

TOGETHER WE LEARN: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS OF GROUP WORK IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Although group work is widely promoted in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, most studies have examined its benefits in isolation, focusing primarily on cognitive or affective aspects. Few scholarly studies have explored students' perceptions holistically across cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, particularly in Indonesian secondary school contexts where sociocultural norms influence classroom interaction. This qualitative study addresses that gap by examining how ninth-grade students at SMPN 2 Batusangkar perceive the role of group work in English learning. Thirteen students were purposively selected based on participation levels and teacher recommendations. Data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman framework. Findings indicate that group work enhances comprehension, accelerates task completion, and stimulates idea generation (cognitive); fosters enjoyment, self-confidence, and occasional frustration with passive peers (affective); and promotes activeness, responsibility, and collective problem-solving (conative). The study's unique contribution lies in providing a culturally contextualized, multidimensional account of group work perceptions, offering actionable insights for designing structured, equitable, and engaging collaborative activities. These findings have key implications for EFL educators and curriculum developers seeking to balance learner autonomy with guided support to optimize participation, language development, and essential 21st-century skills.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, EFL Learning, Group Work, Indonesian Secondary Education, Students' Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the global shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy has emphasized the importance of collaborative learning strategies in second language classrooms. This shift reflects broader educational reforms aimed at promoting learner autonomy, critical thinking, and communicative competence rather than passive knowledge transmission. Among these strategies, group work has gained increasing recognition as a powerful pedagogical tool that fosters engagement, promotes peer interaction, and facilitates deeper learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Slavin, 1995). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, where opportunities for authentic communication are often limited, group work offers learners meaningful platforms to practice the target language, negotiate meaning, and develop confidence in expressing themselves (Brown & Lee, 1994; Oxford,

1997). This makes collaborative learning particularly relevant in Asian settings, where large class sizes and exam-oriented instruction often restrict opportunities for individualized language practice.

The benefits of group work are widely documented in both theoretical and empirical research. Classic cooperative learning theories emphasize that collaboration enhances learning through positive interdependence, where students support one another to achieve shared goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1999), and through the Zone of Proximal Development, where peer scaffolding enables learners to achieve tasks they could not accomplish alone (Vygotsky, 1978). Research has consistently found that group work stimulates cognitive engagement by encouraging learners to explain ideas, challenge perspectives, and co-construct new knowledge (Gillies & Ashman, 2007; Webb, 2009). In Indonesian contexts, Sajidin and Ashadi (2021) found that group-based activities sustained student engagement and improved comprehension of English materials, while (Gunawan, 2025) demonstrated that project-based collaboration enhanced speaking fluency, critical thinking, and teamwork skills among university students. Affective benefits are also evident: group collaboration reduces anxiety and fosters emotional comfort by providing safe spaces for learners to test ideas before presenting them publicly. Meilasari et al. (2023) found that cooperative learning significantly alleviated speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners, while Alzubi et al. (2024) reported increased motivation and self-confidence through group discussions. Conatively, group work helps students develop responsibility, strengthen accountability, and engage more actively, preparing them with the collaborative and communicative skills required in modern learning environments. (Situmorang, 2021).

Yet, despite its well-established potential, group work is not without its challenges. Studies consistently highlight the problem of unequal participation, with dominant learners overshadowing quieter or less proficient peers, leading to disparities in contribution and learning (Burke, 2011). In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, cultural values of harmony and respect for authority may prevent students from openly addressing peers who fail to participate fully, resulting in frustration or passive compliance (Abbott, 2017; Suryati, 2015). Coordination difficulties also emerge when group tasks lack clear structure, leading some learners to view group work as inefficient or time-consuming (Alfares, 2017). Interpersonal conflicts, arising from mismatched personalities or proficiency levels, can further undermine group cohesion and create negative learning experiences (Chen, 2018). Additionally, while digital tools have expanded opportunities for group collaboration, they have also introduced new challenges, such as reduced accountability and reliance on teacher intervention, particularly when online interactions are not carefully facilitated (Oktaviani & Sadiq, 2023). These challenges underscore that group work is not a universally effective strategy but one whose success depends on contextual factors such as task design, teacher facilitation, and students' social orientations.

