Cooperative Learning in English Language Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions and Actions

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This study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions and practices of cooperative learning (CL) in English language classrooms. It was conducted with the participation of 46 teachers (34 females and 12 males) from 10 schools (7 senior and 3 junior secondary schools) in a city in the Mekong delta – Vietnam. All the participants had used CL in their classroom at least two year before they participated in the study. To find out teachers' perceptions of CL in English language classrooms, the study used questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire consisting of 50 items was designed based on Likert scale aiming at collecting data about their perceptions and practices to promote CL in their classrooms. The interviews with six of the participants were conducted to obtain more insightful understanding of cooperative learning and how they practiced promoting cooperative learning and difficulties they had when they applied it in their classrooms. The results show that most of the investigated teachers had positive perceptions of applying cooperative learning, especially they had good understanding of it (M=4.3, SD=.479). Regarding difficulties the teachers had, the results showed that the big class size, the noise and class control losing were claimed to be regular barriers. Besides, they also offered some ways to promote cooperative learning in English classrooms including clearly assigning roles for students, setting the stage for learning and closely monitoring the groups.

Keywords: teachers' perceptions, teachers practices, cooperative learning, English classrooms, promoting cooperative learning

INTRODUCTION

English has been widely taught as a compulsory subject in most educational institutions in Vietnam, from primary schools to tertiary institutions (Nguyen et al., 2014). This indicates that proficiency in the English language is important and everyone should learn to master English skills in order to achieve their own goal. However, it has been observed that it is difficult for Vietnamese students to communicate in English, although they have studied at least 7 years in the general education level. The phenomenon is caused by many factors including uninteresting teaching style; insufficient time for communicative activities; grammar-driven teaching; unreasonable time-management, unclear instructions, large class sizes; teachers' limited ability in classroom organization, unequal students'

English levels; inadequate lesson preparation; teachers' limited use of teaching aids and technology, and students' lack of confidence in using oral English in class activities (Nguyen et al., 2014).

In classroom environment, it is increasingly important for teachers to diversify their classroom instructions with different methods to teach each lesson in order to find out better methods which meet students' differences and encourage them develop their potential skills. Cooperative learning is likely to be one of the good ways to get such aims. It is considered to be an effective method to improve teaching and learning processes in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Slavin (2011) stated that cooperative learning is one teaching strategy that has been utilized to meet today's demands.

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that places students in small groups, offering students the opportunity to complete a task together to increase their own and each other's learning (Johnson at al., 1986). By using this strategy, students can encourage each other to work together on academic tasks as well as help each other with classroom assignments since "the essential feature of cooperative learning is that the success of one student helps other students to be successful" (Slavin, 1987, p. 8).

Realizing the importance of CL in English language teaching and learning, many studies have been conducted to explore the effects and teachers' and students' perceptions of cooperative learning as well as difficulties teachers faced when they applied it in their classrooms. However, very few studies have explored teachers' actions to promote cooperative learning. This paper centers on finding how teachers perceived CL, what they really did in their classrooms to promote CL and what difficulties they faced in using it in the classroom. It aims to answer the two research questions related to teachers' perceptions and actions of CL as follows:
1. *What are teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning in English language classrooms?*
2. *What do teachers do to promote cooperative learning in English language classrooms?*

Literature Review

What is cooperative learning?

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy for group instruction that emphasizes learning that is facilitated by students rather than the teacher. Olsen and Kagan (1992) define cooperative learning as:

> *"... group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others"* (p. 8).

Slavin (1987) refers cooperative learning as "instructional methods in which students of all performance levels work together in small groups toward a group goal" (p.8). Similarly, cooperative learning is seen as a process where students work together in groups to "master material initially presented by the teacher" (Slavin, 1990, p.20). According to Slavin (1990), the goal of cooperative learning is for students to help each other succeed academically.

Although different authors have different definitions about cooperative learning, they have one thing in common. It is a teaching method in which students work together for the success of their learning. Cooperative learning, in this paper, can be understood as a teaching strategy in which individuals try to benefit themselves and all other group members by working collaboratively.

The importance of cooperative learning and its benefits to EFL learners

Cooperative learning activities allow student success in an interactive, responsive, cooperative, thinking environment (Lyman, 1992). Kagan (2009) states that cooperative learning activities offer a foundation for classroom instruction that has the potential to increase positive interaction among students and permit them to explore and engage in learning. Students participating in cooperative learning groups gain academically and socially, increasing their self-esteem, enjoyment of the subject

studied, and time-on-task (Lyman, 1992). They also benefit from the opportunities cooperative learning groups provide for learning from others in informal interactions, practicing use of a collaborative model, utilizing critical thinking skills in hands-on situations, and incorporating theoretical concepts into best practices through practical application.

Johnson & Johnson (2007) claimed that CL can help create positive interdependence which means that everyone in the group is bound together, sharing resources and opinions to maximize the learning results of all members. Positive interdependence then creates the sense that group members "sink or swim together" (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991). One cannot succeed without others being successful. Positive interdependence encourages everybody understands that each member's contribution is important in helping the group to achieve its goal and each member can succeed only if all members succeed. When positive interdependence is established, learners have a sense of responsibilities for their own learning and for the success of other group members. There are a number of ways of structuring positive interdependence in CL classrooms. One way is to have a single group product, another is to assign roles for each student and provides a group reward. In addition, "the main and the most prominent feature of collaborative learning is the feedback which reflects learners' engagement in tasks" (Alalimi, 2020: 61), so the teacher should utilize this to develop learners' peer feedback skill.

Gillies (2007) added that practicing speaking in groups helps learners explore various language structures and allow them to develop new patterns of thought. Crandall (1999) points out the efficacy of cooperative language learning in reducing learner anxiety, fostering positive attitudes toward language learning and improving self-esteem. In CL a flexible learning atmosphere which is shaped by cooperation rather than competition is claimed to increase students' level of autonomy (Candy, 1991).

