

CHAPTER FIVE

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

5.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis of the qualitative data (observation, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews). Review and analysis of these data sources provided insight in answering the third research question. RQ3: How do undergraduate EFL experimental group students experience using cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together in EFL reading comprehension classroom? The third question dealt with students' responses to the Learning Together strategy instruction. This question elicited each participant's change in response to Learning Together strategy instruction. It also addressed the participants' actual use of Learning Together strategy. This qualitative part described the participants' Learning Together strategy usage in the Saudi higher education EFL academic context.

As shown in the preceding quantitative chapter, the twelve-week Learning Together strategy intervention improved the experimental group's reading comprehension scores as exposed in numerical values. Still, there was no method to ascertain statistically whether or not the experimental group students really used Learning Together strategy properly when they learned. For that reason, the researcher wanted to validate if the experimental group students who received the Learning Together strategy instruction-based reading comprehension course could apply the strategy they learned when they read other EFL reading comprehension text.

Though the statistical data already indicated the effectiveness of the learning together strategy instruction through pre-and post-reading comprehension test and questionnaires, it could not be claimed that all of the experimental group students perceived the Learning Together strategy instruction in the same ways or degrees. Additionally, these statistical figures could not offer any evidence about how students made use of Learning Together strategy they learnt.

To answer the third question, which is ‘How do undergraduate EFL experimental group students experience using cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together in EFL reading comprehension classroom?’, semi-structured interviews and student focus group interviews were conducted. The essential aim of the interviews was to have a chance to examine each student’s responses on Learning Together strategy instruction. The interview questions were principally designed to expose how experimental group students perceived Learning Together strategy instruction as compared to traditional lecturing instruction. According to Koda (2005), foreign language readers are frequently engaged in diverse perceptions and processing in reading. That is to say that the educational atmosphere and instructional strategy Saudi undergraduate EFL students are exposed to can affect their reading comprehension knowledge, usage and achievement.

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with the participants. An interview guide was used to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions. The interview guide was created and tested with the help of an expert panel. Qassim University faculty members with expertise in research, teaching, and cooperative learning provided reviews and feedback on the interview questions. These reviews and feedback aimed to ensure that they could effectively encourage open discussion of the topic under study and solicit answers.

This would allow for a constructive examination of learning together. The semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to create a dialogue with the participants and elicit answers that were robust and rich in description. The fact that the interviews were semi-structured allowed the researcher to ask additional questions or request clarification of answers when necessary. The interview guide was broken into two distinct sections, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The responses from these follow-up interviews were used to answer the third research question. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and participants were provided with an opportunity to validate the transcripts. Once the responses had been validated, the data analysis phase of the research began.

5.1. The Researcher

The researcher has worked as an EFL lecturer for Qassim University for more than nine years. The researcher has relevant experience teaching all core subject areas across several levels in higher education classroom settings. The researcher is experienced in a wide range of instructional strategies, and he has utilized a number of diagnostic tools to evaluate student learning outcomes. Because of this expertise, the researcher was well suited to converse with participants on the topic of learning together strategy during the semi-structured interviews. However, the researcher was not unaware of the potential for bias.

To address this issue, the researcher recorded reflective notes related to his own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions on the topic of learning together prior to conducting the interviews. This was done to ensure that the potential for bias was limited when collecting and analyzing the data. The researcher also successfully completed coursework, entitled, "Practitioner Inquiry in Education", during his study

for the Master Degree at the University of Birmingham which prepared him to ethically collect and analyze data. This coursework helped the researcher to better understand qualitative data collection and analysis strategies that reduce bias such as bracketing and member checking. The researcher then used these techniques to ensure that preconceived notions or ideas did not color the data analysis and to validate that the data collected from the participants accurately represented their perceptions and experiences.

5.2. Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

A basic qualitative inquiry involving the analysis of responses from semi-structured interviews was the research methodology used in the qualitative part of the present study. Participant responses were recorded for accuracy to ensure that no data was missed or misconstrued. This allowed the researcher to refer to the original statements made by the participants instead of being forced to rely on notes or memory, which could be subjective or fallible. The audio recordings were then transcribed by the researcher to allow for easier coding and data analysis.

Following the transcription of the interviews, participants were invited to review the responses for accuracy and to ensure their meanings had been adequately conveyed. Once the responses were validated, the data analysis process began. The organized data were studied and arranged based on thematic labels corresponding to the firsthand answers of the third research question. This permitted the researcher to recognize patterns and links in the data and separate the answers into themes. Once all the interviews were uploaded, the coding of the data began. Coding consisted of assigning codes to key statements and phrases found in the interview responses.

The next step in the data analysis process involved refining and condensing the initial codes into larger categories. During this step, the researcher looked for patterns that began to emerge in the data. Once patterns began to emerge, the researcher looked for themes that were representative of the patterns. These themes were then related to the research questions. The following section presents the themes that emerged from the data analysis in relation to the third research question.

5.3. Experimental Group Student Semi-structured Interviews

Hatch (2002) stated, “Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds” (p. 91). To reveal some participants’ meaning structures, 12 students were interviewed individually face-to-face, so that not only was the speech of the students recorded but also their behaviors and facial expressions.

No abnormalities were exposed that could disturb the process of data collection. Twelve students of the experimental group participated in the interviews. At the completion of the interview each participant was given a small gift as an expression of appreciation. The participants’ interviews were summarized alphabetically by their pseudonym.

5.4. Student Focus Group Interviews

Two student focus group interviews were carried out. The first focus group interview involved five while the second focus group interview involved four of EFL undergraduate students from the experimental group classroom that utilizes learning together strategy. Those students combined together for quite a lively, funny personal experience-based interview.

5.5. Presentation of Qualitative Data and Results of the Analysis

The interview questions used to answer the third question of the study. The third research question asked:

RQ3: How do undergraduate EFL experimental group students react to using Learning Together instruction in their EFL reading comprehension classroom? This question was answered through participants' responses to the eight questions of the interview guide. Questions 1 through 8 of the interview guide were as follows:

1. Describe how your EFL reading comprehension instructor helps you work with others (when? for how long? how many times a week?). What's it like?
2. When you work with a partner or group, how do you know what to do? How do you know who does what?
3. Does working with a partner or group make your EFL reading comprehension learning easier or does it make it harder? How do you know?
4. Does working with a partner or group help you do better or worse in EFL reading comprehension? How do you know?
5. Do you enjoy learning EFL reading comprehension more or less when you work with a partner or group?
6. Can learning together strategy be used in teaching other EFL skills? Describe why or why not?
7. Describe how it feels working in EFL reading comprehension alone versus working in a group.
8. If you were an EFL reading comprehension instructor, how would you organize your classroom so that students can learn the most they can?

Research Question 3

The third research question focused on students' experiences and perceptions when using learning together in their EFL reading comprehension classroom. In attempting to identify the reactions, experiences and perceptions of students implementing learning together strategy, the interview guide questions related to Research Question 3 resulted in eight emerging themes. These eight emergent themes included:

- (1) EFL reading comprehension instructor provided continuing support during the learning together instruction sessions,
- (2) Learning EFL reading comprehension skills is much easier when working in learning together groups,
- (3) Working in learning together groups improves EFL reading comprehension skills learning,
- (4) Learning EFL reading comprehension is more fun when students work in learning together groups,
- (5) Learning together is a strategy that can be used in teaching other EFL skills,
- (6) Student help-seeking strategies were widened due to learning together instruction,
- (7) Participating in learning together activities produces secure learning atmosphere and positive student interactions and
- (8) The future use of learning together strategy would yield better students' achievement.

The sections that follow restate both the semi-structured interview and focus group interview questions used to collect data for Research Question 3 and describe the themes and findings that emerged from the data associated with each area of inquiry.

