

## An Exploration of Libyan Learners' Attitudes Towards Pair Work Activity in English Language Learning Development

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### ABSTRACT

This research paper aimed to investigate Libyan learners' attitudes towards pair work activity in their learning process. Furthermore, this research established the reasons for their attitudes, how this activity affects their learning process, and how Libyan learners can be encouraged to participate in this activity. Mixed approaches of quantitative and qualitative methods were used for data collection, by means of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was distributed online to 59 Libyan learners. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four Libyan learners to discuss their attitudes in more detail. The study explores both gender, among participants the majority were male Libyan learners (61%) than female Libyan learners (39%). The Most of them were in the 25-34 years old (72.9%) and (62.7%) have been studying English for more than one year. Based on the findings of the current research, it could be said that 79.3% of students found pair work positive / very positive while less than 7% of learners found pair work very negative / negative. Eventually, The findings showed that most of learners acknowledged that participating in pair work is very useful, the analyzed data illustrates that 74.5% of students found pair work helpful / very helpful; while 79.3% found pair work positive / very positive. In addition, the attitudes of male and female learners are similar. This statement was highlighted by both males and females participants of the study. Also the four interviewees stressed that pair work helped them to improve their speaking skills and facilitated their communication.

### INTRODUCTION

English language has become the most popular language that is taught all over the world. Meanwhile, the number of English language learners is continually increasing, which necessitates finding the most relevant method to effectively teach the language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Consequently, over the years many English language teaching methods have been developed, involving grammar translation method, audio-lingual method, situational language teaching method (SLT) and direct method. However, communicative teaching methods are currently understood as the most effective method in English language teaching (Ansarey, 2012). They have been defined as the ability to communicate in different situations rather than focusing on the grammatical structures (ibid).

Savignon (1972) has stressed the positive impact of the use of communicative methods in the teaching and learning process to improve learners' English language. To challenge this, Swan (1985) has claimed that communicative approaches tend toward a misunderstanding concerning the notion of authenticity. He also pointed out that

communicative approaches did not succeed in admitting the important role of first language in English language learning. However, Storch and Aldosari (2010) have reported that the current use of communicative approaches in English language learning encourages learners to participate in pair work activity and small group discussion to improve their English language.

Pair work practice in the classroom is the topic that will be investigated through this research. According to Zohairy (2014), pair work constitutes a vital element in English language learning. It represents an alternative whereby the learner can, in some cases, progress more rapidly than working alone. Due to the importance of pair work tasks in the learning process as an effective communicative approach, this research aims to investigate Libyan learners' attitudes towards pair work activity in more detail.

In Libya, the communicative language is Arabic, whereas English is taught as a foreign language in schools. Nonetheless, the weakest form of communicative approaches is currently applied in Libyan education rather than the strongest, as traditional methods still predominate and are based

on memorization and repetition (Shihiba, 2011). To support this, Abdulhamid (2011) has also indicated that Libyan classrooms arranged traditionally, where the teacher presents and explains subjects to passive listeners. (Abdulhamid, 2011: P24). has stated that the teacher-centred approach is the implemented approach in Libyan classroom. Accordingly, Libyan learners have a limited opportunity to express their views analytically or critically, and are rendered “passive learners”.

### Problem Statement

English language is considered to be one of the most important languages in the world. There are plenty of techniques in the process of language learning and development, one of these approaches is pair work or group work. Many English foreign language learners face a lot of difficulties and problems in learning English language. This research aims to examine Libyan learners’ attitude towards the process of language development through pair work activity.

According to Alhmali (2007), the situation of the country plays the most significant role in improving the quality of its education. Although Libyan education is free at all stages, obviously there are some issues in the quality of this education. To support this, Omar (2013) has stated that Libyan English language teaching is still not enhanced enough and developed, although the Libyan community realizes the significance of English language for communication and for the future of country from different aspects of the Libyan community.

Most English foreign language learners face difficulties when they are asked to work in groups or pair work activity. This may happen due to different factors, one of the important factor that may cause problem to EFLLs is the language competence, another factor that play a crucial role in influencing learners attitude is language performance in which they find it hard to speak or work in groups because they may be afraid to speak or commit mistakes, as Libyan learners’ attitudes will be investigated in this research paper, Reid (2006) has stated that learners’ attitudes is an analytical method that evaluates a certain theme, either to discover a positive or a negative tendency. In other words, to investigate an attitude is to evaluate it, and the main purpose is to investigate Libyan learners’ attitudes towards pair work activity. This current study is for the future of both Libyan learners and Libyan education. As the students in Libya used to work individually, sit isolated in their desks, and they are not allowed to speak except to their teacher if they want to ask question, the teacher inevitably becomes the source of authority in the learning environment. Furthermore, Libyan students themselves might not be aware of the significance of this reality, and if they asked to work in pairs they start talking in their first language with different topic.