The coexistence of these benefits and challenges has produced a nuanced and sometimes contradictory body of research. On one hand, group work is celebrated as a transformative learning process that supports cognitive development, emotional security, and behavioral engagement (Gunawan, 2025; Meilasari et al., 2023). On the other hand, it is critiqued for its tendency to reproduce inequities, create inefficiencies, and generate

interpersonal tensions (Supriyadi et al., (2022)). What is missing in much of the literature is an integrative perspective that accounts for the complex ways in which cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions interact to shape students' perceptions of group work. Existing studies often emphasize one dimension at the expense of the others focusing, for instance, on academic achievement without considering emotional factors, or on motivation without analyzing behavioral accountability. As a result, there is limited understanding of how students experience group work holistically, and how these experiences influence both their language learning outcomes and their broader development as autonomous, collaborative learners.

This study seeks to address that gap by exploring students' perceptions of group work in EFL classrooms through the lens of the Cognitive, Affective, Conative. By examining how group work shapes students' thinking, feelings, and behaviors, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its role in English language learning. Specifically, it investigates the experiences of ninth-grade students in an Indonesian secondary school, highlighting how collaborative activities enhance comprehension, foster emotional comfort, and encourage active engagement, while also acknowledging the challenges of participation inequities and coordination issues. Drawing on qualitative interview data, the study is guided by the central question: *How do students perceive the role of group work in enhancing their English language learning?* The findings are expected to inform teachers and curriculum developers about how to design and implement group-based activities that maximize benefits, mitigate challenges, and align with the needs of learners in diverse EFL contexts. In doing so, the study contributes both to the theoretical refinement of engagement research and to the practical advancement of collaborative pedagogy in language education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perceptions of ninth-grade students at SMPN 2 Batusangkar regarding the use of group work in English language learning. A qualitative approach was selected to allow for rich, in-depth insights into participants' experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they assign to collaborative learning in their specific educational and cultural context. The study involved 13 students from Class IX who had prior experience participating in group work during English lessons. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to capture variation in participation levels (high, medium, and low) and breadth of group work experience. Selection was based on recommendations from the English teacher and the researcher's direct observations during a teaching practicum (PLB). Prior the data collection, Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar. As the participants were minors, both written guardian and student consent were secured. All participants were informed of the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms (S1-S13) were assigned in all transcripts and reporting. Personally, identifying information was removed, and all digital data such as audio, video, and transcripts were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol informed by existing literature on group work in EFL settings. Interviews were conducted both in person and via online platforms, depending on participant availability. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. Questions were open-ended to encourage reflective, detailed responses. Examples included: “Can you describe how group work affects your understanding of English lessons?”. “How do you feel when working with classmates in a group?”. “What do you usually do if a group member is not participating actively?”. “Can you share an example of a group task that you found especially helpful or challenging?”. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and brief field notes captured non-verbal cues and contextual details to supplement the transcripts.

The data analysis followed the Miles & Huberman (2014) interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and verification. Data reduction began with verbatim transcription of all interviews, followed by repeated readings to gain familiarity with the content. An initial coding framework was developed deductively from the study’s cognitive, affective, conative (CAC) dimensions, then refined inductively to incorporate emergent codes from participants’ narratives. Two researchers independently coded a subset of transcripts to enhance coding reliability. The resulting codes were compared, discussed, and consolidated into a final codebook. Codes were then organized into thematic categories and summarized in narrative and tabular displays to facilitate interpretation. Patterns were examined in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks, including Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, cooperative learning theory, and Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, whereby key points from each interview were summarized and verified with participants to confirm accuracy. Triangulation was achieved by drawing on multiple data sources: interviews, field notes, and researcher observations.

RESULTS

This study aims to find out the students’ perception of ninth grade students towards group work in English learning at SMPN 2 Batusangkar. The data results were analyzed based on three components of perception, namely: cognitive, affective, and conative.

Cognitive Components

The cognitive component is students’ knowledge and understanding of group work. The research findings show that most students have a good and positive understanding of the implementation of group work in learning English.