Themes emerged from Interview Questions

The eight emergent themes resulted from the interview guide questions related to Research Question 3 are presented, analyzed and discussed in details as follows:

The First Theme emerged from Interview Question 1:

(1) EFL reading comprehension instructor provided continuing support during the learning together instruction sessions.

The first question in the interview guide addressed participants experience describing how their EFL reading comprehension instructor helped them work with each other (when? for how long? how many times a week?). What's it like? The main theme that emerged from the participants' responses in relation to this question was EFL reading comprehension instructor provided continuing support during the learning together instruction sessions. The instructor's support for participants took place during tutorial hours and during the learning together sessions.

Participant 1, Ahmed started by telling that his instructor, the researcher, has his work in groups two sessions a week. Each session lasted for ninety minutes. When asked what it was like, Ahmed replied, "I prefer working in groups to working individually in order to help my other classmates." Participant 1, Ahmed, shared his experience with support from the reading comprehension instructor. "The reading comprehension instructor provides us with support during the learning together

instruction sessions.” Participant 1, Ahmed, felt that continuing follow-up support was very important to successful implementation of learning together instruction. “Support should be an ongoing process, as the more is learned about learning together instruction the better it will be used.”

Participant 2, Bader, mentioned that his instructor made them work in groups two sessions per week for about “ninety minutes for each session” and that “it has been like being easy to get along with other classmates.” Bader reported the attendance of follow-up continuing support was instrumental in his group successful use of learning together instruction. He stated,

“In addition to the follow-up continuing support provided by the reading instructor, I had to seek out different ways to get much more information about learning together instruction. Other members in my group also provided me with some vital facts that enabled me to make the best use of learning together instruction.”

Participant 3, Eyad stated that his EFL reading comprehension lecturer “arranged us in eight groups of five students to work together for one hundred eighty minutes divided by two sessions per week.” Participant 4, Hamad, clarified that his instructor has them work in groups “two sessions on two different days, Sunday and Wednesday” for “about ninety minutes per session,” and “it has been fun and interesting.”

Participant 4, Hamad, also received support from the reading comprehension instructor. “Throughout the reading comprehension course, the instructor used to observe and support us in the implementation of learning together instruction.”

Participant 4, Hamad, noted that the reading instructor also “observed some learning together sessions to assist us with the application of learning together instruction.”

Participant 5, Hatem, stated that the instructor made his class work in groups “For two sessions every week” for “about ninety minutes per session,” and that “it was going all right.” Hatem noted that the reading instructor met with them regularly twice a week to guide and provide support. “We have two weekly reading comprehension sessions with our reading instructor, where we share best practices and receive updates.”

Participant 6, Khalid stated that his instructor helped them to work in partners “generally when we are doing exercises on some EFL reading comprehension skills” for two sessions every week for about “ninety minutes for each session.” In addition, he said that,

“It has been pleasant and funnier since you have somebody to learn with. Any task has not been difficult at all for the reason that if you could not do it entirely, you could ask your group partners for help.”

Khalid, shared his experience saying, “I have participated in two weekly reading comprehension sessions where our reading instructor attended, observed, guided and answered any questions we had.” In the focus group interview, Khalid started the interview by pointing out that the instructor had the students work with each other:

“First, he gave us directions to show us what we had to work on, and then we started working. As the first step we worked individually and competitively under the pressure of time, after that, we worked together with other partners in groups, then we discussed the reading comprehension text from the textbook.”

Participant 7, Mashari, started the interview by stating that the instructor made them work in eight small groups of five members “usually for two sessions per week for about ninety minutes for each session” and he also confirmed that “it has been enjoyable to work in a small group as it helps you make the best benefit of learning.” Mashari stated that useful feedback and support from the reading instructor were provided on an as-needed basis.

Participant 8, Mohannad began the interview by pointing out that the instructor had the students work and learn together with their partners in “eight small groups of five when we have been doing reading comprehension tasks” for one hundred eighty minutes divided by two sessions every week.” Mohannad, noted that “follow up support was carried out by the reading instructor at planning two sessions twice a week and during weekly presentations.” However, he also noted that when additional help was necessary, he sought it out. “I have gone to the reading instructor at his office during the tutorial hours on my own to help me be better prepared for my group presentation using the learning together instruction.” Mohammad’s response suggested that in his case, preparation for presentation was an important factor to his group success.

Several other participants noted that follow-up continuing support was often provided by the reading instructor twice a week. Participant 9, Nader began by clarifying that the instructor had the students work and learn together with their partners in eight small groups and each group consisted of five members, “For two sessions every week, for ninety minutes for each session.” He added that working and learning together with partners in a small group is “kind of stimulating ‘since as soon as you used to do it, you used to learn different useful things from others’ ideas, thinking and experiences.” Nader shared his experience by saying,

“The reading instructor provided us with reading comprehension skills materials to be used as practice sheets inside and outside classroom. We discussed how we are implementing the learning together instruction best practices for small groups.”

Nader stated further in the focus group interview that “after the directions, the instructor told us what to do, then he gave us a reading comprehension text to work on, and then he put us in eight small groups of five.”

Participant 10, Rayan, started the interview by clarifying that “From the very beginning of the EFL reading comprehension course the lecturer gave us the choice of working together or working alone when he said if you want to work alone, you can join the traditional lecture classroom but if you want to work together, you can stay and join any of the learning together groups.” In addition, he said that he chose to join the learning together groups “whenever we study any EFL reading comprehension skill for two sessions a week, for 90 minutes per session.”

Participant 11, Turki, stated that the instructor made them work in a group for two sessions every week and each session lasted for “ninety minutes”. Turki indicated that cooperation between the learning together group students often happened twice a week.

Participant 12, Yamen indicated that “The EFL reading comprehension lecturer regularly used to have students work in eight small groups, each group consisted of five students, yet he allowed students to choose whether they want to work by themselves or work in small groups,” and they work in small groups “maybe two sessions a week for “usually about 90 minutes per session.”

Participant 8, Mohannad, started the second focus group interview by stating that their EFL reading comprehension instructor asked them to work together in groups: “He makes us work together with other partners in groups. Everybody in the classroom has to be a member of a group.”

Participant 12, Yamen, stated further, “Our EFL reading comprehension instructor used to make us work together in groups two sessions per week, each session lasted for ninety minutes.” Participant 8, Mohannad, went also to say that “every session the instructor used to pick our group partners for us.”

Participant 5, Hatem, also added that “we used to work together in different groups every session.” These responses from participants demonstrate the central role reading instructor played in supporting the use of learning together instruction in the EFL reading comprehension classroom. The varied forms of follow-up continuing support mentioned in the participants’ responses demonstrated that efforts were being made by the reading instructor to support participants implement learning together strategy effectively.

No Clear Themes emerged from Interview Question 2.

The second question of the interview guide addressed knowing what to do and how to do it, in other words, clarification of the roles which participants had to play when implementing learning together instruction. Each participant gave a unique answer, and there was no clear theme that emerged about the nature and type of roles had to be played by participants.

In his answer to the question, how the students knew what to do, Participant 1, Ahmed stated, “Well, mainly, we talk it over.” he asserted that working in a group was not easier for him because “all the group members have different answers for the same question.” When he was asked, “How do you know who does what?” Participant 2, Bader replied, “We regularly vote on who has to do the task,” and his exemplar was, “If two students wish to perform a specific task, we will be like, ‘Okay, um, who do you think is the best one to do it?’”

Participant 3, Eyad said that his group partners used to “chat with each other” to make a decision with regard to who does what. In taking a decision pertaining who does what, Participant 4, Hamad said, “We are used to telling each other I am going to

do this task and you are going to do that one.” Participant 5, Hatem, stated that “we simply make our decision” who performs each of the tasks.”