This research aims to provide an explanation of the main purpose of pair work in the learning process of Libyan students, particularly when this method is implemented in Libya, as pair work is used to improve English skills, promote confidence and broaden knowledge in the exchange

of ideas and opinions. Secondly, there are also academic reasons, as it would be useful for English language teaching (ELT) in Libya, as it promotes ELT process, and the Libyan educators and teachers will explore through this research Libyan learners’ attitudes towards pair work when they have exposed to it.

### Research Questions

1. What are Libyan English learners’ attitudes towards pair work activity?
2. Which factors affect Libyan English language learners’ attitudes to pair work?
3. What is the impact of pair work on Libyan learners’ English language learning process?

### Objectives of the Study

1. To identify Libyan English language learners’ attitudes towards pair work classroom activity.
2. To establish the reasons for the emergent Libyan English language learners’ attitudes.
3. To identify the effects of pair work on the learning process of Libyan English language learners.

Although many studies investigated pair work activity in different parts in the world, this paper offers a new angle, investigating Libyan learners’ thoughts and feelings about pair work interaction, but there is a limitation to Libyan studies in this area, which motivate this research paper.

### Literature Review

This section aims to introduce the historical development of teaching methods in English language teaching (ELT) in Libya. Furthermore it discusses the importance of pair work and group work and finishes with how learners can be encouraged to participate in pair work activity.

### General Teaching Methods used in Libya

Looking at the teaching methods used in Libya, schools were officially established in Libya for all levels between 1951 and 1969. During this time considerable changes had occurred in the educational system (Orafi, 2008). The current education system has been developed during the last decades in Libya to track both the local and the global progression (Aldabbus, 2008). Hawana (1981) claimed that even though the aims of teaching programs were relevant to the needs of Libyan learners, the results were not fully effective. To support this, Khalifa (2002) has stated that despite the continuous effort to develop the teaching methods in Libya, traditional methods are still dominant in Libyan education as well as the lack of learning facilities, such as laboratory rooms and computers. Furthermore, Hawana (1981) pointed out in his study that English language classes and materials were presented in Arabic language, and consequently English language learners experienced difficulty to use the simplest forms of English to communicate. What is more, there were also other reasons for this; firstly, there was a lack

of trained teachers to lead the teaching process and also the lack of available communicative materials such as pictures and videos. As a result, learners were less motivated to study English language (ibid).

According to Aldabus (2008) the nature of Libyan classroom interaction is controlled by the teacher in all aspects of classroom work such as repetition, error correction, feedback and answering the questions. Therefore, it can be noticed that the application of teacher-centered approach in Libya is much higher than student-centered approach (Moftah, Norwani and Yusof, 2012). According to Shihiba (2011) the findings of her study to investigate the concepts of Libyan teachers in implementing communicative learner-centred approach (CLCA) showed that the majority of Libyan teachers and educators were motivated to implement CLCA. On the contrary, less experienced teachers preferred the traditional methods which are associated with Teacher-centred approach (TCA).

### **Specific Teaching Methods in English Language**

Teaching of any language is based on the outcomes of natural analysis and its application that comes from theoretical foundation (Richards, 2014). In addition, Britto (2007) has highlighted that the concept of teaching method is the general structure of the classroom. Accordingly, teachers should identify their methods during the learning process (ibid).

Celce-Murcia (1991) has claimed that English language teaching methods have undertaken various fluctuations over the last decades. As a result of dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the traditional methods, educators and linguists started promoting the communicative approach because previously learners were not practicing real language used in everyday situations (Brumfit and Johnson, 1979).

### **Pair work**

Pair work activity has been described as an effective technique to increase the opportunities of learning Moon (2000). Abdulla (2007) has defined pair work as a cooperative work in pairs to fulfill learning tasks. Tatar (2005) has pointed out that active classroom participation through pair work is a significant element to support the learning process. To support this, Maher (2012) has emphasized that the use of pair work in the classroom improves learners' fluency skills, supports collaborative work and enables learners to take the turn of better use of speaking. Long and Porter (1985), cited in Maher (2012) highlighted that many educators have endorsed pair work as it provides opportunities to speak more in the classroom and gives learners control over their learning process. Moreover, it supports classroom dynamic when learners help and encourage each other. Another advantage is that learners unlike when they talk to their teacher they do not feel embarrassed to make mistakes with partners, which builds their confidence and promotes peer correction (ibid). To challenge this, Hill (2004) assumed that there are potential flaws of pair work. For instance, students

make more noise when all the class works in pairs. Similarly, some students might use their first language (L1) or they might change the whole topic into something else. Also Skrzynski (2005) indicated the same issue that learners are at risk to use their L1 during their task as teacher cannot monitor the whole class.