Group Work Helps in Understanding the Material

The findings from this study reveal that group work significantly contributes to students’ understanding of English learning materials. A notable number of informants (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S11, and S13) expressed that learning through group collaboration helped them grasp concepts more effectively. This is primarily due to the accessibility and relatability of peer explanations, which students often found easier to comprehend than teacher-led instruction. One student, S1, remarked:

“Yes miss, Because of group work, I can get help from my friends, which opens up my understanding.”

This statement suggests that group work creates a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable seeking help. The phrase “*opens up my understanding*” implies that group interactions provide new perspectives or simplify complex topics through peer-to-peer assistance. It emphasizes the social nature of learning, where knowledge is co-constructed among members of the group. Another student, S9, explained:

“Sometimes I need help from others to understand the material better, such as how to solve a particular problem.”

This highlights the functional role of group work in problem-solving. The student acknowledges that there are moments when individual understanding is insufficient, and collaboration becomes essential. The sharing of strategies or solutions within a group context fosters deeper comprehension, especially in language learning where diverse interpretations and approaches often arise. S10 shared a broader perspective:

“It is very helpful, Miss, because students have different levels of understanding. By working together, we can ensure everyone understands.”

This quote reflects an awareness of the diversity in learners' abilities and the compensatory effect of group work. Students recognize that by working together, they can bridge gaps in understanding and promote collective academic growth. It also illustrates how group learning nurtures empathy and responsibility, as students assist their peers in achieving shared learning outcomes. Taken together, these excerpts illustrate that group work not only aids individual understanding but also builds a collaborative classroom culture. It aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD), where learners can achieve higher levels of understanding with the support of more capable peers. These findings underscore the importance of integrating structured group activities into English language instruction. When implemented effectively, group work encourages active participation, mutual support, and a deeper engagement with the learning material.

Group Work Speeds up Task Completion

In addition to facilitating understanding, group work was also perceived by several students as an effective strategy for completing tasks more efficiently. Informants S3, S5, S9, and S10 expressed the view that collaborative learning enables faster task execution due to the distribution of responsibilities and the benefits of collective problem-solving. S3 stated:

“When I don't understand something, I ask friends and we discuss it, making it easier to complete.”

This quote emphasizes how the group environment creates opportunities for immediate clarification and idea exchange, which streamlines the completion process. The act of discussing with peers not only aids comprehension but also reduces the time typically

spent struggling alone with difficult content. This illustrates the dual function of group work: enhancing learning while simultaneously increasing productivity. Similarly, S5 observed:

“Tasks are finished more quickly and easily when we discuss them and share ideas.”

This reflection highlights the time-saving advantages of collaborative dialogue. The sharing of ideas within a group allows students to approach tasks from multiple perspectives, often leading to more efficient and creative solutions. Rather than working in isolation, students benefit from the collective knowledge of the group, which speeds up decision-making and reduces redundancy in effort. S10 offered a more comprehensive explanation:

“Because our understanding differs, we help each other, making the task easier and Faster to complete.”

The student points out that diversity in cognitive abilities becomes an asset when leveraged in a cooperative setting. Differences in understanding are not seen as barriers but rather as complementary strengths. Through mutual support, students compensate for each other's weaknesses, leading to both improved quality and speed in task completion. Taken together, these responses reflect the positive impact of group dynamics on students' academic efficiency. The delegation of roles, division of labor, and continuous peer interaction serve as mechanisms that simplify complex tasks and shorten the time required for completion.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports constructivist views of learning, where knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction, and learning becomes more effective in authentic, task-oriented environments. Moreover, it aligns with the principles of collaborative learning, which emphasize interdependence, individual accountability, and shared goals. Practically, this suggests that educators should consider incorporating structured group assignments, especially for complex tasks, as they promote both time efficiency and deeper engagement with the material. Proper guidance in group formation and role assignment can further enhance the productivity benefits of this approach.