The research of Hancock (2004) pointed out that learners with high peer orientation were significantly more motivated to learn than learners with low peer orientation, which indicates that learners who desired to work with others seemed to be more motivated to learn in settings that maximized learner interaction than learners who desired to work alone. CL is proved, by its definition, to make students work together so it can help raise peer orientation among students which may lead to higher motivation in language learning.

Perceiving the positive effect of cooperation toward teaching and learning, teachers need to promote student-student collaboration more as well as focus on the way or strategies how they apply and develop CL well. George (2016) conducted a study to examine ten areas in which the author believes he and other teachers do cooperative learning well and considered as the strategies in order to promote student-student collaboration. These areas are: (1) keeping group size small, usually four or fewer; (2) encouraging students to form heterogeneous groups; (3) monitoring groups as they cooperate and encouraging groups to rely on themselves; (4) creating tasks that the groups find challenging, but not too challenging; (5) encouraging group members to do their fair share in their groups; (6) facilitating a feeling of positive interdependence among group members; (7) being willing to try new ideas in their implementation of cooperative learning; (8) learning from their experiences in using cooperative learning; (9) looking for opportunities to share with colleagues about their use of cooperative learning; (10) being cooperative in their lives outside the classroom. In this study, I want to find out whether the teachers applied any of them or what other strategies they did in their classrooms to promote CL.

Related studies

Thanh's study (2011) carried out an investigation to examine perceptions of 40 college Vietnamese teachers and 40 students toward cooperative learning regarding implementation of cooperative learning in Vietnamese classrooms, perceiving of local teachers and students about this approach to learning, and the local barriers hindered its implementation. Both the questionnaire about interviews were used to collect the data. The results showed that CL has become a common and preferred method

of instruction in Vietnam. However, the functions of CL were often not understood correctly. In addition, CL was hindered by a number of local cultural and institutional barriers such as class size, curriculum coverage and workload division.

Celik (2013) conducted a study with the topic "Implementing cooperative learning in the language classroom: opinions of Turkish teachers of English" to investigate the perceptions and beliefs of the respondents towards applicability of cooperative learning in the Turkish context. She employed a questionnaire and two separate focus group interviews with 6 and 8 participants, as a means of triangulating the data to explore the opinions of Turkish teachers of English as a Foreign Language. The researcher drew a conclusion that the investigated teachers had a good understanding of the concept of group learning overall and admitted that cooperative activities were beneficial in the foreign language classroom. The results also emphasized that students may experience reduced anxiety and more readiness when learning from their peers than from the course instructor. However, the standardized EFL curriculum and students' attitudes were found to be the main barriers in implementing CL.

Hinson (2015) used a mixed methods explanatory research with the collection of quantitative data and qualitative data to carried out a study to gain insight to the perceptions of teachers and students on learning and engagement based on the implementation of Kagan cooperative learning structures. Survey data gained from 107 students, grades 3-8 and 19 teachers having been trained by a Kagan cooperative learning professional developer. Eight teachers were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that students became engaged and motivated when asked to complete assignments in a team setting. The results also provided some insight to issues faced by teachers and the daily implementation of Kagan cooperative learning structures in the classroom including time available and the novice of the teachers in implementing CL in their classrooms.

George (2017) conducted a study to determine the impacts of teacher perceptions of cooperative learning strategies on students' the engagement and academic performance levels. The data were collected from seven high school English teachers using the pre- and post-questionnaires, lesson observation and interviews. The results indicated that teacher perception of cooperative learning strategies had positive impact on English learner engagement and academic performance. They also reflected that teachers perceived these strategies to be useful in their classrooms. In addition, they showed that learners' motivation increased after using a cooperative learning (Jigsaw) method.

METHOD

Research design, participants and data collection instruments

The current research is designed as a mixed method descriptive research with the combination of the quantitative and qualitative methods. By using mixed methods, "Words can be used to add meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.45). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative were analysed and triangulated simultaneously for the strength of the results.

In this study, the researcher used an online questionnaire using Google form as the main instrument because of the convenience for both the participants and the researcher. The questionnaire was based on the theoretical framework described in the literature review and was constructed after reviewing relevant research articles in the same field (Thanh, 2011; Hinson, 2015) for the different contexts in the Mekong Delta. It was originally written in English and consists of 61 questions with 8 clusters. In particular, the first cluster was formulated with 11 questions to ask for background information of participants and 7 other clusters including 50 questions to explore teachers' perceptions of CL and their practice CL in promoting CL.

The data collection was divided into two stages. Stage 1 (questionnaire survey) involved 46 teachers answering 50 item questionnaires to explore teachers' perceptions of CL and their practice CL in promoting CL. The participants were randomly chosen based on a three-step process. First, the research went to each school and asked for permission to meet all teachers of English. Second, I had a short talk with them to find out who already used CL in their classroom. Finally, I organized a draw among teachers who claimed to use CL to choose the participants. There are 41 questions based on a five-point scale as 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (not sure), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree) and 9 other items based on 5-scale design varied as 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (usually), 5 (always).

The whole cluster was described in details as follows (see Table 1)

Table 1
The seven main clusters of the designed questionnaire

Clusters	Items
1. Participants' background information	1 – 11
2. Teachers' understanding of CL	1 – 6
3. Teachers' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL in their classrooms	7 – 16
4. Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' learning in their classrooms	17 – 20
5. Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms	21 – 27
6. Teachers' perceptions toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms	28 – 31
7. Teachers' perceptions toward the frequency of implementing CL in their classrooms	32 – 41
8. Teachers' practices to promote cooperative learning in their classrooms	42 – 50

Based on preliminary results in stage 1, six teachers were randomly selected for stage 2 (in-depth interview) using another draw for the 46 participants in stage 1. The interview questions were mostly based on the questionnaire items and divided into two parts which emphasize some main points: teachers' perception of CL in teaching and learning together with their explanation; the reason why teachers apply CL in their classrooms; problems faced in implementing CL in their classrooms together with their solution to solve these listed problems; their implementation of CL strategies in the future and their practices in promoting CL in their English classrooms.

Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of the percentage by using the Microsoft Excel program and SPSS program version 20 to explore general views of the participants about CL in the classrooms. The participants' responses for the questionnaires were coded into numbers. Firstly, the Scale Test was run to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Next, descriptive Statistic Test was then calculated to observe the mean scores, the maximum, the minimun and standard deviations of the whole group. Finally, the One Sample T- Test was conducted to evaluate whether mean scores of the teachers' perceptions of CL were statistically different from a test value.

The interview data were analyzed by using interview protocols including (1) listening to interview records and transcribing them (2) reading through the transcripts several times to explore the data, (3) finding out themes for similar responses, and (4) putting the similar responses under the same theme relevant to the research questions to be ready for analysis. The final stage of this process was interpreting the coded data.

FINDINGS

Research question 1: Teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning in English language classrooms

The overall teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning in English language classrooms were analyzed with the Descriptive Statistic Test, and then One Sample T-Test was run to see the difference between the actual mean score of teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning in English language classrooms and the accepted mean score of the questionnaire.

Data obtained from the questionnaire is summarized and presented as follows:

Table 2
The overall teachers' perceptions of CL in English language classrooms

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Teachers' perceptions of CL in English language classrooms	46	2.89	4.60	3.83	.354

From Table 2, it can be seen that the total mean score of the participants' perceptions of reflections (M = 3.83) falls between the scale 3 (an average mean) and 4 (the high mean) in the five-scale points for the participants' perceptions. Then, *One Sample T-Test* was run to check whether the participants' level of perceptions toward impact of cooperative learning in English language classrooms (M= 3.83, SD= .354) was statistically different from the test value of 4.0, a high mean. The result has shown that there was a significant difference betwen the sample mean (M= 3.83, SD= .354) and the test value 4.0 (t=-3.17, df=45, p=.003). The result has revealed that the investigated teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning in language English classrooms are just above average.

Teachers' understanding of cooperative learning
The questionnaire which was administered to study teachers' understanding of cooperative learning had 8 items. Teachers' understanding of CL was explored and the results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Teachers' understanding of cooperative learning (N =46)

Clusters	D	NS	A
1. You are familiar with the "group work" and "cooperative learning"	0 (0%)	2 (4.3%)	44 (95.7%)
2. Cooperative learning is working together to achieve a common goal	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)	45 (97.8%)
3. In cooperative learning, students work together to attain group goals that cannot be obtained by working alone or competitively	3 (6.5%)	9 (19.6%)	34 (73.9%)
4. In cooperative learning, each member's contribution is important in helping the group to achieve its goal	0 (0%)	2 (4.3%)	44 (95.7%)
5. In cooperative learning, it is very important to assist and support each other's efforts	0 (%)	1 (2.2%)	45 (97.8%)
6. In cooperative learning, every member is responsible for the final learning outcome	0 (%)	3 (6.5%)	43 (93.5%)

* D: Disagree and strongly disagree; NS: Not sure; A: Agree and strongly agree

As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of the teachers showed their understanding of cooperative learning. They gave positive responses to most of the items from 73.9% to 97.8% with low percentages of disagreement. More specifically, most teachers (95.7%) state that they are familiar with the "groupwork" and "cooperative learning". Besides that, forty five out of forty-six participants asserted that *cooperative learning is working together to achieve a common goal.* Additionally, 95.7% of the teachers believe that each member will make contributions to achieve the group's goals. These

findings reveal that most of the teachers are familiar with CL and have good understanding about CL as well as believe in the importance of each member's contributions toward group achievement.

In addition, a Descriptive Statistics Test was run to check for teachers' understanding of cooperative learning. The results of test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics test for teachers' understanding of CL (N = 46)

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Teachers' understanding of CL	46	3.50	5.00	4.33	.479

It can be seen in Table 4 that the overall mean score of the participants in the questionnaire was quite high (M= 4.33). The computed mean score was a little bit higher than the high mean score of the 5-point scale (M=4.0). The results indicated that teachers perceived the CL approach quite well.

Besides, a One-sample T-test was run to check whether the mean score of participants' understanding of CL in English classrooms (M= 4.33, SD=.479) is statistically different from the test value of 4, a high mean for high level of understanding. The result showed that there was a significant difference between the sample mean score (M= 4.33, SD=.479) and test value 4.0 (t= 4.67, df = 45, p=.00). It can be concluded that, in general, teachers' understanding of CL was quite high. In other words, teachers were aware of what CL is and recognized the importance of each member's contributions toward group goal achievement.

Teachers' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL

The second cluster consisted of 10 items (from 7 to 16). Most of the participants understand the use of cooperative learning well enough to implement and believe that CL has positive impact on teaching and learning. Teachers' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL were explored and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Teachers' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL (N=46)

Clusters	D	NS	A
7. Cooperative learning can easily be implemented in your classrooms	5 (10.9%)	14 (30.4%)	27 (58.7%)
8. You understand the use of cooperative learning well enough to implement it successfully in the classroom.	1 (2.2%)	10 (24.7%)	35 (76.1%)
9. With cooperative learning, teachers usually succeed in achieving educational objectives	5 (10.9%)	15 (32.6%)	26 (56.5%)
10. Teachers' workload could be reduced when class is structured in cooperative learning teams	4 (8.7%)	9 (19.6%)	33 (71.7%)
11. Cooperative learning allows discussion and critical thinking, so students learn more and remember what they have learned for a longer period time.	1 (2.2%)	9 (19.6%)	36 (78.3%)
12. Cooperative learning requires students to learn to work together, which is an important skill for their future	1 (2.2%)	1 (2.2%)	44 (95.7%)
13. More opportunities for critical thinking skills are provided, and students show a significant improvement in those thinking skills.	1 (2.2%)	11 (23.9%)	34 (73.9%)
14. One of the most positive benefits is that students who cooperate with each other also tend to understand and like each other more.	1 (2.2%)	8 (17.4%)	37 (80.4%)
15. Students' work is better organized when they are in groups.	4 (8.7%)	10 (21.7%)	32 (69.6%)
16. Students often accomplish the task in the allotted time when they work together.	6 (13%)	7 (15.2%)	33 (71.8%)

