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Collaborative Learning and Iranian EFL learners' Vocabulary Improvement through Snowball and Word-Webbing Techniques

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to look into the effect of collaborative learning on the learners' improvement in vocabulary learning. Moreover, the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning were taken into account as well. The study was conducted with the participation of 30 intermediate Iranian EFL (English as a foreign language) learners, who were studying in a private language institute. To collect the data, OPT (Oxford Placement Test) was applied to check the learners' proficiency level and meet the homogeneity requirements. Then, the learners took the vocabulary pre- and post-test to check the effectiveness of treatment sessions on the learners' vocabulary learning. Semi-structured interview was also done to investigate the learners' awareness regarding learning vocabularies before and after the treatment sessions. Findings showed that the applied collaborative techniques, i.e. word-webbing and snowball techniques paved the way for the experimental group to outperform the control group since improvement in vocabulary learning was found to be significant. Moreover, Qualitative results revealed the occurrence of positive changes in the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning since almost all the learners concurred that the above-mentioned collaborative techniques assisted them in their better speaking and, by having more interaction through group work, enjoyable environment was created for learning target vocabularies. It was suggested that collaborative instruction should be implemented in teaching vocabulary as it can pave the way for both teachers and learners to benefit from a communicative language classroom.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Word-Webbing Technique, Snowball Technique, Learners' Attitudes, Vocabulary Learning

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1. Introduction

It is noteworthy that the role of collaboration in learning might be well-recognized by L2 scholars. However, there seems to be more research done to highlight the effectiveness of collaborative learning in teaching and learning language skills in the context of task-based and interactional learning environment. Learning new vocabularies, which is one of the most important sub-skills of the language, seems to be a complicated process involving a variety of sub-processes and tasks demanding more elaboration to be internalized. Before a word becomes a part of one's automatic linguistic competence, it has to be recognized as a word, its syntactic and semantic properties should be learned, and it has to be integrated into one's mental lexicon so that it can be retrieved automatically when needed. The thing that

needs to be attended is how vocabulary should be taught to assist the learners to get mastery over syntactic and semantic properties of the word. Much research conducted in the area of second language vocabulary acquisition has been concerned with vocabulary instruction (e.g. Quian, 2004; Zimmerman, 1997) to reveal the significance of vocabulary learning and teaching and paving the way for learners and teachers to acquire the best knowledge of vocabulary acquisition and pedagogy.

Collaborative learning can be based on a variety of techniques or strategies; however researchers agreed that all successful collaborative learning strategies require learners to negotiate roles, timelines, tasks, knowledge, and experiences (Gross Davis, 1993). Barkley, Cross, and Major (2005) identified some of the collaborative learning techniques used

in these types of groups: (a) techniques for discussion, (b) techniques for reciprocal teaching, (c) techniques for problem solving, (d) techniques for using graphic information organizers, and (e) techniques for focusing on writing. In addition, they also presented some of the strategies identified within these techniques, such as (a) think-pair-share, (b) round robin, (c) three-step interview, (d) critical debate, (e) note-taking pairs, (f) learning cell, (g) fishbowl, (h) role play, (i) jigsaw, (j) test-taking teams, (k) case study, (l) structured problem solving, (m) group investigations, (n) group grid, (o) sequence chains, (p) word webs, (q) round table, (r) collaborative writing, (s) peer editing, etc. Slavin (1996) stated that regardless of the strategy used, every collaborative learning endeavor must have the common denominator, i.e. the purpose of engaging students in their own active learning, while providing a supportive and challenging environment.