Group Work Adds Insight or Ideas

Another important theme that emerged from the data is the perception that group work contributes to the enrichment of students' ideas and perspectives. Informants S8, S9, and S13 highlighted the value of collaborative discussions in generating new insights, which might not have emerged during individual learning. This theme emphasizes the cognitive benefits of group interaction, particularly in stimulating critical thinking and expanding conceptual understanding. S8 shared the following:

“Difficult problems become easier when discussed. Friends often give ideas I hadn't considered.”

This statement underscores the transformative effect of collaborative dialogue. By working in a group, students are exposed to diverse viewpoints and strategies, which help simplify complex problems. The phrase “*ideas I hadn't considered*” points to the unexpected

yet beneficial nature of peer contributions. Students often encounter novel approaches that challenge or expand their own thinking. This reflects how group work serves as a platform for intellectual exploration. Similarly, S9 noted:

“Group members complement each other; we share what we know and learn from each other.”

This quote reflects the reciprocal nature of collaborative learning. Each group member brings unique prior knowledge and skills to the discussion, which collectively enrich the learning experience. The mutual exchange of information fosters a deeper understanding, making the group setting not only a social environment but also an academic resource. This aligns with the principles of knowledge co-construction, where learning is enhanced through shared experiences and dialogue. S13 expressed a particularly striking transformation:

“Working in a group increased my understanding from 50% to 100% through the exchange of ideas.”

This comment quantifies the perceived benefit of group work in a compelling way. It illustrates how peer discussions can fill in gaps in understanding and reinforce learning. The student explicitly attributes full comprehension to the collaborative process, implying that the diversity of thought and the interactive nature of group work are critical to achieving deeper cognitive engagement.

Affective Components

The affective component relates to students' feelings or attitudes towards the implementation of group work. Most students feel happy, comfortable, more confident and resentment towards passive members when learning in group work.

Feeling of Enjoyment and Reduced Boredom

The theme “*Feeling of Enjoyment and Reduced Boredom*” reflects students' positive emotional responses toward group work in English language learning. Based on interview data from informants S1, S3, S5, S8, and S9, group work fosters a more enjoyable and less monotonous learning atmosphere. For instance, S1 stated:

“It's more fun doing assignments with friends because we can chat and collaborate, which prevents boredom.”

This statement illustrates how group interaction and collaboration made learning activities less monotonous and more engaging. The opportunity to share tasks, exchange ideas, and socialize contributed to a more relaxed and stimulating atmosphere. Students also highlighted the sense of comfort that group work provided. Many participants noted that working with peers allowed them to feel more at ease, particularly when tackling challenging assignments. The presence of friends in the learning process reduced tension and made classroom activities feel less stressful. This comfort appeared to encourage greater willingness to participate, suggesting that emotional support from peers was a motivating factor in sustaining involvement.

Increased Self-Confidence

The theme “*Increased Self-Confidence*” highlights the positive impact of group work on students’ willingness to express themselves in English learning contexts. Informants S1, S2, S4, S5, S9, S10, and S13 reported feeling more confident when working in groups, as the collaborative environment reduced the pressure of individual performance. For example, S2 stated:

“In front of the class, I’m scared of making mistakes, but in groups, I can ask my friends first.”

While S4 added:

“Groups make me feel more secure because I can confirm my ideas with friends before sharing.”

Some students mentioned that discussing ideas within their groups helped them feel more assured before presenting to the teacher or the entire class. The peer-to-peer validation acted as a steppingstone for participation, especially for students who might otherwise be reluctant to speak up. For these learners, group work created a space where they could try out their ideas and receive encouragement, leading to stronger confidence in their abilities. However, not all affective experiences were positive. Some students expressed dislike toward group members who were passive or uncooperative. These students reported feeling frustrated when they had more responsibility or when others failed to contribute meaningfully. Such negative emotions indicate that while group work can enhance enjoyment and confidence, it can also produce dissatisfaction when group dynamics are imbalanced. The frustration associated with unequal participation suggests that emotional outcomes are closely tied to the effectiveness of collaboration and the fairness of workload distribution.

Conative Components

The conative component relates to students’ behavioral tendencies in response to group work. Most students demonstrated active, responsible and collective problem-solving strategies.