### **Group work**

Another important aspect of communication is group work. Group work happens in the classroom when learners work together in a context of supporting each other (Brown, 1992). Ibnian (2012) stated that his study investigated the effect of using group work to improve learners' attitudes towards EFL, and found that using group work strategy positively improved learners' attitudes in learning English. Also, this strategy enables learners to communicate and share their ideas and views. In group work there is more flexibility than pair work, learners can work collaboratively and also they can be given many roles such as one to judge, disputes, one to act as a chairman and one to make sure the target language is used, which is not available in pair work. However, Hill (2004) also criticized this technique as in some occasions it might refer to individual domination, when one or two dominate the group through forceful personality. Likewise, some group members might rely on others to do the task and keep silent. The solution for drawbacks of pair work and group work that Hill (2004) suggested was the role of teacher who can guide, steer, navigate and dominate the class during these activities.

### **Possible Effects of Pair Work on Teaching and Learning**

Long and Porter (1985), cited in Maher (2012) emphasized that if teacher talking time (TTT) is 25 minutes from 50 minutes lesson of class consisting of 30 students, each learner has only 30 seconds to use the target language. By contrast, if learners work in pairs, each one has a good opportunity for student talking time (STT). Interestingly, it can be seen that using pair work technique reduces TTT and increases STT which enables students to negotiate, discuss and increase the usage of target language to express themselves. Maher (2012) highlights that teachers should be aware of their talking time and try to avoid overpowering the classroom discussion. Another point that should be indicated is that learners should not work with the same partner repeatedly, but the partner should change from time to time so learners have the advantages of working with more than one student each time. The pedagogy of using different partner each time supports learners' unity and friendships and avoids many issues which could occur. It increases positive attitudes, learning outcomes and provides learners with opportunity to share ideas and opinions (Dornyei and Murphey 2004, cited in Maher 2012). However, learners still work collaboratively during pair work activity even if they do not work in "collaborative manner" (Storch, 2001:P29), which suggest that their work in pairs has an impact on their language learning in relation to their motivations and goals.

### How Learners can be Encouraged to Participate in Pair Work Activity

Arteimi (2013) has defined cooperative work as a set of the techniques used to enhance learners' work in pairs and in small groups. Using cooperative learning encourages learners to work in pairs and in groups. What is more, this strategy encourages the concept of mixing different level students together, so strong learners share their ideas and opinions with weak learners. This technique enables learners to develop their speaking skills and teach one another (Arteimi, 2013). To support this, Filatove (2015) also suggested that learners should be mixed according to their levels, high with low and vice versa while the teacher monitors and ensure that learners help and show respect to each other. However, a study done by Zohairy (2014) concluded that learners prefer to work with those whose level is higher, so they can depend on them to do the tasks. Therefore, the teachers prefer learners whose levels are similar to work together, so learners have equal opportunities to work and not have one rely entirely on the other.

Nation and Newton (2008) emphasized that the ability to work in pairs improves through practicing which results in developing communicative skills in English. In addition, they suggested that the role of teacher is to present this approach gradually to learners during learning process. To support this, Arteimi (2013) emphasized the role of a teacher to monitor and guide learners during pair work activity.

### METHODOLOGY

In seeking to give clarification of research terminologies, McGregor and Murnane (2010) claimed that the difference between methodology and method should be shown. Methodology provides the principles of the research while method is related with the strategies and the techniques.

In this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. According to Punch (2005), by using quantitative methods, general views will be gathered from a considerable number of participants. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) stated that quantitative research is introduced in numerical frame. As the main focus of this research study is to investigate Libyan learners' attitudes, a large number of learners' responses is required to present reliable results. However, because quantitative methods might not yield enough of target information, qualitative methods were used to fulfil an in-depth understanding of learners' views. According to Teddlie and Tashakkor (2009) qualitative research is presented in narrative frame. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) pointed out that qualitative methods are highly associated with learners' stances and experience. As such, Libyan learners' experiences of pair work are considerably significant in this study.

The population of this research paper was limited to Libyan learners who study general English language in the UK. This research paper investigated 59 Libyan learners' attitudes; their ages varied between 18 and 44; and their target aim was to improve their English language in the UK either for work or for further education.

This current research paper collected quantitative data from 59 Libyan learners who study English language in the UK, in order to discover their general attitudes towards pair work activity in the classroom, and qualitative data from 4 Libyan learners, male and female who have been in the UK for no less 10 months, and male and female who have been in the UK for no more than 6 months, in order to discover their attitudes in more in-depth.

As mentioned earlier the research paper used survey design and semi-structure interview in collecting the data of the study. The questionnaire was adapted from Zohairy (2014) study, entitled "Effectiveness pair work strategies to enhance Saudi pre-intermediate college students' language production in speaking activities". Zohairy's study focused on Saudi learners' attitudes towards the strategies of pair work in speaking activities at pre-intermediate level, which to some extent different from the researcher's study that focused on Libyan learners' attitudes towards pair work activity in their English language learning process in the UK, and learners were mixed ability of varying levels.