When asking participant 6, Khalid, about how everyone knows what to do, he answered by saying “We regularly organize any task out and work it out so that everyone and everything is done fairly, and everyone gets their own duties.” Participant 7, Mashari clarified, “We have worked it out” as to who does what in the group. When asking him about how the partners in his group made a decision pertaining who does what, participant 8, Mohannad, replied, “We used to take any decision by ourselves. For example, we say ‘You could do this task or take this role if you are interested, and I could do this or take this.’”

With regard to taking a decision concerning who does what, participant 9, Nader, stated, “You just start talking with other partners in the group, then you can easily get agreement on what everyone in the group is going to do.” When being asked, “How do you know who does what?” participant 11, Turki, replied, “Typically there’s a student who started the group by saying ‘Okay, Let’s start doing this task and then that one.’”

When they were asked, in the focus group interview, how they know who does what in their group, participant 3, Eyad, merely said, “Directions,” while participant 9, Nader, expressed his experience by saying,

“The instructor gave us directions, and then we started working individually, then we came to work together as a group, and we had a look at each other’s answer sheets of the reading comprehension exercises. We found out the way of how to do it, and we thought of making the best use of the learning together strategy.”

When they were asked, in the focus group interview, to describe how they know who does what in their group, participant 8, Mohannad, gave details by saying:

Typically, we merely say, “Well, Mohannad, would you like to do this task or this exercise? Immediately I make a quick decision by saying okay I will work it out.” That is the way we normally used to pick what each member of the group has to do.

The Second Theme emerged from Interview Question 3:

(2) Learning EFL reading comprehension skills is much easier when working in learning together groups.

The third question from the interview guide asked: Does working with a partner or group make your EFL reading comprehension learning easier or does it make it harder? How do you know? Based on the participants’ responses, the theme emerged was learning EFL reading comprehension skills is much easier when working in learning together groups. In a semi-structured interview with participant, 1, Ahmed, started by saying, “I prefer working in groups to working individually in order to help my other classmates.” He asserted that at the beginning working in a group was not easier for him because “all the group members have different answers for the same question,” but that, with the time passed, working in a group helped him improve, develop and get better in reading comprehension because as he stated “My scores in the post test were much better than those of the pre-test.”

In reaction to whether working with a partner or group helps him learn better or makes it harder, Participant 2, Bader, stated,

“It is easier as if I don’t know the answer; one of my group partners can help me. Then it is harder to me since I sometimes have the desire to do the task alone.”

When asking him whether or not working together with a partner or in a group helped him learn any reading comprehension skill much easier or makes it much more difficult, participant 3, Eyad, replied,

“Frankly speaking both, since when you work with a partner or in a group with some interruption, it makes the learning process much harder,”

Participant 4, Hamad, mentioned that working or studying with a partner or in a group “makes learning EFL reading comprehension easier because you get any task done faster and much more interesting and funnier than usual.” Participant 5, Hatem, stated that working in a group “helps me learn EFL reading comprehension much easier than usual since everyone in the group is studying and learning together and helping each other in performing different required tasks.”

In his reply to whether working in a group helps him learn easier, participant 6, Khalid, answered, “When I’m working in groups, learning seems much easier since I can ask my partners for help in understanding any difficult task.” He clarified, “Working alone is a bit harder, but working in groups is a bit easier as there is always somebody who is ready to help you when you need.” Participant 8, Mohannad asserted the same notion, saying,

“Working alone is like a huge burden on your shoulder as you are required to do everything by yourself, but in working together atmosphere, you can do something and your partner can do something else which makes it much easier.”

Participant 9, Nader went along with the same lines by explaining,

“Working together with partners in a group facilitates the learning process and makes it much easier. It has helped me a lot as with the help of my partners, I get used to new and various strategies to give the right answers for different types of questions when doing the exercises.”

Participant 10, Rayan stated that,

“working and learning together in our groups in EFL reading comprehension class look like making fun and playing with your classmates outside college.”

In his reply to whether working in groups helped him learn easier or made it harder, participant 11, Turki, said, “The answer of this question of course depends on the kind of the group. If I take part in a group that’s not performing well, it will be

harder. But if I take part in a group that is performing well it will be easier.” Turki stated as a further remark, “By working in a group you are able to discuss your answers with other classmates, and when you work individually, it looks like a kind of privacy.”

Bad grades may be considered as an indicator that the students do not understand the reading comprehension text well, and consequently, the topic of the text is harder for them, while good grades may be regarded as an indicator of understanding of the main ideas, specific details, new vocabulary and concepts, which makes the reading comprehension learning process much easier.

Based on his direct observation of the students, the researcher noted that working together with other partners in a group facilitated the sharing of ideas and suggestions and this in return made the reading comprehension learning process much easier because group partners used to help and support each other when they were in confusion or when they faced any difficulty or puzzlement.

The Third Theme emerged from Interview Question 4:

(3) Working in learning together groups improves EFL reading comprehension skills learning.

Question 4 of the interview guide asked: Does working with a partner or group help you do better or worse in EFL reading comprehension? How do you know? Most participants indicated that working with a partner or group helped them do better in EFL reading comprehension. Based on the participants’ responses, a theme emerged that working in learning together groups improves EFL reading comprehension skills learning.

Students indicated, in both semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, that they learned more reading comprehension skills in learning together groups than in a regular class setting. Participant 1, Ahmed, asserted that working in a group helped him improve, develop and get better in reading comprehension because as he stated “My scores in the post test were much better than those of the pre-test.” When Participant 2, Bader, was asked if working in a group helps him do better or worse in EFL reading comprehension course, he responded, “Of course better as they help me with my reading comprehension skills when I’m struggling to guess new vocabulary” and “You have them there if you don’t know.”

Participant 3, Eyad, stated that he had done better in learning together groups and he felt that since his grades in the post-test were higher than those of the pre-test. He explained it further by saying that

“When you work alone you may be not able to understand every task or answer any exercise and as a result your grades may be bad. When you work with a partner or in a group, you can ask for help to understand everything in details and hence it may be easier for you to achieve a higher grade.”

Participant 4, Hamad, assured that he has done well through working together with his partners in his group as he said “my grades in EFL reading comprehension post-test are better than those achieved in pre-test.” Moreover, participant 5, Hatem, believed that he has done much better in EFL reading comprehension through working together with his partners in a group “When I had an EFL reading comprehension post-test, I got full marks, twenty four out of twenty four.”

Participant, 6, Khalid confirmed that working together had improved his reading comprehension learning for the reason that “When I’m working and learning in groups I can ask my partners for help in understanding any difficult task.”

Participant, 7, Mashari, felt that his reading comprehension learning had improved due to working together with partners in groups as he said,

“It has helped me learn better because I used to work with other group partners and used to help each other whenever required.”

Participant 8, Mohannad, stated that he had felt that he had done much better because his grades in the EFL reading comprehension post-test were higher than his grades in the pre-test:

“We have two tests, one at the start of the reading comprehension course and the other at the end of the course, and my grades in the final test were better than those obtained in the first one.”

As a further remark, participant 9, Nader, said that he knew he had done better since

“It has helped me a lot as with the help of my partners, I get used to new and various strategies to give the right answers for different types of questions when doing the exercises.”

Participant 12, Yamen, shared a similar experience. When he was asked whether working with a group or partner helped him to do better or worse in EFL reading comprehension course, Yamen stated,

“Participation in working together activities helped me gain much more confidence in my reading comprehension skills. I could feel that my reading comprehension skills have been improved and my abilities have been developed dramatically.”

Unlike other participants who were with the positive impact of learning together instruction on their reading comprehension achievement, Participant 10, Rayan, has a different point of view. When he was asked whether working with a partner or in a group helped him learn EFL reading comprehension skills better, and if he has been doing better or worse in EFL reading comprehension class, Rayan responded,

“I think working together may be the same as working alone because my results were similar in both the EFL reading comprehension pre-test and post-test.”