* D: Disagree and strongly disagree; NS: Not sure; A: Agree and strongly agree

As can be seen in Table 5, the findings revealed that most of the participants had strong perceptions toward the role and impact of cooperative learning in their classrooms. Item 12 gained the most positive responses from teachers. Most teachers agreed that *cooperative learning requires students to learn to work together, which is an important skill for their future* (95.7% of agreement). In addition, a large number of respondents responded that *students cooperating with each other tend to understand and like each other more* (80.4%), which indicates that students' relationship is more closely connected in the team setting. Over a half of the participants (58.7%) agreed that cooperative learning can easily be implemented (item 7). The reason why there was quite a high percentage of "Not sure" from participants on items 7 and 9 may be because some of participants did not have much experience or did not control the class activities and students well. In short, with positive responses to most of the items and low percentages of disagreement, these findings show that teacher perceived the role and impact of cooperative learning in their classrooms quite well.

A Descriptive Statistics Test was run to check teachers' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL. The results of the test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Descriptive statistics test for teachers' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL (N = 46)

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Teachers' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL	46	2.9	4.70	3.84	.440

It can be seen in Table 6 that the overall mean score of the participants in the questionnaire was quite high (M= 3.84, SD=.440). The computed mean score was just a little bit lower than the high mean score of the 5-point scale (M=4.0). The results indicated that, in general, teachers perceived rather well the role and impact of CL approach.

Besides, a One Sample T-Test was run to check whether the mean score of participants' overall perceptions toward the role and impact of CL (*M*= 3.8, SD= .440) is statistically different from the test value of 4, the accepted mean for high level of perceptions. The result showed that there was a significant difference between the sample mean score (*M*= 3.84, SD= .440) and test value 4.0 (t= -2.443, df = 45, p=.019). It can be concluded that teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL are relatively high.

Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' learning in their classrooms

The results of the third cluster of the questionnaire with 4 items are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7
Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' learning in their classrooms (N = 46)

Clusters	D	NS	A
17. Your students can achieve more when they work together than they work alone.	0 (0%)	11 (23.9%)	35 (76.1%)
18. Cooperative learning has helped to develop more positive attitudes towards learning in the classroom	0 (0%)	8 (17.4%)	38 (82.6%)
19. In your class, every team member must learn the material in order for the group to be successful	2 (4.3%)	8 (17.4%)	36 (78.2%)
20. Cooperative learning makes learners more responsible for self-study	4 (8.7%)	7 (15.2%)	35 (76.1%)

* D: Disagree and strongly disagree; NS: Not sure; A: Agree and strongly agree

The results in Table 7 show that the majority of the respondents were positive for most of the items. This presents that teachers were aware of the benefits that CL can bring to their students' learning.

More specifically, 82.6% of participants perceived that CL could help their students develop more positive attitudes towards learning. About 78.2% of respondents agreed that every team member must learn the material in order for the group to be successful. In addition, teachers believed that CL helped their students achieve more when they work together than they work alone as well as makes their students more responsible for self-study (76.1%). Although some high percentages of agreement can be seen, there are some items with rather high percentages of "Not Sure" (ranging from15.2% to 23.9%), which indicate that some teachers may lack of experience, knowledge or they did not find any evidence related to the issues given. In general, the results show that teachers in the current study were aware of the benefits that CL in their teaching.

A Descriptive Statistics Test was run to check for teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' learning in their classrooms and the results of test are presented in Table 8.

Table 8
Descriptive statistics test for teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' learning in their classrooms (N = 46)

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' learning in their classrooms	46	2.50	5.00	3.88	.491

It can be seen in Table 8 that the overall mean score of the participants in the questionnaire was quite high (M= 3.88, SD=.491). The computed mean score was as nearly same as the high mean score of the 5-point scale (M=4.0). The results indicate that teachers perceived well the role and impact of CL approach on students' learning.

Besides, a One Sample T-Test was run to check whether the sample mean score (M= 3.88, SD= .491) is statistically different from the test value of 4, the accepted mean for high level of perceptions. The result showed that no significant difference between the sample mean score (M= 3.88, SD= .491) and test value 4.0 (t= -1.652, df = 45, p=.105) was observed. It can be concluded that teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' learning in their classrooms are high.

Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms

The fourth cluster of the questionnaire, teachers' perception toward the role and impact of cooperative learning on students' engagement in their classrooms, consisted of 6 items (21 to 26). Teachers' perceptions were explored and the results are shown in Table 9 below

Table 9
Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms

Clusters	D	NS	SA
21. Your students willingly participate in cooperative learning activities.	3 (6.5%)	17 (37%)	26 (56.5%)
22. In cooperative learning, your students actively participate in the teaching learning process	3 (6.5%)	15 (32.6%)	28 (60.9%)
23. Your students are more motivated when you structure your class in cooperative groups.	2 (4.3%)	10 (21.7%)	34 (73.9%)
24. Your students became engaged and motivated when asked to complete assignments in a team setting	2 (4.3%)	10 (21.7%)	34 (73.9%)
25. Cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among students.	0 (0%)	7 (15.2%)	39 (84.8%)
26. All students contribute and listen to each others' contributions	10 (21.7%)	15 (32.6%)	21 (45.6%)

* D: Disagree and strongly disagree; NS: Not sure; A: Agree and strongly agree

As can be seen in Table 9, the teachers showed their satisfaction with the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms. Item 25 received the most positive response (84.8%) which indicates that cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among students. Additionally, with 34 responses from respondents, the results show that students became more engaged and motivated when teachers arranged the class in cooperative groups and when required to complete assignments in a team setting. In general, the results show that implementing CL could bring benefits to students' motivation and engagement. However, the less positive responses (45.6%) on item 26 with a very high percentage of disagreeing (21.8%) may indicate that some teachers perceived that not all of the students contributed as well as listened to others members' contribution.