According to Marshal and Rossman (2006), the main focus of the interview is to discover learners' attitudes rather than exposing interviewer's attitudes. Therefore, the main purpose of this interview is to provide learners with the opportunity to expand their views in more detail. To conduct the interview, a meeting was arranged between the interviewer and the interviewees individually for 30 minutes.

In the data analysis the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version (21.0) will be utilized to analyze quantitative data gained from the questionnaire, the data modified to frequency and then into percentage. Qualitative data analysis from semi-structured interview was analyzed thematically. Smith and Firth (2011). points out that interview responses can be analyzed in a connection to research questions. The procedures followed were associated with research questions.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data presented in this section was gathered through the questionnaire -completed by 59 Libyan learners who study English language in the UK, and through semi-structured interviews conducted with four Libyan students. According to Jang et al (2008) using different methods to collect data enables both the researcher and the reader to find the strong relation between the collected data and the research questions. To support this, quantitative and qualitative data lead to integration between the data and research aims, and consequently using different methods to collect these data emphasis "complementary strengths and non over lapping weaknesses" (Niaz, 2008:P288).

#### Demographics Factors

A total of 59 Libyan learners took part in the research study. The demographics information by gender, age group, level of English, age range when started to learn English and how long they have been studying English are shown on Table 4.1. Among participants the majority were male Libyan learners

(61%) than female Libyan learners (39%). The Most of them were in the 25-34 years old (72.9%) and (62.7%) have been studying English for more than 1 year. The rest of the information is shown on Table 4.1.

**Practice Pair Work in Classroom**

The responses given by Libyan learners to the question ‘Do you usually practice pair work activity in the classroom now that you are in the UK?’, are shown on Table 4.2.

As Table 4.2.shows, and looking at the sample as a whole, it was only one student (1.7%) selected never as his/her response, 20 (33.9%) selected sometimes, 29 (49.2%) selected usually and 9 (15.3%) selected always. Furthermore, combining ‘usually’ with ‘always’ (i.e. 49.2%+15.3%=64.5%) and ‘never’ with ‘sometimes’ (i.e. 1.7%+33.9%=35.6%), it is clear that more than 60% of

students usually / always practice pair work in the classroom while 35.6% never / sometimes practice pair work in the classroom. The answers given by male learners are 2.8%, 25.0%, 61.1% and 11.1% for never, sometimes, usually and always respectively. The corresponding figures for female learners are 0%, 47.8%, 30.4% and 21.7% respectively. Even though a higher proportion of male Libyan learners (61.1%) usually practice pair work compare to female Libyan learners (30.4%), 25% of male said sometimes they practice pair work while for female it was 47.8%. However there is no significant difference between the proportions of male and female who practice pair work in classroom.

**Reaction to Pair Work**

The responses given by Libyan learners to the question ‘How would you describe your reaction to pair work in the classroom?’,are shown on Table 4.3.

As Table 4.3 illustrates 2 students (3.4%) selected very negative, another 2 (3.4%) judges it as negative, while 8 (13.8%) could not decide if it is neither positive nor negative, 24 (41.4%) think it is positive and 22 (37.9%) assume it as very positive. In addition, combining ‘positive’ with ‘very positive’ (i.e. 41.4%+37.9%=79.3%) and ‘very negative’ with ‘negative’ (i.e. 3.4%+3.4%=6.8%), it could be said that 79.3% of students found pair work positive / very positive while less than 7% of learners found pair work very negative / negative. The answers given by male learners are 2.9%, 2.9%, 17.1%, 40.0%, and 37.1% for very negative, negative, neither positive nor negative, positive and very positive respectively. The corresponding figures for female learners are 4.3%, 4.3%, 8.7%, 43.5% and 39.1% respectively. The responses from male and female learners are similar; there is no significant difference between the proportions of male and female who found pair work in their study positive or negative. It seems to have a great importance especially for ELT teachers to always introduce pair work tasks and insisting on performing them even among students with culturally different studying approaches. It may be noticed that learner themselves react with a positive attitude towards it even after initial struggle.

In terms of how this all relates to research question: ‘What are Libyan English learners’ attitudes towards pair work activity?’,this data shows that 74.5% of learners found pair work helpful / very helpful; 79.3% found pair

**Table 4.1.** Demographics information of libyan learners

Demographics	Categories	Frequency (Count)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	36	61.0
	Female	23	39.0
Age group	18-24 years	4	6.8
	25-34 years	43	72.9
	35-4 years	12	20.3
	Elementary	2	3.4
Level of English	Pre-intermediate	6	10.2
	Intermediate	13	22.0
	Upper-intermediate	23	39.0
Age range when Started to learn English	Advanced level	15	25.4
	Under 18	22	37.3
	18 – 24	13	22.0
How long been Studying English	25 - 34	17	28.8
	35 - 44	7	11.9
Total	1 - 3 months	8	13.6
	4 - 6 months	14	23.7
	1 year or more	37	62.7
		59	100