During observation of one of students groups, the researcher heard a discussion about whether to start with reading the text first or having a quick look at the exercises. One of the students suggested beginning with reading the questions and trying to find out their answers in the text instead of wasting much time in reading the whole comprehension text. He read the questions one by one while his partners were looking for the correct answers.

Another student used the electronic dictionary in his mobile to look up and explain the meanings of new vocabulary to his partners in the group and they all understood the meanings of new words and answered all the questions correctly and through this process of working together their reading comprehension learning has improved.

This observation provided evidence that the students' reading comprehension learning had improved through working together in groups. The researcher noted that students had the ability to communicate their understanding of new words, main ideas and specific details of any reading comprehension text after working together in groups more than after working individually.

According to participant 6, Khalid, "When I'm working and learning in groups I can ask my partners for help in understanding any difficult task." In addition, the researcher noted through his observation that working together in a group gives students opportunity to express themselves frankly and explain their ideas clearly, which shows understanding as learning takes place when students could explain why their answers were correct.

When participants were asked, in the focus group interview, whether they felt they learnt better in EFL reading comprehension course when working together with others and how, participant 10, Rayan, answered this question by saying, "When we

were put into a good group, we learned much better.” Participant 12, Yamen, stated this further,

“If any member of the group was confused of answering any question, he would check first with other partners in his group and if they didn’t know he would ask his classmates in other groups. Just in case of students’ inability to work it out, he would ask the lecturer.”

Participant 11, Turki, replied with the same notion, “I think I learn better since if you cannot make head or tail of something, there has been all the time someone you can ask for help.” He also commented on how he learned from his group partners and how they could teach each other, “I worked in a group. I used to teach other partners how questions could be answered.” Participant 2, Bader, expressed the same notion by saying,

“I think working together with partners in groups helps for the reason that when you have not been able to get the answer, your group has been there to help you get it. When they have not been to get the answer, you have been there to help them get it.”

Nader went on to say, “I think working together with partners in groups is much better than working alone since it is much more fun, amusing and interesting.” Participant 6, Khalid, stated, “I prefer working alone as it may seem difficult for me to complete any EFL reading comprehension in groups.” On the contrast, participant 9, Nader, stated,

“I think I like doing any EFL reading comprehension task in groups since you have the opportunity to learn from your partners’ different learning strategies and study skills which can be applied to similar learning situations.”

Participant 11, Turki, notified that “when you work together with your partners as a group, other partners are ready to help whenever you need help with something.” Participant 2, Bader, said as a further remark, “I like better doing it by myself. I prefer working together in a group first and then, I prefer getting to know it by myself.”

As it could be noted, during the focus group interviews, most students stated that the learning together group activities allowed them to learn quicker and to retain more knowledge for testing. The students also indicated that they learned more reading comprehension skills due to the fact that they were in charge of instructing and helping their partners. Students also pointed out that they learned to work better with different students in the learning together groups and that their views of some of their classmates changed positively due to involving in learning together group activities.

The participants' wide-ranging feedback suggests the positive impact of learning together instruction on improving EFL undergraduates' reading comprehension achievement. The many different points of views mentioned by the participants pertaining to the effectiveness of using learning together instruction in enhancing students' reading comprehension performance provide a broad foundation for higher education EFL programs to consider applying learning together strategy in other various areas and different domains and also suggest that there is a commitment to the continued use of learning together as an effective classroom strategy.

The Fourth Theme emerged from Interview Question 5:

(4) Learning EFL reading comprehension is more fun when students work in learning together groups.

Question 5 of the interview guide asked participants if they enjoyed the use of learning together instruction in their EFL reading comprehension classrooms. The interview question stated: Do you enjoy learning EFL reading comprehension more or less when you work with a partner or group?

The theme emerged in answer to this question was learning EFL reading comprehension is more fun when students work in learning together groups. In a semi-structured interview, participant 3, Eyad stated that he enjoyed learning EFL reading comprehension skills through working together by saying, “I enjoyed it more as I can ask for help whenever I need it. In other words, my group partners can help me with any difficult task and I can help them whenever necessary.”

In addition, Participant 5, Hatem, said as a further remark that working in a group “helps me learn EFL reading comprehension much better since everyone in the group is studying and learning together and helping each other in performing different required tasks.”

Participant 6, Khalid, stated further, “I like working in groups for the reason that you have more than just an idea.” Participant 7, Mashari, also went on to say

“We used to work together on reviewing and discussing reading comprehension texts and help each other in answering different questions of reading comprehension skills exercises.”

When participant 8, Mohannad, was asked if he has enjoyed EFL reading comprehension more or less while working and learning together with a partner or in a group, he said, “Much more, because if you do not understand any task or do not know how to do something, your partners in your group can help you work it out.”

Participant 9, Nader expressed his feeling with regard to this issue by saying that “It is kind of stimulating ‘since as soon as you used to do it, you used to learn different useful things from others’ ideas, thinking and experiences.” Participant 10, Rayan, stated that,

“working and learning together in our groups in EFL reading comprehension class look like making fun and playing with your classmates outside college.”

Participant 11, Turki clarified his point of view by saying,

“When you study and learn with other students, it is an interesting experience, since you do not feel alone. You have a golden opportunity to get along with your classmates and discuss the specific topics in a friendly atmosphere.”

With the same notion, participant 12, Yamen, mentioned that he had enjoyed EFL reading comprehension course “more since I was sometimes absent-minded and distracted and my group partners told me to pay attention to our duties.” In the student focus group interviews, most students stated that they enjoyed working on reading comprehension exercises and assignments with other students in learning together groups more than they would have enjoyed working these tasks individually.

Participant 9, Nader, went on to say,

“I think working together with partners in groups is much better than working alone since it is much more fun, amusing and interesting.”

The researcher noted during his observation that students did not get off reading comprehension tasks as well as they did not get bored with working together in groups. In fact they enjoyed learning together instruction as they used it as a means of interaction. Additionally, in the course of the observation, the students exposed real involvement in doing their tasks. There was not any student who went astray or talked about anything else other than their reading comprehension tasks. They were satisfied and happy with what they were doing.

The researcher noted, in the course of the observation and the focus group interviews, different reasons for why the students were having more fun. This could be explained that undergraduate EFL students are social by nature. One of their greatest concerns is their social life. If EFL reading comprehension is an acceptable means for them to have social interaction, it can hook them.

The Fifth Theme emerged from Interview Question 6:

(5) Learning together is a strategy that can be used in teaching other EFL skills.

Question 6 of the interview guide asked participants about their points of views pertaining to the use of learning together strategy in teaching other EFL skills. The question specifically asked: Can learning together strategy be used in teaching other EFL skills? Describe why or why not? The theme that emerged from the participants' responses was that learning together is a strategy that can be used in teaching other EFL skills. Most participants agreed that learning together strategy can be used in teaching other EFL skills. In his response to this question, Participant 1, Ahmed, stated,

“Yes, any EFL skill cannot be learnt in isolation from other language skills. Using learning together strategy can enable fruitful discussions, sharing thoughts and ideas.”

Participant 2, Bader, was totally convinced that

“Learning together strategy should be used in teaching all language skills because of its utility in preparing a good graduate who has a good command of all four language skills. This graduate could be an asset in the future workforce since cooperation has become a necessary character trait of the required employees.”

Participant 3, Eyad, stated that learning together is a flexible strategy regardless of the EFL subject matter. Participant 4, Hamad, shared the same notion

“Yes, I think that learning together strategy can be used in teaching other language skills. Specific cooperative activities can be planned in the light of learning together strategy to satisfy the different individual needs.”

