Exploring University Teacher Perceptions About Out-of-Class Teamwork

Explorando las percepciones de profesores universitarios acerca del trabajo en equipo fuera de clase

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This study reports on the first stage of a larger joint research project undertaken by five universities in Mexico to explore university teachers' thinking about out-of-class teamwork. Data from interviews were analyzed using open and axial coding. Although results suggest a positive perception towards teamwork, the study unveiled important negative opinions. These opinions suggest the lack of success in promoting deep learning and in developing students' socio-cognitive abilities. Findings were used to develop a survey to be applied to more teachers to gain a broader perspective and to corroborate results.

Key words: Higher education, out-of-class teamwork, teacher educators, teacher perceptions.

Este estudio reporta la primera etapa de una investigación en conjunto con cinco universidades mexicanas, en donde se explora el pensamiento de profesores universitarios acerca del trabajo en equipo fuera de clase. Los datos recolectados a través de entrevistas fueron analizados utilizando la codificación abierta y axial. Aunque los resultados sugieren una percepción positiva hacia el trabajo en equipo, el estudio reveló opiniones negativas importantes. Estas opiniones sugieren la falta de éxito en promover el aprendizaje profundo y en desarrollar las habilidades socio-cognitivas en los alumnos. Los hallazgos se utilizaron para elaborar una encuesta a aplicarse a más profesores para obtener una perspectiva más amplia y comprobar resultados.

Palabras clave: enseñanza superior, formadores de docentes, percepciones de profesores, trabajo en equipo fuera de clase.

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Introduction

The use of group work as a learning strategy may be recently gaining importance in the Mexican university learning context due to the emerging global challenges of the work environment where the ability to work on a team has been regarded as a valuable asset (Kremer & McGuiness, 1998; Portillo Mares, 2011). Authorities of Mexican universities preparing individuals for the work environment also agree on the benefits of teamwork, such as the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), which states on its webpage that teamwork should be used as a pedagogic technique for student centered learning (UAM, 2013).

Mexican education at all levels has traditionally been lecture-centered. Students sitting in lockstep listen to the teacher or work on their own (Stein, 2004). It is not only students who are used to a lecture-centered classroom environment, but also teachers who are used to being the center of attention (Smith & MacGregor, 1992; Stein, 2004). Teamwork, as a relatively new pedagogic approach in higher education in Mexico, presents a challenge by confronting expectations of the classroom working environment (Borg, 2006). A colorful kaleidoscope of perceptions, expectations, beliefs, and methods when using teamwork is expected to be found among teachers within the country. Teamwork "used both in and out of class" (Davis, 1999, p. 1) may be used for short tasks within a class period or for longer projects during the entire school term.

Ten researchers from five public Mexican universities became interested in exploring teachers' and students' perceptions on out-of-class group work. The voice of teachers from the universities of Sonora (UNISON), Durango (UJED), Nayarit (UAN), Colima (UCOL), and Guerrero (UAGRO) are here presented as the results of the first phase of a larger study. The aim of the study is to delve into the factors influencing the use of this pedagogic strategy within Mexican undergraduate foreign languages or language teaching programs. Researchers who are members of the RECALE (Foreign Languages and Academic Bodies Network, for its initials in Spanish) collaborated in the design and collection of data from faculty and students at their home university. The views of ten teachers, two from each university, were explored and used to design a questionnaire which will be administered to all of the teachers of the above mentioned programs.

Since there appears to be no consensus in the literature about a clear division among the terms group work, teamwork, and collaborative learning, they may be used indistinctly in the present paper to refer to three or more students working together "mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product" (Smith & MacGregor, 1992, p. 10).

From Traditional Teaching to Group Work

From its origins, learning has been an instinctive and natural social process in which individuals learn from each other starting with their very early days (Race, 2014). Modern pedagogies, such as socio-constructivism, emphasize the implementation of teamwork as conducive to learning (Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton, 2003). According to Race and Pickford (2007), more learning happens when students work in small groups, rather than listening to lectures. Moreover, they claim that learning can be enhanced when "students interact simultaneously with each other, and learn from each other" (p. 32) in out-of-class small group meetings by discussing and exchanging ideas.