A Descriptive Statistics Test was run to check for teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms. The results of the test are presented in Table 10.

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics Test for teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms (N = 46)

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M.	SD
Teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms	46	2.67	5.00	3.80	.484

It can be seen in table 10 that the overall mean score of the participants in the questionnaire was quite high (M= 3.80, SD=.484). The computed mean score was a little bit lower the high mean score of the 5-point scale (M=4.0). The results indicated that, teachers perceived rather well the role and impact of CL approach on students' engagement.

Besides, a One Sample T-Test was run to check whether the sample mean score (*M*=3.80, SD=.484) is statistically different from the test value of 4, the accepted mean for high level of perceptions. The result shows that there was a significant difference between the sample mean score (*M*= 3.08, SD=.484) and test value 4.0 (t= -2.793, df =45, p=.008). It can be concluded that teachers' perceptions toward the role and impact of CL on students' engagement in their classrooms are just above average.

Teachers' perceptions toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms

In the fifth cluster with, teachers' perception toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms were explored and the results are shown in Table 11 below

Table 11
Teachers' perceptions toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms

Clusters	D	NS	SA
27. Too many students rely on others to do the work when class is structured in CL teams	3 (6.5%)	10 (21.7%)	33 (71.7%)
28. Implementing CL takes a great deal of effort and planning for both teachers and students	0 (0%)	3 (6.5%)	43 (93.5%)
29. It is too time consuming for English language teachers who are unfamiliar with CL	8 (17.4%)	12 (26.1%)	27 (59%)
30. Teachers sometimes lose control in the class room while using CL strategies	7 (13%)	8 (17.4%)	32 (69.6%)
31. Class size and noise are other difficulties when implementing CL	0 (0%)	3 (6.5%)	43 (93.5%)

* D: Disagree and strongly disagree; NS: Not sure; A: Agree and strongly agree

Although it could not be denied the important role and positive impact of CL in English language classrooms, the results reveal that there were some barriers of CL in their classrooms. As can be seen in Table 11, most of the teachers agreed with the 2 statements (28 and 31) with 93.5%. Implementing CL took teachers and students "*a great deal of effort and planning*" since "*class size and noise*" are other difficulties that teachers and students have to deal with in order to implement CL. Besides, teachers admitted that they sometimes lose control in the class room while using CL strategies (69.6%). These results indicate that when groups are working simultaneously especially in big classes, teachers may not have enough time to exam or monitor each group to ensure they were working effectively. Approximately 71.7% (33 of 46 participants) perceived that "*too many students rely on others to do the work when class is structured in CL teams*", which presents the low individual accountability and positive interdependence among group members.

A Descriptive Statistics Test was run to check teachers' perceptions toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms.The results of the test are presented in Table 12.

Table 12
Descriptive statistics test for teachers' perceptions toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms (N = 46)

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M.	SD
Teachers' perceptions toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms	46	3.00	4.60	3.80	.428

It can be seen in table 12 that the overall mean score of the participants in the questionnaire was quite high (M= 3.80, SD=.428). The computed mean score was as nearly similar as the high mean score of the 5-point scale (M=4.0). The results indicate that, in general, EFL teachers perceived the barriers of CL in their classrooms.

Besides, A One-Sample T-Test was run to check whether the sample mean score (*M*= 3.80, SD= .428) is statistically different from the test value of 4, the accepted mean for high level of perceptions. The result showed that no significant difference between the sample mean score (*M*= 3.80, SD= .428) and test value 4.0 (t=-3.170, df=45, p=.003) was observed. It can be concluded that teachers' perceptions toward the barriers of CL in their classrooms are high.

Teachers' perceptions toward the frequency of implementing CL in their classrooms

The sixth cluster of the questionnaire, teachers' perception toward the frequency of implementing CL in their classrooms, consisted of questions 32 through 41. Teachers' perceptions were explored and the results are shown in Table 13 below.

Table 13
Teachers' perceptions toward the frequency of CL in their classrooms

Clusters	N	SD	ST	O	A
32. You often implement cooperative learning in your classrooms	0 (0%)	2 (4.3%)	16 (34.8%)	25 (54.3%)	28 (60.8%)
33. Your students are asked to work in cooperative learning groups from a few minutes to a whole class period	0 (0%)	4 (8.7%)	14 (30.4%)	26 (56.5%)	28 (60.8%)
34. Your students are asked to work in cooperative learning groups from one class period to several weeks.	4 (8.7%)	3 (6.5%)	22 (47.8%)	15 (32.6%)	2 (4.3%)
35. Your students are asked to work in long-term (lasting for at least a year), heterogeneous groups (variety of ability levels, talents, and interests) with stable membership.	8 (17.4%)	11 (23.9%)	10 (21.7%)	15 (32.6%)	2 (4.3%)
36. You have experienced/ implemented the Three-Step Interview strategy	1 (2.2%)	5 (10.9%)	13 (28.3%)	25 (54.3%)	2 (4.3%)
37. You have experienced/ implemented the Number Heads Together strategy	2 (4.3%)	5 (10.9%)	12 (26.1%)	25 (54.3%)	2 (4.3%)
38. You have experienced/ implemented Think-Pair-Share strategy	0 (0%)	5 (10.9%)	7 (15.2%)	31 (67.4%)	3 (6.5%)
39. You have experienced/ implemented the cooperative Jigsaw strategy	1 (2.2%)	8 (17.4%)	18 (39.1%)	18 (39.1%)	1 (2.2%)
40. You have experienced/ implemented Jigsaw II strategy	1 (2.2%)	6 (13%)	20 (43.5%)	18 (39.1%)	1 (2.2%)
41. You have experienced/ implemented Group Investigation strategy	5 (10.9%)	9 (19.6%)	11 (23.9%)	22 (47.8%)	2 (4.3%)