Participant 5, Hatem, also stated that his classmates worked better in their learning together small groups. Hatem noted that when using learning together strategy, “students were able to give more creative ideas during their presentation of

the reading comprehension topics.” Participant 6, Khalid, suggested that though learning together strategy was only used in EFL reading comprehension course, it should be used across all other EFL courses. He stated his idea by saying,

“I think we only concentrated in this course on reading comprehension, but I would like to learn how to use learning together in my other EFL courses more effectively.”

Participant 7, Mashari, described the profits of using learning together strategy in his EFL reading comprehension course by saying,

“My group members were working together toward a common goal to complete reading comprehension tasks assigned by the instructor.”

Based on the researcher’s observation, learning together strategy afforded students the opportunity to achieve their assigned common goals by working together in small groups. To ensure accountability of each member in the group, each member was assigned a role, and each group member learnt interpersonal communication skills as well. Moreover, Mashari went on to provide an example of how learning together strategy can be used to make sure that all group members were engaged in each reading comprehension activity by saying,

“For example, my group members had the opportunity to interact with each other. I noticed how beneficial this interpersonal interaction was to all of us. Due to learning together strategy, we were able to develop friendships and social relationships much faster than when we were working alone.”

Mashari’s comments demonstrated how learning together strategy can bring students together regardless of the school subject matter being studied. Some participants thought that while learning together was a positive teaching strategy in EFL reading comprehension course, the instructor played a vital role in applying this strategy effectively. Participant 8, Mohannad, indicated that learning together strategy played an important role in the EFL reading comprehension course and this of course could apply to other EFL courses.

“Learning together works well when it is used as a part of the EFL reading comprehension course and when students are used to working together and know what outcomes are expected of them.”

Participant 9, Nader, also mentioned that the instructor’s method was essential to the learning together strategy application success.

“I think learning together can be used in teaching other EFL skills and other school subject areas if the instructor can arrange students in groups based on their individual differences, their abilities and their needs and provide different activities that cope with their abilities and satisfy their needs.”

Participants 10, Rayan, 11, Turki and 12, Yamen all commented positively on the learning together strategy’s usefulness. Rayan indicated that “college students should be offered opportunity to work and learn together in groups.” Turki noted that he used learning together strategy in EFL reading comprehension course and added that it can be used in other EFL courses. He stated that, “EFL students should be prepared to use the learning together strategy regardless of the course, subject area or subject matter they are learning.”

In reference to the usefulness of learning together strategy, Yamen shared his experience by saying, “learning together strategy is a useful teaching method that can be used with any other courses”. Based on their positive responses about the usefulness of learning together strategy, there was a clear consensus among the participants that as a strategy, learning together could be useful not only in teaching EFL reading comprehension courses, but also in teaching other language skills as well as school subject areas.

The Sixth and the Seventh Themes emerged from Interview Question 7:

- (6) Student help-seeking strategies were widened due to learning together instruction and**

(7) Participating in learning together activities produced secure learning atmosphere and positive student interactions.

Question 7 of the interview guide asked participants: Describe how it feels working in EFL reading comprehension alone versus working in a group. Two themes emerged in answer to this question: (a) Student help-seeking strategies were widened due to learning together instruction and (b) Participating in learning together activities produced secure learning atmosphere and positive student interactions.

Participants indicated that they noted many changes in their interpersonal interaction and in the instructional environment when it came to implementing learning together strategy in the classroom. Participants highlighted both widening student help-seeking strategies and positive student interactions due to implementing learning together strategy in a secure learning environment. Widening student help-seeking strategies referred to differences in the way participants interacted with each other during learning together group activities, whereas positive students' interactions referred to changes in student behaviors and outcomes from implementing the strategy.

Some examples of widening student-help seeking strategies included more opportunities for seeking help from peers during participating in group learning and a greater focus on mixed groups. Students' positive interaction increased face-to-face interaction among students, and offered a greater ability to allow students to progress at their own pace. Student positive interaction included participants' beliefs that their learning together group activities were more effective, students were more engaged, low ability students had greater opportunities to shine, and higher ability students were provided with more challenges.

Student help-seeking strategies were widened due to learning together instruction was the first theme that emerged from the seventh question of the interview. Student help seeking strategies had been broadened due to taking part in learning together activities. Before taking part in learning together activities, students used to seek help from their lecturer. At the end of the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year, and after exposure to learning together instruction, students used to ask their partners in groups for help. Participant 1, Ahmed, described the changes that had been made in their help-seeking strategies in their EFL reading comprehension classroom as a result of using learning together strategy.

“Since implementing learning together strategy in my EFL reading comprehension classroom, there was a division of tasks among students. In the group, there was an increase of face-to-face interaction between students, and students are assigned specific roles and duties. When we faced difficulties in doing any task, we used to ask the lecturer for help, but after involving in learning together instruction, we used to ask each other for help whether inside or outside the classroom ”

Additionally, Ahmed said that he felt “satisfied” by working with his other classmates as group members because he could “help others with their questions, answers and discussions,” but that “it was not easy for me ” to work individually because “every time I work on a reading comprehension skill, I don’t know what to do.” He explained it further, “I am so excited and amazed to find myself fond of EFL reading comprehension now; working together during the reading comprehension course is actually more fun and much better than working alone.”

Participant 2, Bader, noted that his individual learning had changed in the sense that he stated,

“I experienced working together with my group partners in the EFL reading comprehension classroom via learning together strategy which provided us with opportunities to help each other and to get engaged in learning together activities.”

Participant 3, Eyad, added, “We got engaged when learning together strategy was implemented in my EFL reading comprehension classroom.” Eyad talked about himself as an example by saying,

“I used to be shy to read before the class, but after the learning together instruction, I found it less embarrassing to read, ask for help, share ideas and participate with other partners of my group.”

Participant 4, Hamad, also noted that help-seeking strategies changed in his EFL reading comprehension classroom after using learning together instruction.

“Our asking for help methods have changed in my EFL reading comprehension classroom after using learning together as a teaching strategy in which our instructor asked us to work together in small groups on the same duty and to ask each other for help whenever we face any obstacles.”

Hamad noted that the learning together instruction has changed their individual activities to group activities when dealing with reading comprehension skills as the focus of the learning process was collaborative rather than individualistic. Participant 5, Hatem, described his experience pertaining the difference between learning together in groups and alone by saying,

“In learning together groups, students can do their tasks easily, and their tasks are done fairly by each one in the group. Students can move at a pace that fits their individual differences. With the help of their high ability peers, students who are low ability can be able to be leaders or major contributors. High ability students were responsible for helping their low ability peers.”

Participant 6, Khalid, noted that his asking for help approach has changed from asking the instructor to asking his partners as a result of using learning together strategy. Khalid stated that his instructor created more “mixed ability, mixed learning style, and mixed social group groupings and asked them to work together and help each other whenever necessary.” Participant 7, Mashari, expressed his own satisfaction with working in learning together groups “It was a great experience to see ourselves taking ownership of our work, helping each other and learning from each

other.” Participant 8, Mohannad, noted that group work took up a significant portion of their schedule timeline. “Learning together allowed us to work and learn together over a long period.” This allowed Mohannad to modify his style of individual learning to learning in groups to accommodate the needs of his group partners. “I was able to see my group partners work together and help each other do different simple and difficult reading comprehension tasks.”

Participant 9, Nader, also reported positive outcomes of working in groups compared to working alone after implementing learning together strategy. Nader stated, “We were encouraged by the instructor to work as a group and to help each other face hardships of our work as a team. Participant 10, Rayan, noted that learning together strategy made the process of EFL reading comprehension learning “much easier as students taught and helped each other.” However, Participant 11, Turki, mentioned that there were some extra loads due to the group presentation deadlines when using learning together strategy.