As to the role of word-webbing in vocabulary learning, it seems that using a word web can result in mapping out a new word. One way to expand the learners' vocabulary depth and breadth is to find new words and discuss them at length, which can be achieved by creating a word web that maps out the new word. If the learner is struggling with vocabulary from a particular unit or theme, it is useful for him to create a vocabulary word web for common words that he/she might encounter (Laufer, 1992). Similar to word-webbing, the purpose of the snowball strategy is to predict, summarize, justify, and think critically. Teachers can adapt the strategy to their own purposes. The Snowball technique enforces writing, responding to text, critical thinking, justifying, and collaboration (Zimmerman, 1997). The anonymity of the activity also encourages students to respond even if they are unsure of the 'right' answer. In fact, both above-mentioned techniques can pave the way for the teachers to create a collaborative learning atmosphere to help the learners improve their vocabulary knowledge.

Although recent years have seen an increase in investigation of general beliefs about language acquisition, beliefs about acquisition of vocabulary and their influence on learning strategies have been under-researched. To date, no studies have investigated vocabulary learning beliefs in the context of Iran.

To sum up, up to present, a few studies have been carried out in terms of applying collaborative learning on the

learners' vocabulary development; therefore, paving the way for the present study to probe the effect of collaboration on the learners' vocabulary learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques to stimulate the learners' background knowledge for the purpose of learning the target vocabularies while collaborating and working on the tasks based on the above-mentioned tasks. The learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning were also taken into account to check the learners' awareness regarding how vocabulary can be taught and whether their probable simplistic attitudes about vocabulary learning can be changed by the treatment sessions.

The study intended to answer the following research questions:

1. Does collaborative learning result in the EFL learners' vocabulary improvement through word-webbing and snowball techniques?
2. To what extent can collaborative learning affect the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

A group of 40 intermediate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners who were studying English in a private language institute were the potential candidates in order to examine the effect of collaborative learning on their improvement in vocabulary learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques. The participants were divided into one experimental group and one control group based on the purpose of the study. In fact, the experimental group included 15 participants, and 15 participants were assigned to control group. Though the participants seemed to be homogeneous in terms of their levels of proficiency (i.e. intermediate level according to the records of the Institute), Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was also administered to make sure of the sample homogeneity. Meanwhile, 10 of the students identified as outliers were discarded from the study.

2.2 Instruments

The instruments used in the study include: 1) OXFORD PLACEMENT TEST (OPT)

Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered before the treatment sessions to select homogenous samples in terms of their proficiency levels. It is noteworthy that the participants of the study were of intermediate level and OPT was applied to select the students who are all intermediate learners.



2) VOCABULARY PRE-TEST

After the participants responded to the OPT, the researcher-made vocabulary pre-test (see appendix 1) was taken by the participants before the treatment. The pre-test was based on the course syllable content. It was in a form of 25 multiple choice questions to check their initial knowledge of the target vocabularies prior to the treatment.

As to the reliability measure of the pre-test, a pilot study was conducted with the participation of 40 intermediate students (from another private institute with similar characteristics of the participants of the present study) to check test score consistency. Reliability coefficient was found to be 0.70 (using KR-21 formula), which appeared to be an acceptable value in terms of consistency of scores as highlighted in Farhady, Jafarpour, and Birjandi (1994). The reliability of the pre-test is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability of Vocabulary Pre-Test

N	Mean	SD	Variance	Reliability
40	20.66	4.86	40.12	0.70

3) VOCABULARY POST-TEST

The researcher-made vocabulary post-test (see appendix 2) was taken to look into the effectiveness of the treatment sessions in terms of collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques. In fact, the post-test served as a measurement of the students' progress after the treatment.

Similar to the pre-test, the post-test contains 25 multiple choice questions based on the treatment sessions. It aimed to see whether vocabulary instruction through collaboration and word-webbing and snowball techniques might have any impact on the learners' vocabulary development.