Group Work Encourages Activeness

The theme “*Group Work Encourages Activeness*” captures students’ perception that working in groups enhances their participation and engagement in English language learning. This theme emerged from the responses of informants S1, S2, S4, S5, S8, S10, S12, and S13, who consistently expressed that being part of a group setting motivated them to become more involved in classroom activities. Based on the excerpt S2 stated:

“I’m more active because I don’t want my group to fail to complete the task,”

Highlighting the sense of responsibility and accountability that group members feel toward one another. This sense of shared responsibility often prompts students to put in

more effort, not only for their own success but also for the benefit of the entire group. Similarly, S12 remarked:

“I try to engage my friends, so everyone participates in the group activity.”

Demonstrating that group work can also foster leadership qualities and initiative, as students take active roles in supporting and encouraging one another. S13 added:

“Even when I feel lazy, my group motivates me to stay active.”

It points to the influence of peer motivation in sustaining engagement even when individual drive may be lacking. In such environments, students are more likely to exert effort, remain engaged, and take initiative because they feel a sense of obligation and support within their teams. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of group work activates social motivation, which can lead to increased persistence and task completion, especially in language learning contexts that often require repeated practice and communicative risk-taking.

From a psychological perspective, group dynamics reduce social isolation and provide a platform for mutual encouragement, which is essential for sustaining motivation in second language learning. In practical terms, these results suggest that well-structured group activities can be strategically used by teachers to promote higher levels of student activeness. Group work not only supports linguistic interaction but also cultivates a classroom environment where peer influence, shared goals, and collaborative responsibility drive student participation. Therefore, incorporating group work into English learning activities offers a valuable pedagogical approach for increasing student engagement and fostering a more dynamic, supportive, and participatory learning atmosphere.

Group Work Fosters Responsibility

The theme “*Sense of Accountability in Group Tasks*” illustrates that students perceive a strong personal and collective responsibility when engaging in group-based English learning activities. Informants S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S12, and S13 consistently emphasized the importance of contributing actively and supporting their peers to ensure the completion and success of group assignments. S7 stated:

“Even if the task is difficult, we try to help each other and share the responsibility.”

Underscoring the cooperative nature of group work and the willingness of students to persevere through challenges as a team. S9 added:

“I actively contribute to completing assignments and ensuring group success.”

It reveals a personal commitment to the group's academic outcomes. Meanwhile, S12 expressed a deeper level of involvement by saying:

“If others don't understand, I feel the need to explain and support them.”

It indicates that group work can foster a sense of leadership and peer tutoring among students. Tool for instilling a sense of responsibility, mutual support, and accountability among learners. It shifts the focus from teacher-centered instruction

to student-centered collaboration, where learners actively manage their own roles and contribute to the group's collective progress. As such, incorporating collaborative tasks into English learning curricula not only enhances linguistic competence but also cultivates a stronger sense of ownership and teamwork essential components of effective 21st-century learning environments.

Collective Problem-Solving Strategies

The theme "Collective Problem-Solving Strategies" highlights the way students collaboratively approach academic challenges in group settings, particularly during English learning activities. Informants S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, and S13 described a clear pattern of engaging in group discussions to solve problems collectively before seeking external help. S4, S6, S9, S12 stated:

"If we can't solve a problem through discussion, we ask the teacher for help."

It indicates that students prioritize peer-based collaboration and turn to the teacher as a secondary resource. S9 emphasized this process further by saying:

"We try to understand the task together before asking the teacher."

It suggests a proactive learning attitude and a desire for group autonomy. Similarly, S13 noted:

"We discuss within the group and only approach the teacher, when necessary."

It reinforces the idea that students prefer to rely on peer dialogue and mutual reasoning before escalating to instructor assistance. The students' willingness to work together to understand instructions, clarify confusion, and resolve difficulties reflects the development of critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills, all essential for effective group learning.

Moreover, their restraint in immediately seeking teacher intervention shows a level of self-regulation and cognitive engagement. Students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in the problem-solving process. It also echoes the principles of collaborative learning, where knowledge is co-constructed, and learners benefit from the diverse perspectives and strategies offered by peers.