“I have to prepare reading comprehension skills presentation using learning together strategy under the pressure of time. Assignments were also an additional burden developed”

Some students mentioned in the student focus group interviews that they used to text each other confusing reading comprehension questions or call each other on their mobile phones while they were off campus. This was clear in participant 12, Yamen’s saying,

When I worked together with my partners in a group I used to ask my partners for help. We used to text each other reading comprehension confusing questions or call each other on our mobile phones whenever we were off campus.”

Prior to the learning together treatment students used to express themselves by using the first singular pronoun “I.”

A very clear example of this was participant 12, Yamen's saying,

“Frankly speaking, before taking part in learning together instruction reading comprehension classroom, I used to work alone and study hard every night to make sure I understood the reading comprehension text and if I faced any confusion, I would write down the embarrassing questions to ask the lecturer the next day in class.”

At the end of the semester and after being involved in learning together activities, students used to express themselves by using the first plural pronoun “We.”

This was very common and obvious in students expressions such as those mentioned by participant 12, Yamen,

“Once we started the learning together, we used to get together to study reading comprehension skills,” “It doesn't matter what groups I have been in, we have always been used to working together well. Regardless of the level of the group members, we were always able to help each other out.”

In his answer, during the focus group interview, to the question about how it felt working alone versus working together with partners in groups, participant 6, Khalid, stated,

“I believe it has been different, as during working alone, you simply get the task, then you work your way out, and working together with partners in groups, you will already have to work on it a little bit because your partners could help you have an idea what the task is about.”

Participant 9, Nader, noted that he “likes working together with partners in groups because you can get more learning strategies and study skills.”

Generally speaking, student help seeking strategies have been widened at the end of the semester after exposure to learning together instruction in comparison to the beginning of the semester. The components in the theme help-seeking strategies led to the affirmation that learning together activities stimulated students to help each other and search for additional materials to improve their reading comprehension learning.

The second theme that emerged in relation to Interview Guide Question 7 was that participating in learning together activities produced secure learning atmosphere and positive student interactions. Communication in the course of learning together activities creates positive student interaction. At the beginning of the semester, the researcher noted that all group members exchanged mobile phone numbers to be able to communicate with each other whether inside or outside the classroom.

As a result of communicating with each other, students felt secure in their learning atmosphere. Regardless of the answers mentioned by participants, it was clear from their responses that they felt that the learning together strategy has an important positive impact on making the learning environment much more secure. Participant 1, Ahmed, felt that the learning atmosphere was impacted positively by learning together strategy.

“Working together had a positive impact on the learning atmosphere in which all group students felt secure when doing their assigned duties in order for the reading comprehension task to be completed.”

When asking him what it felt like to work with a partner or group, Ahmed replied, “It feels like everyone is clarifying and simplifying information and ideas to me.” When participant 2, Bader, was asked how it feels working in EFL reading comprehension alone versus working in a group, he responded, “Of course working in groups was much better than working alone as my group partners helped me with my reading comprehension skills when I was struggling to guess new vocabulary” and “this of course made me feel secure in the EFL reading comprehension classroom.” Bader also noted that working in a group made him “feel comfortable that my group partners were there for me when I didn’t know the answer to a question,” but that when working alone, he had “to do how it how I thought it should be done, instead of

being told how to do it.” Bader also expressed his feeling of that in the focus group interview by saying,

“By working together I felt very comfortable and relaxed when asking my group partners for help. Before that I used to be confused, scared, embarrassed and shy to ask the lecturer for clarifying any ambiguous questions.”

Based on his close observation of the students’ interaction with each other in the reading comprehension class, the researcher noted that continuous communication among student group members during working together in performing required reading comprehension activities helped with students reading comprehension learning.

In describing how it felt working alone versus working with a partner or in a group, participant 3, Eyad, said,

“When you work alone you may be not able to understand every task or answer any exercise and as a result your grades may be bad. When you work together with partners in a group, you can ask for help to understand everything in details and hence it may be easier for you to interact with your group partners and achieve a higher grade in a secure learning atmosphere.”

Additionally, Eyad mentioned in the focus group interview that he felt that there were no worries of the instructor’s judgement. He explained,

“Through communication with other group partners, students felt that they were free of the instructor’s embarrassing comments or passive judgments. They had the ability to ask and answer questions without any worries or fears of being criticized.”

Participant 4, Hamad labeled working alone as “much more struggling, and it has been really harder than working with a partner or in a group.” Hamad explained it further,

“My feeling towards reading comprehension at the end of the semester is now much more positive than it was at the beginning of the semester. At the beginning of the course I used to have negative feeling toward EFL reading comprehension.”

Participant 5, Hatem, also pointed out that he had obtained much more confidence and felt secure in his reading comprehension study due to working together in groups.

“With the positive interaction with my group partners, I have gained much confidence and felt secure by taking part in learning together activities; I am looking forward to using learning together strategy in studying more advanced reading comprehension courses in my academic future”

In describing how it felt working alone versus working in groups, participant 6, Khalid, stated, “Working alone is a bit harder, but working in groups is a bit easier as there is always somebody who is ready to help you whenever you need.” Participant 7, Mashari, reported similar attitudes toward the positive impact of learning together strategy on the students’ interaction and the learning atmosphere.

“My group partners communicated with each other well and shared responsibility for their work. They worked better in small groups and were able to work better in a secure learning environment.”

Mashari also indicated that he “has felt good” working and learning together with partners in a group and “it has been a little more challenging” and “kind of hard to solve” working and learning EFL reading comprehension alone. Mashari also stated “My attitude towards EFL reading comprehension has changed significantly.” When participant 8, Mohannad, was asked to describe how it felt working alone versus working in a group, he answered by saying,

“Working alone is like a huge burden on your shoulder as you are required to do everything by yourself, but in working together atmosphere, you can do something and your partner can do something else which makes it much easier.”

Participant 9, Nader, indicated that EFL reading comprehension is much “easier to do with a group as you have other partners who are ready to help you whenever you need help.” In his description of working individually versus working in a group, participant 10, Rayan, replied, “When you work alone, you feel like lonely and helpless as it may be difficult for you to ask other classmates’ help if you cannot make head or tail of any confusing exercise. But if you work together two, three, four

or five partners in a group, you can help each other facilitate, get over and work out any embarrassing exercise”

When asking about how it felt working alone versus working in a group, participant 11, Turki, said, “By working in a group you are able to discuss your answers with other classmates, and when you work individually, it looks like a kind of privacy.” In addition, Turki commented on how he learned from his group partners and how they could teach each other by saying, “I worked in a group. I used to teach other partners how questions could be answered.”

The researcher noted that students’ contacting with other partners provided them with the environment suitable for feeling secure and making the opportunity available for students to share their knowledge, their experience and their ideas with their classmates. During working together, students used to communicate with their group partners before communicating with their instructor. In his reaction to the question regarding describing how it felt working in EFL reading comprehension alone versus working with a partner or in a group, participant 12, Yamen, said, “Whenever I decide to work on my own, I feel lonely. There is nobody there to help me overcome any confusing situation. But whenever I chose to work with a partner or group, I feel secured and comfortable.” Yamen stated this further when he mentioned in the focus group interview,

“If any member of the group was confused of answering any question, he would check first with other partners in his group and if they didn’t know he would ask his classmates in other groups. Just in case of students’ inability to work it out, he would ask the instructor.”

Yamen added,

“In my point of view as an undergraduate EFL student when I could not understand anything I used to ask the lecturer for help. When I worked together with my partners in a group I used to ask my partners for help. We

used to text each other reading comprehension confusing questions or call each other on the cell phone whenever we were off campus.”

Additionally, Rayan indicated, “When I could not get what other partners were saying, I used to ask them to repeat and explain for me what they were saying.” This shows that students who were exposed to the learning together instruction became independent learners and were not dependent on the instructor as the sole source of knowledge. The researcher noted through his observation that most introvert and shy students engaged in class due to learning together atmosphere, constant communication and positive participation in learning together activities.