Regarding the reliability coefficient of the post-test, the same participants, who took part in the pilot study for the pre-test, carried out the post-test to check the consistency of the post-test scores with the application of KR-21 formula. The reliability was calculated as 0.75 highlighting a logical amount of consistency measure. Reliability of the post-test is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability of Vocabulary Post-Test

N	Mean	SD	Variance	Reliability
40	24.12	6.99	45.12	0.75

4) SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

To examine the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning, they were invited to participate in a semi-structured

interview session to explore their perceptions about grammar learning before the treatment. The interview questions the learners were supposed to answer include:

1. What's your attitude towards vocabulary learning? Is it easy or difficult for you to learn new vocabularies?
2. Do you agree that learning new vocabularies is essential for language learning, why?
3. Are you interested in learning vocabularies?
4. Does your teacher have any special plan for teaching new words?

After the treatment, they were invited for the second semi-structured interview to see whether collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques may lead to probable changes in their attitudes about vocabulary learning. It is noteworthy that semi-structured interview was taken by the experimental groups and conducted almost with the same above-mentioned questions to check consistency among the learners' answers. It should be noted that the semi-structured interview sessions were audio recorded.

2.3 Procedure

The present study was done with the participation of intermediate students. Moreover, the study attempted to examine the effect of collaboration through word-webbing and snowball techniques on EFL language learners' vocabulary learning in one hand, and explore their attitudes about grammar learning on the other. As to the homogeneity of the learners regarding their proficiency levels, they took OPT. Then, the participants were divided into experimental and control groups. Prior to the administration of pre- and post-tests, a pilot study was done to measure their reliability in order to guarantee the consistency of the scores. Then, both groups took the vocabulary pre-test to examine their initial knowledge of vocabularies in their syllabus material. Then, the experimental group took part in a semi-structured interview session to explore their attitudes about vocabulary learning. After that, the experimental group underwent five 1.5-hour treatment sessions of collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques explained in the following:

Word-webbing technique is a graphic organizer strategy that provides a visual of how words or phrases connect to a topic as in the steps below:

Step 1. Students were divided into groups of 4 or 5 randomly.

Step 2. Each group receives a paper and different color markers.

Step 3. One student draws a circle in the middle of the paper and writes the main idea in it.

Step 4. Each student adds a concept to it with different color markers. They write subtopics in the corners.

Step 5. Each student selects one corner and writes her/his words. All students have a chance to add their ideas.

Step 6. Papers are displayed around the classroom and each group reports their word-web.

Snowball technique is also useful when the aim is to generate ideas and involves the following steps:

Step 1. Each student receives a task. They receive the same task. They have to work within a preset period of time (5 minutes, more or less).

Step 2. They work on the task in pairs, they share ideas.

Step 3. Pairs then form groups of 4 to share their ideas and knowledge.

Step 4. Snowball is finished until they solve their problems.

In fact, the application of the above-mentioned techniques paved the way for the collaborative learning to take place in a form of tasks to foster communication among the learners to learn the target vocabularies adopted from the materials covered in the syllabus content. The experimental group (15 learners) was also divided into three groups (each included five members) to collaboratively work on the target words with regard to the above-mentioned techniques.

It should also be noted that no techniques were applied in the control group and they received traditional vocabulary instruction without the use of specific tasks for collaboration.

After five sessions of vocabulary treatment, the participants took the vocabulary post-test based on the target word items for the second time to look into the experimental groups' achievement of vocabulary development, and compare the results of the experimental group with the control one.

In the post-test session, students were interviewed in groups for the second time in order to see whether their perceptions toward learning vocabulary via word-webbing and snowball techniques might have been changed. Moreover, the

interview session was recorded for further examination.

3. Data Analysis

As to the data analysis, quantitative measures included both descriptive and inferential statistics to measures were adopted to look into the impact of collaborative learning on the learners' vocabulary improvement. To do so, the learners' pre- and post-tests results of the experimental group and the control were quantitatively analyzed through SPSS software (version 20).

In order to analyze the learners' interview, learners' partial transcriptions of their interview session in line with grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were provided to get into their perceptions about vocabulary learning before and after treatment sessions.