The view of a group of students working together in the classroom to achieve a common task or learning objective is gradually becoming more frequent around the world as this paradigm gradually pervades former lockstep environments in higher education (Lillo Zúñiga, 2013; López Hurtado & Viáfara González, 2007). However, the inclusion of a new teaching-learning strategy involves more than just organizing students into groups to work together (Lillo Zúñiga, 2013; Portillo Mares, 2011). Teachers are perceived more

as organizers or facilitators of learning experiences, while students are seen as active agents interacting with the course content (Zárate & Moiraghi de Pérez, 2004). Teachers who prepare group work activities no longer perceive of themselves as know-it-all experts delivering their wisdom, but as expert promoters or "designers of intellectual experiences" (Smith & MacGregor, 1992, p. 10) for their students.

Benefits of Group Work

Group work has been reported to increase student active participation and enhance learning outcomes (Davis, 1999). The development of the highly valued transferable skills such as oral communication and the ability to solve problems has also been observed in small groups. Developing the ability to listen to others' ideas thoughtfully and analytically and build on others' work can only be done when working with others (Race, 2014). For the language classroom the use of group work increases each student's opportunity to use the target language (Long & Porter, 1985).

Despite benefits and advantages, misinterpretation of what group work entails and assuming that all individuals will naturally work in groups without problems or misunderstandings may yield a number of undesired outcomes. The challenge of out-of-class group work may be enhanced by the absence of a figure of authority to monitor the groups' activity. However, Fiechtner and Davis (1984) suggest that those groups that work in class and out-of-class create a more cohesive group, enhancing the learning experience through group work.

Problems Acknowledged in the Literature

Motivation to work in a group is considered to be a severe obstacle when setting group work tasks (Kerr & Bruun; Morgan; as cited in Davies, 2009). Uncommitted group members may influence the whole group effort and dynamic when committed group members reduce their own efforts upon perceiving they are doing all of

the work. One of the common problems observed by both teachers and learners is the free rider, who seeks to take advantage of the work of others while reaping the benefits (Davies, 2009; Davis, 1999; McGraw & Tidwell, 2001; Medrano Vela & Delgado Alvarado, 2013; Quinn, 2012). Students' reaction to free riders may result in the *sucker effect* (Kerr as cited in Davies, 2009), which makes another group member become a free rider too. Large groups may promote the number of free riders, the sucker effect, or social loafing. A group member who does not feel part of the group may become a social loafer. Social loafing is characterized by a reduction of effort when forming part of the group in which members do not feel committed to the group (Davies, 2009).

Another common undesired outcome could be that students divide the work to be done into equal parts, later collected by the group member responsible for putting all the parts together and turning in the completed work. Though apparently every student would be working and doing his or her part, there is no discussion or interaction among group members (Medrano Vela & Delgado Alvarado, 2013; Oakley, Brent, Felder, & Elhajj, 2004), being unaware of the actual contents of the rest of the final product. Other problems faced by group members are type and quality of communication among group members, difficulty in attending out-of-class meetings, different perceptions on ethics and on the way the work should be approached, having different grade expectations and clear leadership among group members (McGraw & Tidwell, 2001).

A disadvantage observed specifically in language classroom group work may be that students with a higher command of the language, either written or oral, do most of the work (Davies, 2009). It is not only that a teacher may well perceive that the written paper or the oral presentation does not reflect the language ability of weaker students, the problem goes beyond that. Language level heterogeneity among group members may result in stronger students doing all the work without much

participation from weaker students, depriving both strong and weak students from the benefit of discussion and ideas exchange.

Grouping Students

The way groups are conformed is another aspect which may influence interaction among participants, thus affecting the group's outcome. Although teachers may think that students prefer selecting their group members, a study involving 155 students revealed that only one out of two participants reported having a good group experience in this situation (Fiechtner & Davis, 1984). The authors concluded that their worst experience in group work was with self-selected members, rather than with teacher-selected group members. Race (2014) claims that allowing students to decide who to work with could bring the advantage of members having a sense of belonging, though there is the risk of some students left without a group.