* N: Never, SD: Seldom, ST: Sometimes, O: Often, A: Always

As can be seen in Table 13, the majority of responses from the teachers reveal that CL has been widely used in Vietnamese classes. Approximately 95.7% of the participants said that CL has been "always" "often" and "sometimes" used in their classrooms. Impressively, no teacher responded that their classes "never" used CL. Responses from participants also showed that the teachers did not follow any specific types of CL groups when they implemented CL. A majority of the teachers reported that they rarely applied the last format where teachers asked their students to work in long-term, heterogeneous groups with stable membership. With very high percentage of "never" (17.4%) and "rarely" (40.9%), the results may indicate that teachers have less experience or interests in the last type or may be because they want their students to have chance to take turn to cooperate with all of students in class to complete assignments in various team. Moreover, the results also showed that among those given typical CL strategies, Think-Pair-Share strategy is the strategy which was applied most (approximately 89.1% of responses).

A Descriptive Statistics Test was run to check for teachers' perceptions toward the frequency of implementing CL in their classrooms. The results of test are presented in Table 14.

Table 14
Descriptive Statistics Test for teachers' perceptions toward the frequency of implementing CL in their classrooms (N = 46)

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M.	SD
Teachers' perceptions toward the frequency of implementing CL in their classrooms	46	1.60	5.00	3.36	.605

It can be seen in table 14 that the overall mean score of the participants in the questionnaire was just above average (M= 3.36, SD=.605). The computed mean score was lower the high mean score of the 5-point scale (M=4.0). This means that the participants' frequent use of CL strategies is at the average level. It can be concluded that these CL strategies are sometimes applied in EFL classrooms.

Besides, a One Sample T-Test was run to check whether the sample mean score (*M*= 3.36, SD= .605) is statistically different from the test value of 4, the accepted mean for high level of perceptions. The result showed that there was a significant difference between the sample mean score (M= 3.36, SD= .605) and test value 4.0 (t= -7.218, df = 45, p=.00). The results indicated that frequency of implementing CL approach is not high. It can be concluded that teachers did not usually implement CL in their classrooms.

Teachers' explanation of applying cooperative learning in English language classrooms
To gain deeper insights into participants' perceptions of applying cooperative learning in English language classrooms, the interviews were conducted with six teachers who were randomly selected for the interview. Semi-structured interviews were employed in order to obtain the expected information from the selected teachers. Thanks to the gained information from semi-structured interviews, it was possible to compare and contrast the information, which made it possible to interpret the collected data and draw the later conclusion from the findings. Regarding the questions for semi-structured interviews, a two-open-ended question interview was developed. The findings of the interviews are presented in the following parts.
   a.   *Teacher's perception toward CL*

In parallel with the data collected from the questionnaire, the interview data present that all participants showed their good understanding about what CL is. Some responses are given as typical example.

> *"In my opinion, cooperative learning method is the method in which teachers ask their students to work together in group in order to achieve group goal"* (Teacher 1)

> *"Cooperative learning is learning collaboratively. This means that learners work in group in order to achieve academic goals and social goals, meaning learners will have chance to learn how to work with others in group, learn how to socialize."* (Teacher 4)

In terms of the benefits that CL brings to their classrooms, all of the teachers realized that CL is a useful approach and brought to them some of beneficial aspects. Particularly, they revealed that CL approach helped their students engage in the lesson, increase their interaction between group members, have more motivation in learning process as well as improve their language achievement. The following statements were heard from the interviewees.

> *[...] CL is very helpful for teaching and learning process. [...] Specifically, thanks to it, student–student interaction, students' learning motivation and students' language achievement are improved. [...]* (Teacher 1)

> *"Applying CL in teaching is useful. It is one of the best ways to make students engaged in the lesson [....]"* (Teacher 4)

In general, the data in both the questionnaires and interviews indicate that all respondents recognized usefulness of CL as well as its positive effects on learning and teaching.
   b.   *The main purpose of cooperative learning*

When being interviewed about the main purpose of cooperative learning, interview responses showed interesting purposes of CL. Most of them believed that CL could help enhance students' learning

motivation, develop students' soft skills like communication skills, improving students' social behavior. The respondents responded:

> *The main purpose of CL is to enhance student's motivation. Besides that, it aims to help students develop soft skills like communication skills[...]* (Teacher 4)

> *Cooperative learning can benefit learners in developing [...], soft skills, [...], their social behaviors, and motivation in learning* (Teacher 6)

Besides, other respondents also shared that the main purposes of CL are helping students understand texts deeply; helping them remember the text in a longer time; developing their English skills and language ability; improving their academic achievement; promoting interaction with others and developing solve problems skill. The following statements were made by teachers:

> *I think the main purpose of CL is to help students to interact with others [...]* (Teacher 2)

> *"The main purpose of CL is to enhance student's motivation [...]* (Teacher 4)

It could be concluded that some teachers had their own aims as well as purposes when they instructed class in cooperative learning group.

Research question 2: Teachers' practices cooperative learning in their classrooms

Teachers' practices to promote CL

In the last cluster of the questionnaire, teachers' practices to promote CL in their classrooms were explored and the results are shown in Table 15 below.