It was noted that students’ communication within the reading comprehension classroom extended to out of class communication between students. Students worked together outside of class to study reading comprehension.

The Eighth Theme emerged from Interview Question 8:

(8) Future use of learning together strategy would yield better students’ achievement.

Question 8 of the interview guide asked participants about their intentions to use learning together strategy in their classrooms in the future. The question asked: If you were an EFL reading comprehension instructor, how would you organize your classroom so that students can learn the most they can? The primary theme that emerged from participants’ responses in relation to this question was that they expected that their future use of learning together strategy would yield better students’ achievement.

Participant 1, Ahmed, explained that if he were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would arrange his classroom “into groups to work

cooperatively and learn together so as to help each other in overcoming any difficult task,” in order for all students to do their best. Participant 2, Bader, echoed a similar statement, if he were the EFL reading comprehension lecturer, he would “certainly have them work by themselves and in groups.” When he was asked about when he would have them work in groups, he answered, “When I get to know what they are doing.”

Participant 3, Eyad, noted that learning together was important when there were individual differences in student proficiency levels. Eyad also noted that if he were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he “would have my students work in groups in order to help them acquire better learning outcomes and better team working skills.” Additionally, Eyad, “would blend the low proficient students with the medium and high proficient ones, so the low proficient students could ask the high proficient for help whenever needed.”

Participant 4, Hamad, believed it was essential to always stay exposed to new teaching strategies like learning together. When Hamad was asked if he were in the position of the instructor, he would “make his students study, work and learn together five times a week instead of only two sessions.”

Participant 5, Hatem, offered the most detailed and technical explanation of his intention to use learning together strategy in the future. In his response to the question if he were in the position of the EFL reading instructor, he explained,

“I would not like to force them to work together in groups. I want them to feel that the decision of working together in groups is theirs and is not imposed on them by other authority and this what the instructor has done with us when he said, “Well, if anyone does not want to work with other partners in groups, he can work alone and go to the other classroom that does not apply learning together instruction.” I will do like what the instructor has done and let students do what they like.”

If participant 6, Khalid, were in the situation of the EFL reading instructor, he “would prefer working in groups to working alone.” Khalid explained that as long as learning together went on to yield positive effects, he intended to use this strategy wherever and whenever possible. Khalid would bring together his classroom “in groups, and I would ask them to work together for 30 minutes with different partners and with different EFL reading comprehension tasks.” Participant 7, Mashari, shared a similar sentiment. If he were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would “have students work and learn together with their partners in small groups once or twice a week.”

Participant 8, Mohannad’s, answer also supported a comment made by participant 3, Eyad. If Mohannad were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would “put students in small groups which include low, medium and higher proficiency students to make high proficient students help their low and medium proficient partners.” Mohannad explained his point of view by saying,

“I would let my students choose their favorite partners to work together in a group if they are interested. I would ask them to work together quietly but if they started to make noise, I would have to warn them one, twice but if they do not listen to my warnings, I will ask them to work by themselves silently in order to keep the classroom under control.”

Participant 9, Nader, believed that the use of learning together strategy could be tied to students’ motivation. Nader indicated that if he were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would “do my best to stimulate my students to do their utmost before putting them into groups.” Participant 10, Rayan, indicated that if he were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he “would put students in groups, but always I would give them the option if they like to work in groups or work individually.”

Participant 11, Turki, noted that learning together strategy would help increase the effectiveness of learning groups. If Turki were in the place of the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would put “The students in mixed groups. Each of these groups consists of weak, intermediate and brilliant ones so that the brilliant students can help other weak and intermediate ones.”

As a final point, if participant 12, Yamen, were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would “let students choose their group partners.”

Yamen explained,

“I would put students in groups and switch them around every session, but if a student worked well and felt comfortable and relaxed with one partner, I think that this partner could be their partner for the rest of the sessions all over the semester. I will pay attention to how that works. But if it does not work, I believe it will be my duty to help them go to their seats and do their work by themselves for the rest of the semester.”

During the focus group interview, many participants stated that using learning together strategy in their future EFL reading comprehension classrooms would improve individual achievement. Participant 1, Ahmed, stated that the future use of learning together strategy in his EFL future classroom would help his students to become “independent thinkers.” Participant 2, Bader, believed that “learning in a natural social setting, like the learning together setting, would stimulate his students’ higher order thinking skills.”

Participant 3, Eyad, suggested that if he were in the place of EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would use the learning together strategy to improve his students’ academic achievement. Being used to working better with other students was the topic of Participant 4, Hamad’s response, “if I were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, I would use the learning together strategy to help my students achieve both academic progress and positive social interaction.”

Participant 5, Hatem, made a similar statement that students getting used to “working with their group partners to achieve successful outcomes” was an important element of the reasoning behind his future use of learning together strategy if he were the EFL reading comprehension instructor.

Participant 6, Khalid, was very direct in his answer to Interview Question 8, if he were an EFL reading comprehension instructor, he would use learning together instruction since he thought that

“By using learning together strategy in my EFL reading comprehension classroom, I expect an increase in my students’ achievement. My students will feel more comfortable, more active, more successful less stressed as they can learn from each other and help each other.”

Participant 7, Mashari, stated,

“If I were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, I would apply the learning together strategy in my classroom to offer my students the environment in which they can lean on each other for help while giving assistance to other group members to help this strategy be applied successfully in my EFL reading comprehension classroom.”

Participant 8, Mohannad, added, “My future students will be in a hard need to know that the real future world requires that they should live, learn and work together.”

Participant 9, Nader, noted that working together is an important skill for EFL students who face language barriers. Students can benefit from being used to working together in groups. If participant 10, Rayan, were the EFL reading comprehension instructor, he “would put students in groups, but always I would give them the option if they like to work in groups or work individually.”

Additionally, participant 5, Hatem, explained,

“I would not like to force them to work together in groups. I want them to feel that the decision of working together in groups is theirs and is not imposed on them by other authority and this what the lecturer has done with us when he

said, “Well, if anyone does not want to work with other partners in groups, he can work alone and go to the other classroom that does not apply learning together instruction.” I will do like what the lecturer has done and let students do what they like.”

Participant 12, Yamen, on the other hand,

“Would put students in groups and switch them around every session, but if a student worked well and felt comfortable and relaxed with one partner, I think that this partner could be their partner for the rest of the sessions all over the semester. I will pay attention to how that works. But if it does not work, I believe it will be my duty to help them go to their seats and do their work by themselves for the rest of the semester.”

As a final point, participant 8, Mohannad, stated it further by saying,

“I would let my students choose their favorite partners to work together in a group if they are interested. I would ask them to work together quietly but if they started to make noise, I would have to warn them one, twice but if they do not listen to my warnings, I will ask them to work by themselves silently in order to keep the classroom under control.”

The comments of both the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews participants made it clear that the entire sample agreed that the future use of learning together strategy in their EFL reading comprehension classrooms would improve students’ learning outcomes. Some participants focused on the benefits students would receive in terms of getting used to working together, while other participants focused on the benefits the strategy would offer in terms of improving learning outcomes and individual achievement.