While some authors favor a teacher decision on group formation, though carefully planned (Blatchford et al., 2003; Hassanien, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Parmelee & Michaelsen, 2010), others consider that some students may feel uncomfortable with the decision, and they should be allowed to change groups (Oakley et al., 2004; Zárate & Moiraghi de Pérez, 2004). Self-selected groups are reported to "have a higher propensity for cheating" (Oakley et al., 2004, p. 11) or to cover for one another, as illustrated in a recent study in México (Medrano Vela & Delgado Alvarado, 2013) where high achievers complained about working with free riders during the whole semester due to pre-existing relationships. High achievers felt relieved when final project group members were teacher-selected (Medrano Vela & Delgado Alvarado, 2013).

Developing Group Work Skills

Undesired experiences and a sense of unworthiness may be avoided if sufficient attention is given to understanding the benefits and expectations of group work (Hassanien, 2006; McGraw & Tidwell, 2001) by all those involved. Oakley et al. (2004) claim that the management and interpersonal skills required to effectively participate in teamwork are not innate in students nor are they in teachers. Becoming effective group members who aim at effectively contributing and cooperating in the group's task achievement requires conscious effort on behalf of both the participants and the teachers. Students need to be helped in understanding the importance that being able to work in groups may have in their professional life (Oakley et al., 2004). However, working in groups requires the development or enhancement of the necessary skills. Oakley et al. add that students should be gradually introduced to group work participation and its characteristics. Ground rules established at the beginning of the task and clear establishment of roles, responsibilities, consequences, and expectations may be crucial for successful group work. Although participants should be able to take over the group's dynamics, the teacher may intervene when necessary.

The teachers' role is to provide appropriate scaffolding which will lead students to perceive the need to exchange ideas and discuss their points of view in route to building their own understandings and contribute to the groups' task (Lillo Zúñiga, 2013). Undeniably, it is the teacher's task to guide students who, upon arrival at university, may lack the required skills for being effective group members (Davies, 2009; Dolmans, Wolfhagen, van der Vleuten, & Wijnen, 2001; Hassanien, 2006; Smith & MacGregor, 1992).

Previous Experiences and Group Work

It should not be expected for someone to be able to appropriately guide students on effective group work approaches when previous learning experiences have not included this approach to learning and teaching (Borg, 2006). Implementing group work requires more than changing the seating arrangement (Portillo Mares,

2011; Quinn, 2012; Stein, 2004). Research literature has highlighted the importance of teachers' perceptions and beliefs which filter every interpretation of their work (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Prieto Navarro, 2007; Woods & Çakir, 2011). Teachers who have only experienced a traditional approach to teaching will be guided by this principle in the classroom unless deep seated beliefs are challenged and modified, resulting in the adoption of new teaching practices (Borg, 2006). Only when existing beliefs based on previous experiences are challenged can these previous perceptions be reconsidered and modified (Hayes, 1995).

A review of the literature reveals that most studies regarding the implementation of group work, interactions, and teachers' and students' beliefs have mostly taken place in North America and Europe with few studies conducted in Ibero-America where Mexico is located. An example is a research project conducted in 2004 and 2005 where López Hurtado and Viáfara González (2007) look into the implementation of a cooperative learning approach in the public school context in Colombia. The ability to work on teams is one of the generic competences many Mexican universities seek to help students develop. The researchers from the five universities involved in this research project considered that, in order to plan the development of this competence, it was first necessary to find out the beliefs regarding group work of those involved in its implementation: teachers and students.

Description of the Study

Aim

As stated above, the aim of this study was to explore university teacher perceptions of the BA in English language teaching (ELT) or similar programs at the five universities previously described about out-of-class teamwork. Specifically, the study sought to find out teachers' opinions of teamwork in relation to learning and whether these teachers assigned students activities

to be carried out in teams and out-of-class. The study also aimed to discover whether the teachers organize this type of work and the ways in which they carry out this organization.

Research Design

This is the first phase of a larger mixed-mode research project which seeks to find out the teachers' and students' perceptions about out-of-class teamwork and whether problems are common in five state universities in Mexico in the Bachelors in the ELT program or similar programs with the purpose of finding solutions. Therefore, this study will collect qualitative data from a small sample of teachers from the five universities to find out these perceptions. The information from the data will serve to develop a questionnaire to be applied to the rest of the teachers and students to compare the results. Therefore, the present study is one of the most relevant parts of the whole research since it is foundational to the development of the instruments to be applied in future stages of the research to all of the teachers and students of the mentioned programs in participating universities.