Regarding the application of the grounded theory in second language research, Dornyei (2007) states that it is a qualitative research methodology which is in favor of stepwise guidelines for data analysis providing an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon. In fact, grounded theory codes the data regarding the learners' perceptions about vocabulary learning. For this purpose, three steps were identified by Dornyei (2007) including:

1. Open coding of textual data and break them to chunks. Each of these segments is assigned a category.
2. Axial coding of the data that the researcher tries to make associations between the categories of interview data found in the first step to create a sensible categorization.
3. Selective coding by which the researcher aims to finally identify the main codes that have already been specified in the second stage.

4. Results

4.1 Investigation of the First Research Question

The first research question of the study was to look into the effect of collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques on Iranian intermediate learners' vocabulary improvement. Hence, quantitative measures were conducted both descriptively and inferentially as in the following.

Test of normal distribution (see Table 3) was initially conducted to see if the scores of the learners in both groups, i.e. experimental and control learners were distributed normally.

Table 3: Test of Normality Distribution for Experimental and Control Groups



Groups		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Experimental	Pretest	.131	15	.134	.953	15	.143
	Posttest	.131	15	.133	.959	15	.214
Control	Pretest	.131	15	.139	.946	15	.086
	Posttest	.132	15	.130	.951	15	.125

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

First of all, tests of normal distribution were run to see if the data were distributed normally. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness-of-fit test showed .134 and .133 for the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group, and .139 and .130, for the pre-test and post-test, scores of the control group. Since the sample size, in each group, was rather small (n=15), under 50, the results of Shapiro-Wilk test of normal distribution were taken into consideration as well. The results of Shapiro-Wilk goodness-of-fit test showed .143 and .214 for the learners' scores in the experimental group on the pre-test and post-test, and .086 and .125 for the learners' scores in the control group on the pre- and post-tests. The results of both tests, showing non-significant p-values, indicated that the scores were normally distributed. Therefore, parametric tests could be used to analyze the data.

After checking normality distribution, a set of paired-samples t-test (Table 4) was conducted to compare the experimental and control groups' performance on the pre-test.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-Test

Groups		N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Pretest	Experimental	15	9.7143	1.58247	.26749
	Control	15	10.1143	1.71106	.28922

Looking at the table of descriptive statistics, it can be inferred that the learners' mean score, in the experimental group, (M=9.71, SD= 1.58) was not too much different from that of the learners in the control group (M=10.11, SD= 1.71) showing that the groups were different, but to a little extent. In order to compare the groups' mean scores on the pre-test, independent samples t-test was provided (Table 5).

Table 5: Independent Samples T-Test for the Pre-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.224	.637	-1.015	68	.314	-.40000	.39395	-1.18612	.38612
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.015	67.589	.314	-.40000	.39395	-1.18621	.38621

The results of the independent-samples t-test table were analyzed to see if there was any significant statistical difference between the learners' mean scores on the pre-test. Looking at the

Levene's test, it can be seen that the assumption of equal variances is not violated (p= .637). Therefore, the results of the first line could be used to report the data. The results of the first line showed a non-significant p-value (p=.314, df= 68, t= -1.01). The mean difference was -.40 with 95% confidence interval ranging from -1.18 to .38 indicating that the learners performed similarly prior to the treatment.

Regarding the fact that parametric tests lack enough power to test the assumptions, it is safer to report the results of the second line of the independent-samples t-test called Welch's procedure, as well, which assumes that the variances are not equal. The results of the second line showed a non-significant p-value as well (p=.314, df= 67.58, t= -1.01). The mean difference was -.40 with 95% confidence interval ranging from -1.18 to .38 which confirms the results of the first line.

In order to examine the efficacy of collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques on the learners' vocabulary learning, the experimental and control groups' performance was compared (see Table 6).

