingly, traditional affective factors—such as general shyness (7.9%) and the fear of negative evaluation or making mistakes, including the fear of giving an incorrect answer—accounted for only a very small fraction of the responses. Furthermore, a small percentage of students (5%) attributed the issue to a lack of understanding of the teacher's explanation, indicating that the problem lies not in the teacher's clarity but rather in the students' ability to express themselves in the target language.

Table 5. The reason why you rarely participate in class

Items	**Answers (%)**				
The reason why you rarely participate in class	Because I'm afraid I'll give the wrong answer	Because I'm shy	Because I think my knowledge of the language is not enough	Because I don't understand what the teacher explained	Another idea
	3	7.9	84.2	5	0

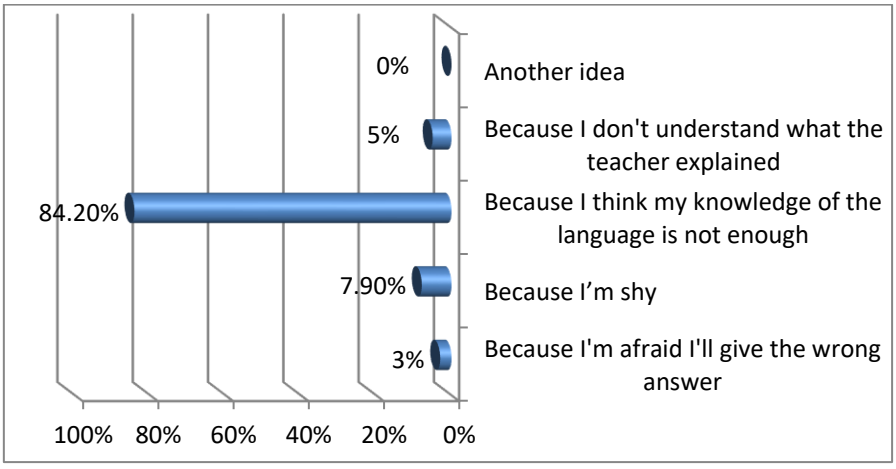

Figure 5. The reason why you rarely participate in class

Students' Perceptions About the Benefits of Cooperative Learning in English Class

Table 6 illustrates students' perceptions of cooperative learning in English language classrooms, presenting the percentage distribution for each item based on a five-point Likert scale, alongside individual and cumulative mean scores. Overall, the data indicate a positive orientation toward cooperative learning, reflected in a cumulative mean score of 3.65. While explicit opposition is virtually non-existent or extremely low across all items, the high concentration of neutral responses suggests that although students recognise the structural benefits of group work, their level of enthusiasm and endorsement varies from one aspect to another. Furthermore, the prevailing neutrality regarding the development of communicative skills points to a need for teachers to place greater emphasis on explicitly guiding students toward engaging in argumentative discourse, adhering to active listening protocols, and employing debate techniques during group tasks, to maximise the linguistic benefits offered by cooperative methodologies.

Students' Perceptions About Group Work in Cooperative Learning in English Class

(Table 7) illustrates students' perceptions of group work dynamics within the framework of cooperative learning in English language classrooms. The data evaluates four key dimensions of cooperation, using relative distributions based on a five-point Likert scale, alongside individual and composite mean scores. Overall, the data reveals a highly positive attitude among students toward cooperative learning, as reflected by a strong composite mean score of 3.67. Notably, there is a complete absence of "strongly disagree" responses (0%) across all criteria, suggesting that students generally reject any negative view of cooperative work. Empirical evidence indicates that integrating cooperative learning into English

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language instruction successfully fosters a spirit of interdependence and a sense of belonging to a unified community. While students clearly recognise the importance of collaborating with their peers to complete academic tasks, further attention should be directed toward promoting equitable participation and refining strategies for reaching consensus during group activities.

Table 6. Students' perceptions about the benefits of cooperative learning in English class

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
	N (%)					
In class, you are working on skills of dialogue, listening and debate.	3	0	51.5	37.6	7.9	3.48
When working in groups, you want to share ideas so that the whole group knows what is being done	0	7.9	39.6	40.6	11.9	3.56
The help of classmates is very important to complete the task.	0	0	43.6	32.7	23.8	3.80
Team members must exchange and interact in assigned tasks.	0	2	40.6	33.7	23.8	3.79
Each team member must participate in the group's tasks.	0	2	43.6	41.6	12.9	3.65
Average						**3.65**

Table 7. Students' perceptions about group work in cooperative learning in English class

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
	N (%)					
You make decisions by consensus among team members.	0	3	49.5	38.6	8.9	3.53
You cannot complete a task without the contributions of your classmates.	0	4	25.7	55.4	14.9	3.81
There needs to be interaction between the group members to perform the task.	0	2	41.6	46.5	9.9	3.64
Each member must make efforts in the group's tasks	0	2	45.5	32.7	19.8	3.70
Average						**3.67**

Students' Perceptions About the Difficulties in Cooperative Learning in English Class

Based on the data presented in Table 8, which assesses students' perceptions of collaborative learning in English classes, the results indicate a highly positive attitude among students toward collaborative learning, with an overall mean score of 3.71 out of 5.00. In general, students recognise the practical importance of working in teams, as well as the cognitive benefits it offers; notably, none of the participants selected the "strongly disagree" option for any of the statements provided.

Table 8. Students' perceptions about the difficulties in cooperative learning in English class

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
	N (%)					
It is important to share documents, information, etc. to perform tasks.	0	5.9	44.6	27.7	21.8	3.65
Each team member should try to participate, even if they don't like the task at hand.	0	3	33.7	56.4	6.9	3.67
It's easy for your team to come to an agreement in the face of differing opinions or conflicts.	0	2	43.6	47.5	6.9	3.59
The better each team member does his or her task, the better the team will achieve.	0	0	27.7	60.4	11.9	3.84

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Each team member must do his part to complete the task.	0	0	26.7	62.4	10.9	3.84
Working together with class members allows you to expand your knowledge of the subject.	0	0	53.5	27.7	18.8	3.65
Discussion will help you better understand the assigned topics/tasks.	0	3	24.8	61.4	10.9	3.80
Working together allows you to better identify the most important aspects of information.	0	0	41.6	47.5	10.9	3.69
Working together enriches the vision of the topic by the input of all team members.	0	5	28.7	60.4	5.9	3.67
Average						**3.71**

Conclusion

In conclusion, most participants hold a positive attitude towards students' perceptions when learning English. Also, the data reflect a strong positive trend in student participation, suggesting that the vast majority of students engage effectively within the English language learning environment. According to the reasons you take English classes, skill improvement was represented by (54.5%), then want to know more about English was represented by (22.8%). On the other hand, the main reason why you rarely participate in class the main reason was language proficiency; a very large proportion of participants (84.2%) attribute the lack of classroom participation to the belief that their language knowledge is insufficient. Overall, the data reveals a highly positive attitude among students toward cooperative learning, as reflected by a strong composite mean score of 3.67. Notably, there is a complete absence of "strongly disagree" responses (0%) across all criteria, suggesting that students generally reject any negative view of cooperative work.

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