In exploring teacher thinking, the current paper is qualitative in nature and consistent with Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) description of the nature of qualitative inquiry by exploring and "understanding phenomena from the point of view of the participants" (p. 2). The instrument was a semi-structured interview which provided uniformity and flexibility by guiding the interviewing process with the questions but at the same time giving researchers freedom to delve into interesting aspects and issues of responses. There were seven questions in the interview which was carried out in Spanish, the participants' mother tongue (see Appendix A for the English version of the interview). The purpose of the first question was to find out teachers' opinion about teamwork in general while the second question intended to uncover whether teachers used out-of-class teamwork and the type of work they assigned. The

third question investigated whether this collaboration was of common use while the fourth question tried to detect the way teachers organized teamwork. The fifth and sixth questions sought to discover the advantages and disadvantages teachers perceived about out-of-class teamwork while the last question asked for their perception about what students thought about this topic.

Participants

The participants were a small group of ten teachers belonging to the five universities. One full-time teacher and one part-time teacher from each university were interviewed to collect data from the two types of teachers who work at these five state universities.

Data Collection

One researcher in each university got in touch with the teachers, briefly explaining the research and asking for their collaboration. A consent form was signed by those willing to participate, allowing for the interview to be audio recorded. Five of the researchers and the ten teachers agreed on the time and place for the interview to take place, which lasted approximately an hour. Recordings were later transcribed. Confidentiality is guaranteed by referring to participant teachers as Teacher 1 (T1), Teacher 2 (T2), and so on.

Data Analysis

A data-driven approach was used to create a framework for analyzing all the information provided by teachers. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) state that "creating categories for coding is the first step of analysis" (p. 39) in qualitative research. Therefore, open and axial coding was carried out first to allow the themes to emerge from the data following the suggestions for data reduction made in Creswell (1998) and LeCompte and Goetz. Open coding was conducted by half of the researchers. This consisted of reading the ten teachers' transcripts several times and writing down all the themes they talked about in order to discover, compare, and

contrast the emerging themes. Axial coding was then conducted. Themes similar in meaning were grouped to form broader themes. Data were read again by these researchers and themes and subthemes were compared, contrasted, discussed, and agreed upon by the researchers. Then, transcriptions and the open and axial coding were sent to the rest of the researchers to be examined for corroboration, thus conducting a member check which is getting interpretations revised by colleagues as suggested by LeComte and Goetz. The seven broad themes and 14 subthemes that emerged from the data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes of Teachers' Perceptions About Teamwork

Theme	Subtheme
1. Opinions	a) Positive b) Negative
2. Assignment Types	a) Class delivered b) Oral production c) Virtual
3. Frequency Factors	
4. Organizational Processes	
5. Advantages	a) Learning b) Abilities c) Motivation
6. Problems	a) Organization b) Training c) Assessing
7. Perceptions of Students' Opinions	a) Positive b) Negative c) Neutral d) Group dependent

Results and Discussion

Opinions

Teachers' perceptions about teamwork were positive and negative. With regard to the positive perceptions, Teacher 1 expressed that what an individual student can do is not comparable in quality to what three can do and

also that teamwork sums ideas, opinions, experiences, and knowledge. This teacher's comment reflects what students reported in Hassanien's (2006) study where the exchange of ideas was perceived as a valuable experience. A very interesting argument was posed by Teacher 7, who at first said that the importance of teamwork depended on the theories of learning that teachers support. He explains that if a teacher conceives learning as a social process as in socio-constructivism, then the teacher will logically devise activities to have teamwork. Teacher 7 adds that students need to develop teamwork abilities for the workplace, as stated by Kremer and McGuiness (1998), Portillo Mares (2011), and Race (2014). He further states that teamwork "is fundamental" regardless of theories of learning because nevertheless, teachers should prepare students for the labor market where they will need to work as teams. There were three other teachers who mentioned the importance of the development of group work skills for the workplace. Two full time teachers (T1 and T5) commented that group work is a process, acknowledging working on teams is not a natural ability that needs to be developed, as stated above by Davies (2009), Lillo Zúñiga (2013), López Hurtado and Viáfara González (2007). Teachers' statements as a whole suggested that the reasons for the positive opinions about teamwork are related to quality of work (T1), theories of learning (T7), and students' future employment needs. Teacher 8 mentioned that it was through group work that cooperation skills and empathy towards others was developed, as claimed by Smith and MacGregor (1992).