In total, eight themes emerged related to Research Question 3, which asked about undergraduate EFL experimental group students’ reaction to using learning together strategy in their EFL reading comprehension classroom. The eight emergent themes which were drawn from the participants’ answers to questions contained in the interview guide for both the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews are organized according to Interview Guide Questions and summarized in table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Interview Guide Questions and Emergent Themes Summary

Interview Guide Questions	Emergent Themes
1. Describe how your EFL reading comprehension instructor helps you work with others (when? for how long? how many times a week?). What's it like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EFL reading comprehension instructor provided continuing support during the learning together instruction sessions.
2. When you work with a partner or group, how do you know what to do? How do you know who does what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear theme emerged regarding roles played by participants.
3. Does working with a partner or group make your EFL reading comprehension learning easier or does it make it harder? How do you know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning EFL reading comprehension skills is much easier when working in learning together groups.
4. Does working with a partner or group help you do better or worse in EFL reading comprehension? How do you know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in learning together groups improves EFL reading comprehension skills learning.
5. Do you enjoy learning EFL reading comprehension more or less when you work with a partner or group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning EFL reading comprehension is more fun when students work in learning together groups.
6. Can learning together strategy be used in teaching other EFL skills? Describe why or why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning together is a strategy that can be used in teaching other EFL skills.
7. Describe how it feels working in EFL reading comprehension alone versus working in a group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Student help-seeking strategies were widened due to learning together instruction. (b) Participating in learning together activities produced secure learning atmosphere and positive student interactions.
8. If you were an EFL reading comprehension instructor, how would you organize your classroom so that students can learn the most they can?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future use of learning together strategy would yield better students' achievement.

As noted in Table 5.1, the first theme dealt with the support students received from their instructor in relation to learning together strategy and was derived from participants' answers to the first interview guide question: Describe how your EFL reading comprehension instructor helps you work with others (when? for how long? how many times a week?). What's it like? Participants' responses indicated that instructor's continuing support on the use of learning together strategy was frequently provided during the whole sessions of the EFL reading comprehension course.

The instructor played a prominent role in providing such support when applying the learning together strategy. The second theme that emerged was derived from participants' answers to the third interview guide question that asked: Does working with a partner or group make your EFL reading comprehension learning easier or does it make it harder? How do you know? The second theme was that learning EFL reading comprehension skills is much easier when working in learning together groups.

The third theme that emerged was derived from the participants' responses to the fourth interview guide question that asked: Does working with a partner or group help you do better or worse in EFL reading comprehension? How do you know? Regardless of the EFL reading comprehension skills participants engaged in, they all made it clear that working in learning together groups improved EFL reading comprehension skills learning. The fourth theme emerged from the participants' responses in relation to the fifth interview guide question that asked: Do you enjoy learning EFL reading comprehension more or less when you work with a partner or group? Participants noted that learning EFL reading comprehension was more fun when students worked in learning together groups.

The fifth theme emerged from the participants' responses to the six interview guide question that asked: Can learning together strategy be used in teaching other EFL skills? Describe why or why not? Participants widely supported the notion that learning together is a strategy that can be used in teaching other EFL skills. The strongest sixth and seventh themes emerged from the participants' answers to the seventh interview guide question that asked: Describe how it feels working in EFL reading comprehension alone versus working in a group.

Participants strongly believed in the effectiveness of the learning together strategy in widening student help-seeking strategies as well as producing secure learning atmosphere and positive student interactions. The eighth interview guide question focused on the future use of learning together strategy in the EFL reading comprehension classroom and asked: If you were an EFL reading comprehension instructor, how would you organize your classroom so that students can learn the most they can? When asked how learning together would be used in their EFL reading comprehension classrooms in the future, the participants varied significantly and had limited commonality in their responses. However, as noted in the eighth theme, the participants were all in agreement that the future use of learning together strategy would yield better students' achievement.

5.6. Observation Findings

Merriam and Associates (2002) stated that observations “represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest” (p. 13). To get much better understanding of the EFL reading comprehension classrooms being researched, two classrooms were observed by the researcher for two EFL reading comprehension lectures of about one hour and a half each lecture. The first classroom applied Learning Together strategy, while the second classroom did not apply Learning Together strategy. Instead, the second classroom used the traditional lecturing instruction.

The first observed classroom was a classroom in which the Learning Together strategy was implemented. There were forty students in the classroom during the observation. Students were put in eight groups of five. The lecturer divided the session into three parts: Directions, activity time and presentation. The directions part was lecturer-focused and continued for the first 20 minutes of the session.

The lecturer began the session by distributing one-page hand out to groups of students to decide who does what and define each group member's role, in other words, the group leader, the group registrar, the group timer, the group presenter and the group participant. The students were working on previewing skill for that particular session. The lecturer presented the targeted reading comprehension previewing skill and stated exercises essential questions.

The lecturer gave an exemplar to simplify the task. Next, the lecturer and students discussed the reading comprehension text. Upon finishing the exemplar, the students were assigned their reading comprehension task on their reading comprehension textbook, and they got back to their seats and worked individually for 10 minutes. After 10 minutes, the lecturer asked the students to work in eight groups of five.

During the 30 minutes activity time, the students formed eight groups of five and started to talk about the answer they got when they worked individually. After they discussed and decided upon an answer, they divided up the work among themselves so that everybody had a part. Each group members decided that one student would read the comprehension text, one would discuss and explain the answers of the exercises, one would set the time, one would write down the answers and one would present and show the work for the answers.

The students were working together in groups while the lecturer was walking around and writing down his observation notes on the students' interaction and participation. The 30 minutes presentation part was student-centered. During this time, the students presented their work and answered questions in groups. Finally, each group presenter student came in front of the class for presentation and answering any

questions raised by other groups' members. After all the groups' presentations, students made comments on each group's work.

Data gained from observation sessions were written down using the Cooperative Learning Strategy of Learning Together Observation Guide. The cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together skills being frequently observed in the course of the EFL reading comprehension course classroom activities and lectures included positive interdependence and face to face promotive interaction. Findings of the observation involved 90% students' sharing in these two domains, namely, positive interdependence and face to face promotive interaction.

Forms of inside classroom students' sharing behaviors and activities distinguished were those of student discussions, working together in gathering information and writing down it. The researcher, as the observer, noted a member of one of the groups telling his partners that they needed to accomplish their task before the group went on with the lecture. That was an obvious example of positive interdependence among the experimental group.

The other classroom observed by the researcher was a classroom which did not apply Learning Together strategy, but utilized traditional lecturing instruction. There were 40 students in the classroom for the period of the observation. The classroom was quite silent the whole time, except for when the lecturer explained the skill or asked the students to answer the questions. The students stayed at their individual seats all over the lecture. The lecturer divided the lecture into three parts similarly to the Learning Together strategy, namely, explanation for 30 minutes, individual activity time for 30 minutes and feedback for 30 minutes.

The lecturer started the lecture by asking the students to get out their EFL reading comprehension textbook. The lecturer started his presentation by asking some

questions about previewing skill to warm up his students. Then he started explaining the skill in details giving more examples from the textbook and asking the students to answer the questions individually. During the individual work activity time the lecturer walked around the classroom informally assessing students and answering their questions. The students were given about 30 minutes to work individually on their tasks. Some students did their tasks very fast and sat at their seats bored with nothing to do.

After 30 minutes of independent individual work time, there was a 30-minute feedback time. During this time, the lecturer asked each student to show him his completed exercises. This went on until every student had his turn to show the lecturer his answered exercises and get feedback. While this was going on, some students were off task; students were seen playing with their mobiles, bored with doing nothing, and laying their heads down on their seats.

5.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the qualitative data analysis phase of the study, including observation, individual interviews and focus group interviews. The results discussed in this chapter revealed an answer to the third research question: How do undergraduate EFL experimental group students experience using cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together in EFL reading comprehension classroom? The classroom observation revealed that cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together was employed with commitment in the EFL reading comprehension classroom instruction. Also, the classroom observation revealed that students worked actively and cooperatively in Learning Together groups.

The semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interview revealed that the Learning Together strategy allowed students to be actively engaged, to learn from each other and enhanced their learning of reading comprehension skills and critique of the work of their group members. The themes emerged from the interviews revealed that the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together played an essential role when students learned from each other. The next chapter, Chapter Six, provides a summary of the study, a discussion of the results relative to the existing research, an examination of the implications of the research, conclusion and recommendations for future study.