**Table 4.2.** Practice pair work in classroom

Gender	Count /%	Practice pair work in classroom				Total
		Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always	
Male	Count	1	9	22	4	36
	Row %	2.8%	25.0%	61.1%	11.1%	100.0%
Female	Count	0	11	7	5	23
	Row %	0.0%	47.8%	30.4%	21.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	20	29	9	59
	Row %	1.7%	33.9%	49.2%	15.3%	100.0%

work positive / very positive. In addition, the attitudes of male and female learners are similar. It may come with a surprise for ELT practitioners who very often seem to admit that they are forced to use many persuasive techniques to integrate and involve group into pair tasks, however; as can be seen the effort is worth doing as in the end it results in appreciation and recognition in improving language skills.

### Gender Attitude Towards Pair Work

In order to figure out the differences between male and female attitude toward pair work, four questions from the adapted questionnaire were used, *Q.1 Reason for enjoying pair work?*, *Q.2 Reasons for not enjoying pair work?*, *Q.3 Effects on English language learning?*, eventually *Q.4 How can learners be encouraged to take part in pair work activity?*. The average was calculated for the main variable. This was then used to make comparison between male and female learners. The results of this comparison are shown on the Table 4.4 below.

As Table 4.4 shows for Q.2 and Q.3 there is a significant difference between male and female learners while for Q.1 and for Q.4 there is no significant difference. As Figure 4.2 shows the mean for male is higher than that of female indicating male learners agreed more than female for reasons

for not enjoying pair work. See Figure 4.2. Similarly, for Figure 4.3 male have a significantly higher mean than female, indicating male learners agreed more with the effects of pair work than female learners.

All in all as the thorough statistical analysis of the participants responds to the questionnaire, it seemed to show that Libyan learners do not find it difficult to adjust to UK ELT communicative classroom methods, and even though many of them had no previous experience in practicing working in pairs, they do find positive effects of into in their Language progress, and therefore express positive attitude towards it. They hardly ever refuse taking part into pair work related tasks even if they need to co-operate with students from different cultural background or of different gender. The research results also suggest the attitude towards the position of the teacher in the classroom, as Libyan learners believe that the teacher is the main responsible during pair work interaction even in indirect way.

### Findings of the Interviews

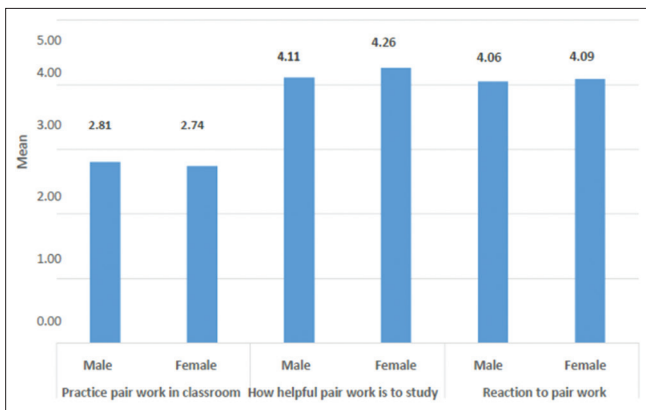
The main aim of the interviews was to supply the research with opinions of Libyan students about pair work activities in the classroom. Libyan learners were asked approximately 16-20 questions in order to investigate their attitudes and reflections. The findings of the semi-structured interviews

**Table 4.3.** Reaction to pair work

Reaction to pair work							
Neither							
Positive							
Gender	Count %	Very Negative	Negative	Nor Negative	Positive	Very Positive	Total
Male	Count	1	1	6	14	13	35
	Row %	2.9%	2.9%	17.1%	40.0%	37.1%	100.0%
Female	Count	1	1	2	10	9	23
	Row %	4.3%	4.3%	8.7%	43.5%	39.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	2	2	8	24	22	58
	Row %	3.4%	3.4%	13.8%	41.4%	37.9%	100.0%

**Table 4.4.** Descriptive statistics for practice pair work in classroom, how helpful pair work is to study, and reaction to pair work

Question	Variables	Gender	No.	Mean	t-test
Q.1	Reasons for enjoying pair work	Male	34	4.25	0.56
		Female	22	4.15	
Q.2	Reasons for not enjoying pairwork	Male	35	3.96	4.45
		Female	22	3.51	
Q.3	Effects on English language learning	Male	36	3.70	9.41
		Female	22	3.27	
Q.4	How can learners be encouraged to take part in pair work activity	Male	36	4.19	2.76
		Female	23	4.37	



**AQI** Figure 4.1. Mean for practice pair work in classroom, how helpful pair work is to study, and reaction to pair work by gender