On the other hand, there were some negative opinions expressed by three teachers. Teacher 8 considers teamwork could be effective and enriching, elaborating on the use of the word "could" because it doesn't necessarily occur due to interior group dynamics. Teacher 9 adds that when real teamwork is carried out, it is good, but that the students do not really know how to work on teams. These two comments reinforce the acknowledgement that working in groups requires special abilities and skills which may not be innate in all individuals. These statements unveil teacher awareness of problems in teamwork but they perceive that the problems are on the students' side, disregarding the teachers' role in the development of these skills. Two teachers (T1 and T2) commented that students did not feel comfortable when working in groups. This comment may reveal students' previous negative experiences during group work; arguably, developing group work skills could modify those feelings. It is noteworthy that, as a whole, teachers' opinions about teamwork are positive.

Assignment Type

Assignment types were very varied and were classified as *class delivered*, *oral production*, and *virtual*. Examples of class delivered were planning microteaching, actual microteaching, videos, and article summaries. Examples of oral production were presentations, application of theory in practice, phonetics, different projects, exhibits and explanations of them. Finally, examples of virtual assignments were online research surveys and interviews. Teacher 4 explains that these last two assignments belong to his Research Methodology II course where students have to learn to investigate in preparation for their thesis work.

Frequency Factors

The frequency of teamwork assignments varied from two teachers that preferred teamwork carried out in class to two teachers who planned this type of work after every unit and for each of the partials, as can be observed next. Teacher 1 said that in the English class he assigns teamwork after each unit while Teacher 3 states that in practical courses it is easier to assign teamwork of what was seen in class such as designing material for ELT. Teachers also said that the assignments depended on the type of course (T3), topic, homework, and semester of instruction as in Teacher 10's comment in which he said that he didn't assign out-of-class teamwork to the first semester students until they had more experience carrying out teamwork.

Organizational Processes

As stated above, teachers perceived the organization of out-of-class teamwork as a process. The way in which teamwork is organized by teachers is varied, consisting of a number of steps. For instance, Teacher 1 divides the group depending on the number of students and the course time. He assigns themes, asks for progress, monitors, and carries out a final revision. Teacher 2 said that if he sees that the group is not integrated, he makes changes in team members. This comment echoes Oakley et al. (2004) and Zárate and Moiraghi de Pérez (2004) above, when stating that there are times when groups are experiencing difficulties and teachers need to intervene. Teacher 3 adds that he assigns teamwork at the beginning of the course presenting instructions, things to include, places to search for the information, the things to be evaluated, and the way students are going to be evaluated.

Data above suggest that teachers are aware that teacher intervention is important in organizing the teams, monitoring, rearranging a group when necessary, and providing clear expectations of the work to be carried out.

One interesting issue that was unveiled and reported by five teachers was concerning the ways in which students are organized into groups. While most literature suggests groups should be teacher-selected (Davis, 1999; Fiechtner & Davis, 1984), Teachers 6 and 7 expressed that they let students organize themselves while Teacher 4 said that it was teacher led. In addition, Teachers 3 and 8 commented that they carried out both types of organization (Fiechtner & Davis, 1984). Finally, Teacher 10 expressed a surprising statement by saying that to avoid only one or two students working, he does not organize out-of-class teamwork anymore, only in-class. This teacher is aware of the common problems taking place in group work, such as the free rider, the sucker effect (Davies, 2009), or the division of work without any discussion among team members (Davis, 1999; Medrano Vela & Delgado Alvarado, 2013; Oakley et al., 2004).

This statement, in addition to some of the statements issued for *frequency factors* in which teachers preferred to control teamwork in class, suggests problems. Although most of the teachers stated positive opinions of this type of work, at a later stage of the interview negative perceptions started to arise. This point will be discussed in the Problems section of this paper.