Pedagogically, this theme suggests that fostering collective problem-solving practices within group work settings can empower students to take initiative, strengthen peer collaboration, and reduce overdependence on the teacher. Teachers can support this by designing tasks that require group negotiation, promoting inquiry-based learning, and encouraging students to exhaust peer resources before seeking help. Ultimately, such practices not only enhance students' linguistic and academic development but also nurture independence, responsibility, and higher-order thinking skills, all of which are crucial in 21st-century education.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that group work in English language learning offers cognitive, affective, and conative benefits for students. The integration of qualitative data from student interviews reveals not only how learners perceive group work but also the depth of their engagement and the multiple dimensions it impacts. These findings are best understood through the lens of socio-constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), cooperative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1999), and Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1982), which collectively frame the learning process as socially mediated, emotionally influenced, and behaviorally constructed.

The cognitive benefits reported in this study enhanced comprehension, accelerated task completion, and the generation of diverse ideas strongly align with a substantial body of evidence supporting the cognitive advantages of collaborative learning (Gillies & Ashman, 2007; Webb, 2009). Most participants indicated that peer explanations offered in group settings were more relatable and easier to internalize than teacher-led instruction. This resonates with Sajidin & Ashadi (2021), who demonstrated that group work in Indonesian junior high schools promotes active learning by enabling students to process material through familiar peer communication styles. Similarly, Gunawan (2025) reported that project-based collaborative learning significantly enhanced both speaking fluency and higher-order thinking skills, showing that such approaches benefit not only linguistic but also analytical capacities.

The emphasis on time efficiency as a motivator for engagement represents a noteworthy extension the literature. While studies such as Alfares (2017) have acknowledged efficiency as a driver of participation in higher education, few have documented its importance in adolescent EFL contexts. Students saw efficiency not as a shortcut but as an enabler of deeper engagement freeing up cognitive resources for problem-solving and idea elaboration. This pragmatic appreciation of group work suggests that cognitive benefits are not limited to comprehension and recall but also include strategic time management skills, an often-overlooked academic competence.

Furthermore, the repeated observation that exposure to multiple viewpoints enriches understanding aligns with Kuliahana & Marzuki (2024), who found that structured group discussions improved speaking fluency and expanded students' repertoire of communicative strategies. In our study, students used peer contributions to reconsider their own ideas and integrate alternative perspectives behaviors that echo Vygotsky (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where cognitive growth occurs through the support of more capable peers. From a pedagogical standpoint, these findings suggest that teachers should deliberately structure group activities to maximize these cognitive benefits. This might include assigning roles that ensure diverse viewpoints are heard, scaffolding peer explanations with targeted prompts, and encouraging time management practices within groups. Doing so would not only deepen comprehension but also equip students with transferable skills such as negotiation, synthesis, and collaborative reasoning.

The affective benefits observed enjoyment, reduced boredom, and increased self-confidence are consistent with Krashen (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that language acquisition is facilitated when learners are in low-anxiety, high-motivation environments. These benefits are echoed in recent empirical studies. Meilasari et al. (2023) found that cooperative learning reduced speaking anxiety and promoted fluency among Indonesian secondary EFL students, while Kuliahana & Marzuki (2024) highlighted students' preference for group discussions due to the supportive, motivating atmosphere they create.

Importantly, this study offers a more nuanced view of affective experiences in group work. While most students reported positive emotions, several expressed frustrations with inactive group members. This dual affective reality mirrors findings from Burke (2011) in higher education contexts, where uneven participation can undermine group cohesion. However, it contrasts with Supriyadi et al. (2022), whose research in Indonesian classrooms emphasized harmony and collective unity over the expression of discontent. The frankness with which our participants voiced dissatisfaction may reflect a generational shift toward valuing individual accountability within collectivist cultures.

From a theoretical perspective, these affective dynamics can be understood through Vygotsky's concept of social interaction as a learning mediator. Emotional comfort in group settings appears to serve as a scaffold for risk-taking and experimentation with language, while frustration may function as a motivator for setting clearer group norms. Pedagogically, the implications from group work are not automatic but depend on structures that promote equitable participation. Teachers might integrate strategies such as rotating roles, setting explicit participation expectations, and incorporating peer evaluation to balance emotional comfort with accountability.