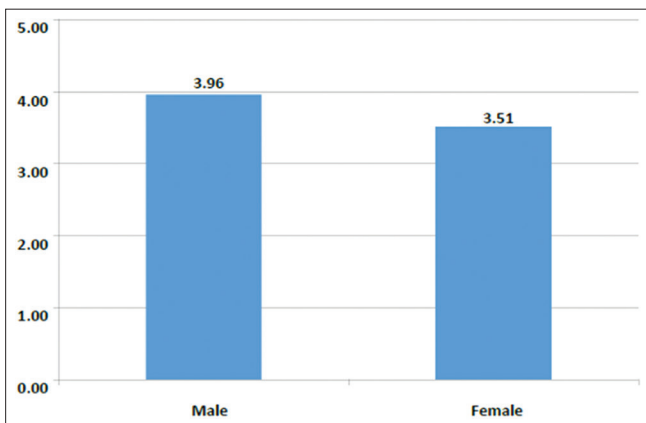


Figure 4.2. Reasons for not enjoying pair work (q.2)

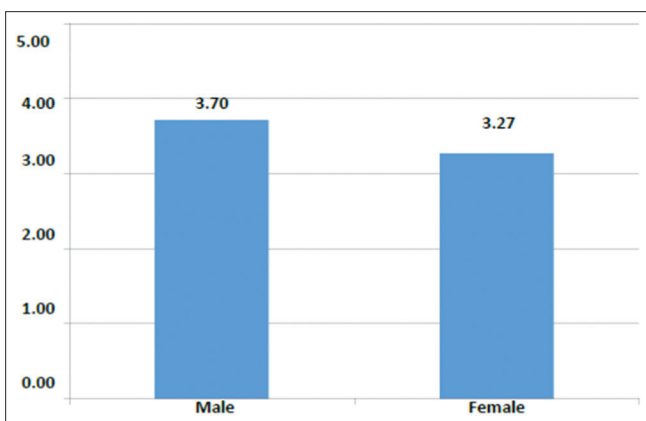


Figure 4.3. Effects of pair work on English language learning

were gathered from four Libyan learners who study English language in the UK, in order to improve their English language competence. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with two males and two females. The current level of proficiency varied among them as well as their pair work experience in and out of the UK. The reason for such differentiation was an attempt to establish what may have an impact on easiness to cope with pair work task-gender, preparation and clearness of instruction or level of fluency

**Attitudes of libyan students towards pair work activity in English language class**

Generally, the four Libyan learners had a positive attitude towards pair work activities. It indicates that all of the students find pair work activities as useful and beneficial for their language learning progress. Even though the initial stress connected with interaction and lack of confidence most of them agreed that is one of most successful ways to learn speaking English especially while living in the UK, where speaking English is part of students' academic and daily life. However, what seemed to be very interesting was the fact that their positive attitudes differed according to their level and time of living in the UK. The first was a Libyan female (student, A), she has been in the UK for ten months, although she has been exposed to pair work activity for the first time in the UK, she had a positive attitude. The second was also a Libyan female (student, B), she highlighted that she has been first exposed to pair work in the UK and so she did not like at first, but her attitude positively changed within the time. The third was a Libyan male (student, C), he had a positive attitude towards pair work activity. However, he pointed out that he has not been exposed to pair work activity first time in the UK, because of his job in the National Oil Corporation in Libya; the company provided a private English course to improve their English for communication purposes. The company has had a lot of foreign workers who speak English and a lot of its employees go to study abroad, during this course they worked in pairs and small groups. Although the pair work practice was incorporated within the class but was not sufficient as it had a form of two or three minute conversations which was not enough for them. The fourth Libyan student whose level was elementary (student, D) who he has been in the UK for six months, he had a positive attitude towards pair work activity as well even though as he confessed he has never exposed to pair work before coming to study in England.

**The factors that affect the attitudes of libyan students towards pair work activity in English language class**

The four Libyan learners provided a brief explanation of the factors that affected their attitudes towards pair work activity in the most significant way. There was a general agreement that pair work positively improved their English language competence and performance. All participants agreed that pair work classroom have a lot of advantages. These advantages range from the interaction and discussion with exchanging ideas. According to interviewees being given an opportunity to speak with an attempt to use the right words while speaking makes it easier to interact with each other, and at the same time fight over the fear of speaking in front of the others.