Advantages

The three main advantages perceived by teachers are related to learning, abilities, and motivation. All the teachers agreed that by sharing knowledge and discussing ideas with their peers, student learning is enhanced. Examples of this interpretation are given as follows: Teacher 9 said that learning is standardized because the less knowledgeable students learn from the ones that know more since the knowledgeable students push the less knowledgeable ones to reach a higher standard to complete the assignment. Teacher 7 stated that by collaborating with each other, students reach a deeper, meaningful, and permanent level of learning (Davis, 1999). Teacher 7 explained that students share ideas and argue what should the assignment include and later the content to be included is revised and agreed upon among them. Teacher 10 added that it helps students to get used to problems and allows for strategy development to solve interpersonal conflicts (Oakley et al., 2004). Therefore, at the same time that students are involved in deep learning (Entwistle & Waterston as cited in Davies, 2009), they develop cognitive and social abilities (Kremer & McGuiness, 1998; Lillo Zúñiga, 2013). Finally, regarding motivation, Teacher 2 expressed that the synergy, force, and energy that the team creates is higher than the one an individual would produce, boosting students' motivation. Participants perceived many advantages in the use of group work as a learning strategy.

Problems

Teachers specified that the problems perceived in out-of-class teamwork were mostly related to

organization, training, and assessing. For the first subtheme, organization, Teachers 6 and 7 said that sometimes teachers cannot afford the amount of extra work and effort the organization of teamwork requires. Teacher 7 stated that teachers need to invest time to convince people, train them, and follow up on their teamwork. The wording used by Teacher 7 is interesting since he has to "convince" students which could suggest that students are not willing to participate. This comment is consistent with comments above which state that students need guidance and training when working on teams and teachers need to have the time to do it. Another problem mentioned was the selection of group members, which was regarded as "problematic" by Teacher 2 since he said that teacher selection functions partially and student selection functions better.

In relation to the problems of the subtheme, *training*, each of the ten teachers emphasized the need for training students. As Teacher 3 clearly explained, there are students that do not know how to work on teams, however, their individual work is quite good. Later, Teacher 3 added that it would be good to train them so that they really work on teams. Eight teachers agreed that all the work is carried out by only some of the team members and there are ones that do not work but get the credit. Clearly free riding is a common problem. Lack of student commitment, difficulties in getting together, conflict among them, incorrect planning, and work distribution were also mentioned by participants as sources of conflict. All these difficulties experienced by team members reflect a lack of understanding of what group work really entails. Development of the abovementioned transferable skills may help them overcome these negative experiences and learn to interact with others despite the difficulties encountered.

One quite worrisome issue was that only Teacher 2 stated the need for training teachers to implement teamwork. This finding suggests that the majority of the teachers perceive that they do not need any training and that it is the students who should be trained. Teacher 7

stated that he never imposes on the organization of the team members while Teacher 3 states that sometimes there are students that he knows will do the work of their friends. In addition, Teacher 8 gives the assignment in written form to make sure students understand the task and only "sometimes" organizes the groups. This reveals a lack of awareness of the teachers' role in helping students develop group work values and skills. Teachers are to provide appropriate guidance; however, for such guidance to be delivered, teachers themselves need to develop the skills to become effective group work developers.

Concerning the subtheme of assessing, Teacher 5 argued that the team is evaluated and not the ones who worked. This comment suggests the awareness of the presence of free riders or social loafing. Teacher 10 added that if peer evaluation is carried out, students cover for each other, assigning maximum marks regardless of their awareness of work imbalance within the team. Although the teacher does not mention whether this was a team where the students selected their group members, it is clear that there is either friendship or peer pressure among team members to cover for each other. Although Teacher 10's comments reveal knowledge about modern pedagogies in favor of teamwork promotion, he refused to assign out-of-class teamwork because he couldn't be sure whether all of the group members worked.

Perceptions of Students' Opinions

Teachers had a variety of comments about students' thinking in relation to out-of-class teamwork. Positive assumptions were voiced only by Teacher 5, who stated that when students become aware that they are actually learning they get engaged and even enjoy looking at other teams' work. In contrast, two participants said their students thought teamwork undermines their individual effort (T1, T9) and another two mentioned they disliked it due to difficulties in getting together (T5, T7). Other perceptions against teamwork were related to time consumption (T5, T9) and problems on agreeing on what is to be done (T2).