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of the Post-Test

	Groups	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Posttest	Experimental	15	13.7429	1.70368	.28797
	Control	15	10.4000	2.08919	.35314

The results of the descriptive statistics showed a difference between the performances of the learners in the experimental group (M= 13.74, SD= 1.70) and those in the control group (M= 10.40, SD= 2.08) showing that the learners in the experimental group performed so much better than those in the control group following the treatment sessions.

The results of the independent-samples t-test were also analyzed to find the statistical difference between the two sets of scores obtained from the post-test of the two groups (Table 7).

Table 7. Independent Samples T-Test for the Post-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	2.041	.158	7.336	68	.000	3.34286	.45567	2.43358	4.25213
	Equal variances not assumed			7.336	65.354	.000	3.34286	.45567	2.43292	4.25280

Examining the Levene's test, a non-significant p-value can be seen (p=.158) suggesting that the assumption of equal variances is not violated. Therefore, the first line of the table could be reported. The results of the first line of the table showed a

significant p-value ($p = .000$, $df = 68$, $t = 7.33$). The mean difference was 3.34 with 95% confidence interval ranging from 2.43 to 4.25. The Cohen's d statistics also indicated a large difference as well ($d = 1.75$) indicating that the learners in the experimental group significantly outperformed those in the control group. The results of the second line of the table showed similar results as well. As to considering the second line of the table, a significant p-value ($p = .000$, $df = 65.35$, $t = 7.33$) can be observed. The mean difference is 3.34 with 95% confidence interval ranging between 2.43 and 4.25 which denotes the outperformance of the learners in the experimental group, highlighting the fact that the above-mentioned vocabulary techniques paved the way for the learners to engage in collaborative learning environment, which resulted in improvement in their vocabulary learning.

4.2 Investigation of the Second Research Question

The second research question of the study was 'to what extent can collaborative learning affect the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning?'. In order to answer the question, learners' responses to the interview were specified and then categorized with regard to the coding of data, and then selected transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews were provided to be in line with the categories. Before starting with the categories of the learners' attitudes, it is beneficial to review the interview questions:

1. What's your attitude towards vocabulary learning? Is it easy or difficult for you to learn new vocabularies?
2. Do you agree that learning new vocabularies is essential for language learning, why?
3. Are you interested in learning vocabularies?
4. Does your teacher have any special plan for teaching new words?

As to the interview transcripts, coding of the interview transcripts were initiated to find out the categories emerged according to the initial coding of the answers. Then, axial coding of data was conducted to discover the main categories of data for the purpose of selective coding which is the final stage. Therefore, the main categories of the learners' interview were 1) learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning before the treatment; and 2) learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning after the treatment. Each of these two main categories has sub categories to

interpretively analyze the data. Concerning the first category of the learners' attitudes, the following classifications can be made as to the coding procedure:

- a) Vocabulary learning is a difficult activity in the classroom
- b) Learning vocabulary is monotonous

As to the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning before the treatment, the following codes can be introduced:
- c) Vocabulary learning interactively helps speaking
- d) Group work makes the vocabulary learning more enjoyable

It should also be mentioned that 15 learners of the experimental group were selected to take part in interview. Since the experimental group's responses were of importance regarding the purpose of the study, their attitude change was thoroughly analyzed. In the following, each of these sub-categories is taken into account and interview extracts are provided as well.

4.3 Learners' Attitudes about Vocabulary Learning Before the Treatment

As to the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning, interview data showed that their attitudes seemed to be rather simplistic and negative toward learning vocabularies, which clearly denotes their unfamiliarity with this important sub-skill. Below, learners' sub-categories as well as interview extracts are provided to demonstrate the learners' lack of awareness about vocabulary learning before the treatment.

- a) Vocabulary Learning is a Difficult Activity in the Classroom

Regarding the difficulty of vocabulary learning that the learners might face, almost all the participants ($n = 13$) believed that vocabulary learning was not as easy as the other skills such as reading or speaking. In fact, the learners might not have sufficient knowledge of how to teach vocabulary as effectively as possible to make it seem less difficult for them. Here, it was found that learners' were not interested in vocabulary exercises and they always face difficulty in understanding target vocabularies particularly within sentence. As an example, one of the participants' interview extracts is as follows:

Extract 1.