On the other side, there were also some disadvantages found in par work activities during ELT lesson. However, it was hard to find one clear drawback of this sort of tasks, as the participants responses varied according to their personal conditions and circumstances. Student A stressed that pair work provided her with an opportunity to speak more in the

classroom and that improved her English language skills, in particular speaking skill. She said: *“pair work improves my English language, especially in speaking and pronunciation, and also using the adverbs and some famous expressions”*. Student A also emphasized that during pair work students can support each other, which was fully compatible with student C and D. As student C stated pair work integrates students as they try to help each other. He said: *“This activity facilitates expressing your ideas and understands how your partner thinks, and shares yours ideas and opinion with your partner, it gives you a whole idea what is the topic about.”* Additionally, student D paid attention to the role of the students to enhance and provide confidence to each other. On the other hand, Student B claimed that some Libyan learners might not prefer working in pairs because they are allocated in a situation where they are instructed to find the proper words to communicate, so they totally depend on themselves, unlike what they used to be taught in Libya, which initially may result in negative opinion and reluctance to participate. However, after the passage of time and support it was noticed and admitted that pair work helped her later to improve her speaking skill. It has been indicated by many learners in a form of general agreement that this activity may improve their fluency and accuracy in English language. Furthermore, all participants agreed that learners should not work with the same partner; but they should change their partners each time, so students do not feel bored or uninterested and enjoy the variety of different activities with different group members. In terms of culture issues, three out of four students mentioned that they have no problem to work in pairs with represents of different than their own gender, except student A, she pointed out that even though she can work in a group with different gender, yet she still prefers working with the same gender.

#### ***The impact of pair work on Libyan English language learning process***

Throughout the interviews the four participants emphasized that pair work activity helped to improve their English. Nevertheless, on the response about the flaws of pair work, about 75% of the participants agreed that there are also some disadvantages. As it was further explained the biggest drawback of the pair activity during English class is if the majority of the members share the same first language, in this particular case Arabic which unintentionally very often results in a greater probability of turning the discussion from English to Arabic. Secondly, the difficulty to work in pairs may be caused by personal reasons and character differences, some of the students may like to work independently while some in group. Moreover, the partner you work with may have a huge impact on the learning process, student A said: *“your partner may provoke you or force his /her opinion”*, which obviously make some students, avoid working in pairs to avoid this kind of partners. While student B stressed that when two students speak the same language work in pairs, it would not be quite effective as they will speak in their first language, which make her always try to work with someone whose first language is not Arabic, and student C agreed with

her and also emphasized that the students may try to speak in English but later spontaneously their conversation will turn into their first language.

#### ***How Libyan learners can be encouraged to participate in pair work during English Class***

There are few factors that may influence learning process and development, one of the most important is learning environment and studying culture. In this case, participants' cultural background influenced their approach towards teaching methods used during classes. On the other hand, attention was drawn not only to the cultural differences but the role of a teacher. Tutors can make a very significant influence towards helping students to learn English language by a pair work classroom activity. They also showed that the partners can encourage or discourage each other as mentioned above. However, the four students emphasized that the teacher is the controller of pair work activity. Similarly, if some students are reluctant or unwilling to participate with others during this activity, the teacher is the main factor to encourage and support them, although he/she might be silent during the activity itself. Additionally, student C pointed out that *“teacher should be flexible and make jokes to make learners accept teacher's advice, and learners should love the teacher.”* which indicates that there should be friendly environment between the teacher and the students in the class during pair work activity to encourage them to participate.

#### **DISCUSSION**

Many studies concerning overseas students in Western universities and higher educational institutions tried to investigate the factors affecting their English language learning in classrooms.

Generally, the findings of this study revealed that Libyan learners showed greater enthusiasm to learn English in pair work interaction (Table 4.3), it could be said that 79.3% of students found pair work positive / very positive while less than 7% of learners found pair work very negative / negative. Majority of them thought that pair work activities served as a tool to make them speak more in the classroom. It confirms Long and Porter (1985), and Maher (2012) views, who stressed that pair work provides learners with opportunities to speak more in the class and gives them control over their learning process. Additionally, the students in pair work motivate each other to speak on the certain subjects and topics, which was emphasized through the four interviews, when one of the students said: *“During pair work activity, the students are in a situation where they need to speak and find the proper words to express themselves. Additionally, the student can listen to different accents and recognize them such as Ethiopian, Italian and Indian and etc.”*

During the qualitative data analysis, it was demonstrated that the Libyan students have no objection pairing with other learners whose level is either higher or lower than them as long as they can exchange ideas and share opinions under teacher direction, and that is support the idea that high level students have no problem to work with lower level students.



This confirms the views of Filatove (2015) which highlight that learners should be mixed according to their levels, high with low and vice versa, in a similar way, this agrees with Harmers (2001) and his view by asserting that the help from the higher level students to the lower level students during pair work encouraged the latter to participate and interact. However, this finding was challenged by the study conducted by Zohairy (2014) who reported that Saudi Students preferred the pair work activities when they work with higher level students due to the help and assistance they obtained.