Neutral views were in terms of students being indifferent to teamwork (т4) and unawareness of their students' perceptions about working on teams (т8, т10). Finally, under the *group dependent* subtheme, success in group work was subject to how members got along with each other (т3, т8). Negative views referred to the teachers' perceptions regarding the students' lack of awareness of the importance of teamwork for the development of the transferable skills, abilities, and values which are likely to be important in their future professional life. For instance, the abilities are to carry out a professional project in the workplace together with other coworkers, being able to accept constructive criticism, and arguing, negotiating, and sharing ideas with others.

To summarize, the participants' data were very informative and rich in insights. At the beginning of the interviews most teachers stated positive perceptions about teamwork. Their comments disclosed awareness of the theoretical aspects about modern theories of learning and pedagogy which emphasize the implementation of teamwork since the teachers were at ease discussing the benefits associated with socio-constructivism and collaborative learning, as should be recalled. Moreover, a noteworthy issue was that teamwork was judged "crucial" regardless of the theories of learning because it was perceived as a skill students needed to acquire for future employment. However, teachers were also quite aware of the problems that teachers and students face. They are related to organization, student training, and assessing this type of work. As should be recalled, among the sources for these problems were the difficulty for students to meet, free riders due to differences in commitment to the task assigned, and conflicts among students who only like to work with their friends. All of the teachers stated that students did not know how to work as teams. However, it was not mentioned who would be responsible for providing the training. Currently, in the Mexican context, it is unlikely for students to reach university already possessing the

skills to work as teams. Therefore, teachers need to be prepared to develop these skills in the students.

Half of the participants said their students' perception towards teamwork was not positive. The most important issue that arose from this study was the suggestion that the benefits of collaborative learning and socio-constructivism are not being reached. This is because partial learning is being achieved instead of deep learning since the lack of student commitment, conflict among students, incorrect work distribution, and working only with friends are not conducive to learning.

It should be recalled that the following step in the research was to develop a survey using the teachers' perceptions that were stated by them. Because of the relevance of the findings, it was now considered crucial by the researchers to continue investigating teachers' thinking about out-of-class teamwork and to survey all of the staff of the five universities to have a broader perspective and to corroborate results.

Designing the Survey

The perceptions taken from the analysis of the teachers' data were foundational in designing the new instrument. All of the teachers' perceptions were listed and then separated into single statements so that they contained only one idea. To simplify the organization of the survey, similar statements were grouped together in sections. At the end, the survey contained five sections and 43 statements. The final version of the survey can be observed in Appendix в. It is important to mention that the study was conducted in Spanish since this is the mother tongue of nine of the teachers to be sampled. The exception was a French teacher. The measurement scale used for the five sections corresponded to a 6-point positively-packed agreement rating-scale consisting of two negative and four positive points, following Brown (2004). Number 1 corresponded to *strongly disagree* and 6 to *strongly agree*.

The survey was then piloted with two teachers from each participant university. Upon answering it, they

provided feedback on the content and the format. This was discussed by five participant researchers and the survey was edited. Modifications included statement rewriting for clarity and changing an agreement scale for a frequency one for the last section of this instrument, that is, section E, items 33 to 43 (see Appendix B).

Once the survey was completed it was sent to the other researchers for their comments. The survey was perceived to be ready (see English version in Appendix B).

Conclusion

The aim of the study was fulfilled since it was possible to explore the thinking of a small number of university teachers of the Bachelors in the ELT program or similar programs in five universities. Teachers' initial comments were positive, however, a contrasting point of view was revealed when addressing practical issues regarding implementation and follow-up of task assigned. Teachers perceived group work was not being successful in promoting deep learning and in developing the social and cognitive abilities expected in students. This failure was attributed to students' lack of knowledge and ability to work on teams. Student training in this respect was perceived to be required unanimously.

Literature clearly states that it is the teachers' task to develop the skills to work on teams. However, it may be expected that earlier education levels of instruction should have developed these skills. The reality in the Mexican university context is that many of our students have not acquired the skills which would provide many benefits during their student life and could empower them upon joining the world of work. Therefore, it is essential that teachers include in their courses strategies to develop teamwork abilities and skills in their students. In the event that training for students were to be provided, teachers would also need to develop the abilities to effectively plan, organize, monitor, and evaluate teamwork that will enable them to cope with the challenges which may still arise.