"I think that learning vocabulary is the most difficult ... it does not have any fun and therefore less energetic and full of hard vocabularies."

The learner appeared not to be satisfied with tasks of vocabulary done in the class and believes that it is less energetic



and without any interaction while teaching vocabulary. Although teaching vocabulary is of great importance, it seems that teaching and learning vocabulary did not satisfy the learners' expectations though they were not fully aware of what exactly teaching vocabulary is since most of them contended that vocabulary should be taught directly. Learners' attitudes appeared to be simplistic and this may be due to their teachers' teaching methodology in teaching vocabulary less communicatively or maybe there is no teaching of vocabularies in the classroom leading to keeping such attitudes. The thing to be attended is the participants' lack of understanding of what exactly teaching and learning vocabulary is and what the main purpose of vocabulary task is.

b) Learning Vocabulary is Monotonous

This category of the learners' attitudes shows that the participants' responses to the interview revealed their reluctance to learn target vocabularies. It seems that learners' less eagerness in vocabulary learning might be due to the difficulty of the skill they may encounter as it was highlighted in the previous extracts above. Regarding the lack of interest in vocabulary learning making it monotonous without any variety, the majority of the participants (n=12) believed that when they were working on tasks of vocabulary, there were no additional activities to make the learning process less boring, leading to have the learners more interested in doing the vocabulary exercises. This attitude is shown in the following extract:

Extract 2.

"When we are doing vocabulary activities, we have to do the tasks of the book individually or with our classmates in a form of a machine ... right or wrong. It is boring just to answer the questions of the book without having any talking with the friends or very little or no interaction with the teacher. This makes it boring for us."

The above extract delineates that participants were in favor of more interaction in vocabulary instruction and they were not pleased with the current method of teaching vocabulary in the classroom. More importantly, it can be found that they were probably indifferent to vocabulary learning. More than half of the learners concurred that a vocabulary exercise was just to do it uniformly and jump to a reading or speaking task like a machine. It seems that some of the participants were, to some extent, lazy or

they would like to pass the time as fast as possible when they were supposed to work on vocabulary exercises. In fact, these types of learners might need more justification and attention to be more aware of the purpose of vocabulary instruction to make them be consciously involved in vocabulary learning, and what they were expected to do during vocabulary learning. On the other hand, there were learners who liked more interactive classes while the vocabulary section of the textbook was started, and they were not satisfied with less-energetic and boring atmosphere caused by no interaction in the classroom.

4.4 Learners' Attitudes about Vocabulary Learning after the Treatment

As to the learners' attitudes after the treatment of collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques, their responses to the interview highlighted their satisfaction with the methodology adopted in teaching vocabulary leading to holding positive attitudes about vocabulary learning. It seemed that teaching vocabulary through collaboration, to a large extent, resulted in changes in the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning. Hence, it is of value to go for sub-categories of the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning after the treatment.

c) Vocabulary Learning Interactively Helps Speaking

Regarding the learners' attitudes' change about vocabulary learning, all the participants (n=15) in semi-structured interview agreed that collaborative vocabulary instruction was so effective in that they felt improvement in vocabulary since they were able to carry out the tasks individually and benefit from peer interaction and simultaneously interact with the teacher and improve their speaking as well. The extract below reflects one learners' positive attitude about vocabulary learning after receiving the treatment of vocabulary instruction:

Extract 3.

"The new method of teaching vocabulary, for example, snowball, we could have more talk with our friends and do the exercise and speak about that after choosing the words, and talk to our friends. It was very enjoyable."