Table 15
Teachers' practices to promote CL in their classrooms (N = 46)

Clusters	D	NS	A
42. Teachers provide the right amount of help when students need it	5 (10.9%)	6 (13%)	35 (76.1%)
43. Teachers help students understand each member's contribution is important in helping the group to achieve its goal	4 (8.7%)	6 (13%)	36 (78.2%)
44. Teachers help students understand that it is very important to assist and support each other's efforts	5 (10.9%)	2 (4.3%)	39 (85.1%)
45. Teachers help students understand that every member is responsible for the final learning outcome	5 (10.9%)	1 (2.2%)	40 (86.9%)
46. Teachers require students to interact verbally with one another on learning tasks since verbal exchanges determine outcomes of cooperative learning	5 (10.9%)	7 (15.2%)	34 (73.9%)
47. Teachers assign roles for students in every group that will not only challenge them but also help them grow in positive ways.	5 (10.9%)	3 (6.5%)	38 (82.6%)
48. Teachers as facilitators set the stages for learning, monitor the groups, and checks on students' understanding of the material	4 (8.7%)	5 (10.9%)	37 (80.4%)
49. Teachers should allocate some time at the end of each class for cooperative groups to process how effectively members worked together as well as how well the groups are working.	4 (8.7%)	8 (17.4%)	34 (73.9%)
50. Teachers should give feedback to each group, and share observation results in the class through a whole-class processing session at the end of the class period	4 (8.7%)	3 (6.5%)	39 (84.7%)

* D: Disagree and strongly disagree; NS: Not sure; A: Agree and strongly agree

Regarding the results from the last cluster of the questionnaire in relation to promoting CL in their classrooms, most of the teachers perceived their roles in promoting cooperative learning in their

classrooms well. They believed that it was important for them to help their students understand the importance of every member's responsibility (86.9%), assisting and supporting each other's efforts (85.1%) for achieving group goal as well as the final learning outcome. They well perceived their roles when giving feedback to each group and sharing observation results at the end of the class period; assigning roles for students; setting the stages for learning, monitoring the groups, and checking on students' understanding of the material with 84.7%, 82.6%, 80.4% respectively. These numbers could mean that teachers played important roles in promoting CL as well as supporting their students to participate more actively and successfully in CL activities.

Regarding the results from semi-structured interviews, the data gained from the last question of the interview are presented as follows. Based on themes emerging from the coding, teachers' practices to promote CL were grouped into these main categories: usually require or create more chances for students to work in groups to complete the given tasks, regularly require students to present their group's products and usually offer a group grade or bonus points for the contribution of each member and the whole group. The respondents shared their experience:

> *"I usually require my students to work in group, in pair to complete a given task. For example, in speaking class, to practice new structures, they will take turn to interview their friends. To present their writing products, in team setting, they are asked to write the favorite films based on the hobbies of each student". I will give the group grade for the contribution of all members*. (Teacher 1)

> *"I often apply these activities in class such as Group presentation, Game Activities, Group Interview, A day to be a monitor"* (Teacher 3)

Most of them agreed that creating more chance for students to practice together with regularly checking students' understanding and contribution in the discussion with rewards is some ways to help promote CL in their classrooms. Besides, the teachers added that to promote CL in English classroom, teacher should understand CL well and usually consider their students' level when applying CL approach as well as.

> *To promote CL in English classroom, I should understand CL well […] I should consider what level of my students […] (Teacher 4)*
> *To promote CL in English classrooms, teachers should take the problem of learners' mixed-ability to engage the learners in cooperative learning. (Teacher 6)*

They explained *"if a teacher understands CL well, he or she will be able to implement it in a proper way"*. In addition, knowing the level of their students helps teachers choose the suitable activities, which makes students more motivated and the lesson will become more effective.

It is clear that there is not only one best way to promote CL in English classrooms. Depending on the classroom condition as well as students' ability, teachers choose the most suitable activities to apply. Often creating chances for students to work in small groups could consider as the way the teachers agreed most.

Difficulties teachers often face in applying CL

However, respondents also admitted that they had some challenges when they implemented CL in their classrooms. Based on themes emerging from the coding, these difficulties were grouped into three main categories: class size, classroom preparation and management, curriculum coverage. Three of the respondents admitted the problem related to class size.

> *[…] "First, my class has more than 40 students. It is too crowded to control and facilitate each group."* (Teacher 1)
> *"I think class size is the big problem that I deal with.* (Teacher 2)

The respondents admitted the problem related to curriculum coverage.

> *[...] curriculum coverage is an issue that I worry about. Teachers need to base on the syllabus design to help students lead to the final exam on time so that teachers may be fear of not being able to cover the required content.* (Teacher 3)
> *"To me, barriers that inhibit the use of cooperative learning include not being able to cover as much content [...]"* (Teacher 5)

Four of the participants shared the same challenges related to classrooms preparation and classrooms management. They responded:

> *[...] Besides, classrooms preparation and classrooms management are also the other problems."* (Teacher 2)

> *[...] "Implementing CL in class requires a teacher to spend a lot of time preparing the activities and carrying out them."* (Teacher 4)

Besides, other problems teachers sometimes face include lack of students' motivation in the activity participation; lack of materials, learners' mixed level. They added:

> *"To me, barriers that inhibit the use of cooperative learning include [...] and the lack of materials."* (Teacher 5)

> *The biggest problem I have to face in my teaching context is my learners' mixed level which causes cooperative learning.* (Teacher 6)

In conclusion, most of them reported that they also shared similar challenges of implementing CL in their teaching process. First, they indicated that the class size was too big, so it was hard for them to facilitate each group or control all of them. Besides, because of curriculum pressures, teachers just had enough time to go through all materials but not investigated students' deep understanding on any topics outside the curricula. Last, teachers spent a lot of time preparing the activities and carrying out them.

Teachers' practices to deal with difficulties in implementing CL

Based on the above-mentioned difficulties in applying CL in their classrooms, the teachers suggested using authentic materials or tasks; using games or projects to facilitate students' responsibility in team setting; rewarding to motivate students to get involved in and contribution to the lessons; designing interesting and suitable activities; giving clear instructions on how to implement the task. Below are some of their suggestions.