As the results of this study unveiled some serious issues, the need to confirm the results is of great importance. Therefore, the survey will collect the perceptions of all of the full-time and part-time teachers of the participating BA in English language teaching program or similar programs, or at least of a greater sample of teachers in the five different state universities.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview for Teachers[1]

1. What is your opinion about teamwork?
2. What type of out-of-class teamwork assignments do you plan for students to carry out?
3. How often do you assign out-of-class teamwork?
4. How do you organize from your classroom out-of-class teamwork? What else do you do?
5. What advantages have you seen in out-of-class teamwork?
6. What are the main problems that you have encountered in out-of-class teamwork?
7. On a scale of 1 to 10, to what extent do your students like you to assign them out-of-class teamwork? Why?

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1   The English translation of the interview was made for publication purposes since the original language was Spanish.

Appendix B: Out-of-Class Teamwork Research Project Survey[2]

Dear university teacher:

The purpose of the present research project is to look into university teacher perceptions about out-of-class teamwork. Several teachers working at five Mexican state universities (UNISON, UCOL, UAN, UJED, and UAGRO) will be asked to comment on this teaching strategy. We would appreciate your collaboration in answering the present survey if you use out-of-class teamwork as part of your teaching practice. The group of researchers participating in this study ensures you that no personal information will be revealed, and neither will individual opinions be disclosed.

Please select the option that best reflects your opinion according to each statement.

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Moderately agree	Agree	Strongly agree
A. Out-of-class teamwork:	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Encourages collaboration.						
2. Encourages student integration.						
3. Promotes interaction.						
4. Prepares students for a professional life.						
5. Is a process that takes time for students to assimilate.						
6. Develops social abilities.						
7. Develops cognitive abilities (e.g., critical thinking, problem solution, strategies, etc.)						
8. Is more work for the teacher.						
9. Ends with a team product.						
10. Optimizes class time.						
11. Socializes knowledge and abilities among members.						
12. Makes every student work.						
13. Functions depending on group attitude.						
14. Must be carried out by dividing work among group members.						
15. Depends on participants' affinities.						
16. Requires teacher follow-up.						

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2   The English translation for the survey was made for publication purposes since the original language is Spanish.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Reflects homogeneous knowledge of group members.						
B. The teamwork assignment:	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. Is of better quality than individual work.						
19. Sums each team member's potential.						
20. Reflects application of theory into practice.						
21. Impacts individual grades.						
C. The frequency of teamwork assignments depends on:	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. The topic.						
23. The subject matter.						
24. The course content organization.						
D. The students:	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. That work harder learn more.						
26. Know how to work on teams.						
27. Are equipped with socio-cognitive skills (e.g., can discuss experiences adding new ideas and knowledge, know how to argue, etc.).						
28. Present better work in groups than individually.						
29. Work individually despite being assigned to work in teams.						
30. Divide the work and then put it together.						
31. Re-group inside the team.						
32. Tend to report that every member worked although it isn't always true.						
	Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Fairly often**	**Very often**	**Always**
E. I as a teacher:	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. Give instructions and explain the expected work well.						

34. Give students practice in class prior to the teamwork that will be requested.						
35. Organize the team (I decide who the team members are).						
36. Intervene if necessary and make changes (e.g., I change members on already made teams).						
37. Make sure work has been done as teams (everybody worked the same).						
38. Use rubrics to mark/grade.						
39. Explain all the elements I'm going to mark when work is assigned.						
40. Ask for work that develops research skills.						
41. Ask students to prepare for oral presentations on a topic in class.						
42. Request students to use electronic media when carrying out the assignments.						
43. Request students to present their teamwork using electronic media (e.g., PowerPoint, Flash, web pages, etc.).						

Thank you for your time and collaboration! Please select or provide data:

Full-time teacher_____,   Hourly-based_____,

Academic degree(s) _____

Age between -25_____, 26-35_____, 36-45_____, 46-55_____, 56-65_____, more_____

Years of teaching experience (in general) _____

Sex: Male_____, Female _____