The conative outcomes improved activeness, a stronger sense of responsibility, and a preference for collective problem-solving reinforce Johnson & Johnson's (1999) cooperative learning principle of positive interdependence, wherein group success is depending on each member's contribution. These behaviors resonate with Sajidin and Ashadi (2021), who found that active learning strategies like group work increased students' willingness to participate and assume responsibility for shared tasks. They also align with Gunawan (2025), whose participants demonstrated improved collaboration and self-direction in project-based contexts. Participants not only fulfilled their assigned tasks but also actively supported peers, explained materials, and encouraged engagement. Such proactive behavior has been more commonly documented in tertiary education (Kamardikaningsih, 2023) than in secondary classrooms, indicating that adolescents, when provided with the right structures, can develop advanced leadership and facilitation skills.

The preference for peer-based problem-solving before consulting the teacher marks a significant departure from Alrashidi (2022) findings, where secondary EFL students relied heavily on teacher guidance. Instead, the data align with Oktaviani and Sadiq (2023) who reported that teacher-facilitated group work especially in computer mediated settings can

foster independence and self-regulation. This shift suggests a development of learning strategies among younger learners, potentially influenced by the growing emphasis on student agency in 21st-century education policy. Pedagogically, fostering conative development means giving students structured autonomy. Teachers can encourage this by providing clear, achievable goals while allowing students space to negotiate their processes. This balance of guidance and independence may be particularly effective in contexts where traditional teacher authority remains strong.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the multifaceted perceptions of students regarding group work in English language learning, highlighting its significant role in promoting cognitive engagement, emotional comfort, and behavioral motivation. Through interview data, it is evident that group work fosters a positive affective environment, where students experience greater enjoyment and reduced boredom during learning activities. Moreover, the findings reveal that collaborative learning builds self-confidence, encourages active participation, and cultivates a sense of responsibility and accountability toward completing shared tasks.

From a cognitive standpoint, students benefit from collective problem-solving strategies, which not only enhance their comprehension but also strengthen peer to peer scaffolding and interaction. This aligns with socio-constructivist theories such as Vygotsky (1978), which emphasize the social nature of learning. The data also indicate that group work nurtures mutual support, allowing students to clarify ideas and confront challenges together before seeking help from teachers. These outcomes illustrate how group dynamics contribute to both academic development and social-emotional growth, validating prior literature on cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Slavin, 1995).

Importantly, this study also underscores that the effectiveness of group work is not automatic; it requires thoughtful and deliberate implementation. For teachers, this means designing collaborative activities with clear structures, assigning roles to ensure equitable participation, and facilitating reflection sessions that allow students to evaluate both their contributions and group processes. Attention must also be given to the affective climate of the classroom teachers should encourage peer support systems while addressing challenges such as unequal participation. For curriculum developers, the findings suggest that group-based pedagogy should be embedded more systematically into English curricula, with explicit training modules on collaboration, communication, and leadership skills. By doing so, schools can cultivate not only language proficiency but also the broader competencies essential for 21st-century learning, including critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability.

While this research contributes new insights by framing group work through the combined cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, it also opens avenues for further investigation. Future studies could adopt a mixed methods design to triangulate student perceptions with classroom observations and performance data, thereby strengthening claims of causality. Comparative studies across different educational levels or cultural contexts would also help identify how group dynamics vary with age, proficiency, or sociocultural norms. Furthermore, longitudinal research could examine whether the

benefits of group work persist over time, particularly in relation to sustained motivation, language retention, and learner autonomy. Exploring the role of digital and hybrid learning environments in shaping group work dynamics also remains a pressing area for inquiry, especially as technology increasingly mediates collaborative language learning.

In short, this study confirms that group work, when carefully structured and facilitated, is not merely a classroom technique but a transformative pedagogical tool. It meaningfully enhances language learning experiences by engaging learners cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally, while also preparing them with the collaborative and leadership skills required beyond the classroom. By attending to the design, support, and assessment of group learning, educators and curriculum developers can maximize its potential, and future research can continue to refine its implementation across diverse educational landscapes.

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