> *"In my opinion, I suggest using authentic material or tasks because they may encourage students' learning motivation...Or teachers can use games, tasks, projects to facilitate students' responsibility in pairs, group work."* (Teacher 1)

> *"Teachers should design interesting activities to make students feel motivated in the lesson."* (Teacher 4)

Besides, other teachers suggested solutions related to training in cooperative learning methods. She claimed that it would be better to make implementing CL easier for teachers by training them how to make the most of using CL. One of the interviewees added:

> *"Teachers need to obtain a higher level of training in cooperative learning methods. When teachers receive training in cooperative learning methods, they will be able to implement CL using a higher level of cooperative learning activities to increase student achievement."* (Teacher 5)

In summary, what the teachers suggested for improving the quality of implementing CL is related to the activities which help motivate learners to interact and contribute to the lessons actively and responsibly.

Their implementation of CL strategies in the future

When asked about implementing CL in the future, all of the teachers thought that most of the CL activities were useful for their teaching and for their students' learning as well. Therefore, all of them said "Yes" because of the advantages CL brought about as mentioned on their above-mentioned responses. More specifically, some teachers responded as follows:

> *"Of course. Because as I mentioned, I found that my students have more motivation in learning when CL was applied in the classrooms." (Teacher 2)*

> *"Absolutely yes. Because of the advantages mentioned at the beginning." (Teacher 3)*

All of the teachers reported that they would continue implementing CL strategies in their English language classrooms in the future because they recognized the important role of CL in English language teaching and learning. More specifically, in the interview data, they confirmed that CL contributed some benefits for both teachers and students. For students, CL could increase interaction, their learning motivation and their academic achievement together with skills. For teachers, this approach would help bring them together for intensive discussion on how to use it effectively in their classrooms.

In general, all of the teachers will continue applying CL in their future classrooms because of the usefulness of CL activities for their teaching and for their students' learning.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicated that teachers perceived that CL was important and had positive impacts on learners especially on their willingness to engage in and contribution to the lessons. One of the possible explanations for this may be from the classroom atmosphere. It is noisy with student interaction and engagement in sharing their work to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher. It is in line with the hypothesis and the results of the previous studies (Thanh, 2011; Celik, 2013; Hinson, 2015; George, 2017). In addition to that, CL was believed to develop learners' critical thinking skills, group work and relationship with their classmates as when students work together in small groups, they feel free to share and express whatever they think about the work.

Additionally, the teachers gave most agreement on the frequency of implementing CL approach. This reflected that CL has become a common and preferred method of instruction in Vietnam. This can be inferred from the curriculum and the guidelines and training from the MoET for teachers of English in the general education system.

However, in this study, the analysis from quantitative and qualitative data revealed some difficulties as well as some insight into issues that the teachers faced in implementation of cooperative learning structures in their classrooms. The result from the quantitative data of this study showed that it was not quite easy to implementing cooperative learning in classrooms (M=3.63, SD= .878). The results from qualitative data presented the reasons why CL was difficult to use. Teachers indicated that the class size was too big, so it was hard for them to facilitate each group or control all of them. They admitted that it took a lot of time to prepare the activities and carry out them in CL classes. It is quite normal as when too many groups work at the same time, the teacher finds it difficult to give help or know exactly what each group is doing.

Another drawback of implementing CL revealed by the teachers was that because of the curriculum pressures, they just had enough time to go through all materials but not investigated students' deep understanding on any topics outside the curricula. This finding seemed to be in line with the results of previous studies (Thanh, 2011; Celik, 2013; Hinson, 2015), which showed that CL was hindered by a number of local cultural and institutional barriers such as curriculum coverage and, less time is

available to plan for the effective implementation of the structures, classroom management and students' attitudes towards CL.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that, in general, teachers' understanding of CL was quite high. Besides, most of them understand the use of CL well enough to implement in their classes. Specifically, thanks to CL, teachers could achieve their educational objectives, reduce their workload. To students, CL could help them learn more and remember what they have learned for a longer period time, improve their critical thinking skills, understand and like each other more, develop group work skill which is an important skill for their future. The findings also revealed that most of the participants had strong perceptions toward the role and impact of cooperative learning in their classrooms.

The study proved that teachers had positive perceptions towards the benefits of CL toward their students' learning (M=3.88, SD=.491). Particularly, the teachers were aware that implementing CL helped develop students' positive attitudes towards learning. They reckoned that their students were more responsible for self-study and achieved more when they worked together via CL activities than they worked alone. In addition, the data analysis showed that the teachers perceived that engagement was highly affected by the implementation of cooperative learning structure. Specifically, cooperative learning could enhance good working relationships among students. Besides, students were more motivated when teachers structured the class in cooperative groups as well as when asked to complete assignments in a team setting. However, they found that not all of the students contributed as well as listened to other learners' contribution. Furthermore, implementing CL took teachers and students "a great deal of effort and planning" since "class size and noise" were also the problems. The teachers also admitted that they sometimes lost control and perceived that too many students relied on others to do the work when class was structured in CL teams, which presents the low individual accountability and positive interdependence among group members.

The data also revealed that the teachers perceived their roles well in promoting cooperative learning in their classrooms as well as supporting their students to participate more actively and successfully in CL activities. They also perceived well their roles when giving feedback to each group and sharing observation results at the end of the class period; assigning roles for students; setting the stages for learning, monitoring the groups; and checking students' understanding of the material. Besides, in order to promote CL in their classrooms, teachers believed that it is important for them to help their students understand the importance of every member's responsibility, supporting each other's efforts for the final learning outcome.

Regarding the pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research, this research implies that to get the most benefits of CL, EFL teachers should self-study and work with colleagues to share innovative ideas about it and enrich their teaching strategies. Moreover, it is essential that teachers establish goals of cooperation and interact with other teachers to discuss the best ways to keep groups and the noise under control. It is also helpful to provide feedback on each other's teaching to improve the teaching performance. For the sake of generalization, it will be better if studies in the future can be conducted with more teachers from different language levels and different localities to provide readers high generalized information. In addition, future studies may compare the perceptions between experienced teachers and novice ones about CL.

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