Equally, the finding obtained from Storch (2001) suggested the authenticity are brought when the learners are paired to speak to each other; as consequences they use a variety of formal and informal sentences. However, Hill (2004) reported contrasting outcomes when showing that pairing of students results in noise in the classroom, which negatively affect the abilities of the Libyan students to learn. Similarly, (Hill, 2004; and Skrzynski ,2005) claimed that the students might change the activity to their first language, particularly when they speak the same language, this has been confirmed by one of the interviewees who said: *"I think it will take few minutes to speak English during pair work, and then the students will turn to speak their first language."*

Besides determining the factors which affect pair work activities, this study tried to investigate the impact of pair work on Libyan learners and learning process. This study came up with interesting findings showing that pair work has a positive impact on the learning process of both male and female Libyan students participating in this work. The results showed that the majority of students stated that participating in pair work is very useful, the analyzed data illustrates that 74.5% of students found pair work helpful / very helpful; while 79.3% found pair work positive / very positive. In addition, the attitudes of male and female learners are similar. This statement was highlighted by both males and females participants of the study. Also the four interviewees stressed that pair work helped them to improve their speaking skills and facilitated their communication. One of the interviewees said: *"pair work improves my English language, especially in speaking and pronunciation, and also using the adverbs and some famous expressions."* This support the results of Maher (2012) studies, which indicated that using pair work activity, improve learners' fluency and enables learners to take the turn of better use of speaking. In fact this provides them with of the opportunities to speak freely in the pair form and express ideas.

As it can be seen, the findings of the current study show that the decrease in hesitation and anxiety of learning English language, and the general improvement in speaking were happened through the pair work activity between the Libyan learners. This study also revealed that most of Libyan learners agreed that they feel comfortable when they participate in pair work activity. This view is shared by the findings of Zohairy (2014) in his study which revealed that Saudi students had significantly improved in English language learning through pair work interaction rather than individual tasks.

The third and last objective of this study was to address some the research problem of how Libyan English learners can be encouraged to participate in the pair work. One concern in this study is related to provide the recommendations to the teachers and class room as to how encourage the Libyan English learners to participate in the pair work interaction. As it was discussed earlier that Libyan learners, both males and females, are aware of the benefits of the pair work activities, and showed the interest to participate in this activity during their learning. Accordingly, this study revealed the following strategies to encourage the students to take part in the pair work activities in the class room learning environment.

The value of encouragement and support from the teachers were emerged from this study. As most of students' response stressed the active role of the teacher in organizing the pair work. This, clearly indicates pairing of students should not be done randomly and teacher needs to take care during the process.

Moreover, teachers should be aware of their talking time and try to avoid overpowering the classroom discussion. This seems to be confirmed qualitative results as one interviewee said: *"The teacher should encourage each student to take his chance to talk."* And another interviewee said: *"The teacher should encourage the learner to speak, I feel happier when I speak with the teacher rather than the students. As I have to find the proper words and spend more effort to speak properly with the teacher."*

The findings of the research revealed that over 90% of Libyan English language learners had positive attitudes towards pair work activities, It can be concluded that this study shows that the pair work activities supported the level of enjoyment of English language learning, and learning from the teachers and their fellow classmates as well in the classroom.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate Libyan learners' attitudes towards pair work activity in the learning process, when studying English language in the UK. The results of this research showed that Libyan learners have a positive attitude towards pair work, although the majority have only been exposed to it in the UK. Additionally, they found this activity very helpful in improving their English language speaking skills and communicating outside the classroom. The above findings were similar to the results of a study by Raja and Saeed (2012) which investigated the effectiveness of pair work, and indicated that pair work is one of the best communicative activities for improving learners' English language, but it is not the only communicative task that should be implemented. Another study by Abdulla (2007) investigating the use of pair work to improve oral communication, found that pair work supports the use of language in a meaningful context and improves the speaking skills. In addition, it showed that learners enjoyed exchanging ideas and sharing opinions during the activity. These results were similar to those of this current research, as Libyan learners demonstrated that they enjoy working in

pairs, because they learn from each other's experience and ideas, and consequently this activity has a positive impact on their learning.

Also, the findings of this current research showed that the teacher plays the most important role during pair work activity. To support this, a study carried out by Berčiková (2007) investigating the role of the teacher in pair work, showed that the teacher is the main factor in all stages of pair work, but not the controller. On the other hand, the results of this research showed that the partner's level of English in pair work is not a priority for the learner. To challenge this, Zohairy (2014) in his study concluded that low level students tend to work with high level students during pair work, to help them with their tasks.

Notably, there are no striking differences between male and female learners' attitudes towards pair work activities in this research. Furthermore, the reasons for their attitudes were shown in detail, as there was a general agreement that pair work provides the opportunity to speak more in the classroom, and it helps Libyan learners to practice and improve their English.

Eventually, most Libyan learners had not used this method in Libya and because of their low English language proficiency, they might not have felt enthusiastic about participating in pair work. However, the majority of the learners stressed that pair work has a positive impact on their English language learning, and as it was shown that they believed the teacher plays the most important role in the success of this activity through monitoring and guidance.

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Author Queries???

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