The learner had a positive impression in terms of teacher's vocabulary instruction. An interesting point is that she mentioned 'new method of teaching' and 'snowball', showing that she was aware of the technique in vocabulary teaching and it might be for the first time that the learners

experienced such an interactive class while focusing on target vocabularies through word-webbing and snowball techniques. It can also be found that the participants were affected by having more interaction with their peers as well as the teacher helping them to improve their speaking ability while learning the target vocabularies. In other words, collaborative vocabulary instruction through the above-mentioned techniques paved the way for the learners to freely speak with their friends and teachers about the vocabulary tasks and enjoy the context of interaction.

d) Group Work Makes the Vocabulary Learning more Enjoyable

Regarding changes in the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning, it seems that teaching vocabulary through word-webbing and snowball techniques caused the majority of the participants (n=13) to put much more emphasis on the role of collaboration by mentioning 'group work' in their responses to the interviews. They apparently understood the role vocabulary may play in their success in the process of language learning as it helped them to improve their self-confidence in speaking skill as highlighted in the previous section. By contending that collaborative learning through the so-called techniques fostered the learners' group work activities by the participants, it, therefore, values the role of collaborative instruction in teaching vocabulary and the teacher's abilities to successfully implement the collaborative techniques in the classroom, paving the way for the learners to benefit from peer and teacher interaction to interactively do the vocabulary tasks.

Extract 4.

"I think that in our classroom the students were very close to each other This was because of the group work that the teacher made groups and we were working on the target vocabularies together and the teacher helped us if we had questions."

The fact that they could speak with their classmates and benefit from the teachers' support created a positive feeling in the learners' mind leading to keep this attitude that by group work they could be more successful in doing the tasks and improve their vocabulary learning. In fact, group work, which was resulted due to the collaboration in the classroom, created a fruitful and interactive educational environment for the participants to learn the vocabularies in a communicative context resulting in fairly raising awareness in their

attitudes about vocabulary learning after the treatment sessions

To conclude, the second research question aimed to find out whether collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques could affect the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning and change their simplistic attitudes about learning vocabularies. It was found that almost all the students seemed to hold simplistic attitudes about vocabulary learning and were not much interested in learning vocabularies since it was boring and rather difficult for them. After receiving the treatment of collaborative learning through the above-mentioned techniques, nearly all the participants in the experimental group changed their attitudes about vocabulary learning and they put much more emphasis on the role of vocabularies since it assisted them in their better speaking and made the classroom more interactive through group work while creating an enjoyable environment for learning target vocabularies. Findings demand the implementation of collaborative instruction in teaching vocabulary in the language classroom, which can pave the way for both teachers and learners to benefit from a communicative classroom.

5. Discussion

The present study was conducted to look into the effectiveness of collaborative learning on EFL learners' vocabulary improvement through word-webbing and snowball techniques. As to the quantitative measures of the pre- and post- test scores of the learners in the experimental and control group, it was found that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group after the treatment (i.e. collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques), demonstrating that collaboration was quite successful in helping the learners to improve their vocabulary learning. In other words, the experimental group, which was taught through collaborative learning and benefiting from snowball and word-webbing techniques, outperformed the control group, which underwent the traditional method of vocabulary instruction. Hence, the study, to a large extent, proved that collaboration can be accounted for at the service of teaching vocabulary within communicative context. The present study found empirical support to those of Roschelle and Teasley (1995) and Barkley, Cross, and Major (2005), which concluded that collaborative learning



can pave the way for the learners to engage in an interactive learning environment and be as an active participant in the language learning process and improve their language skills and sub-skills.

To add more value concerning the effectiveness of collaborative learning instruction, Johnson and Johnson (2004) suggested that it can provide an interactive learning environment in order for the teachers and learners to benefit from purposeful classroom involvement, which leads to success in the language learning process. They also pointed out that mastering and utilizing the elements of cooperation allow educators and facilitators to make adjustments to existing curricula:

First, educators have taken existing instructional units and courses and structure them in a collaborative form. Second, they have tailored cooperative learning instructional units to fit needs, circumstances, subjects, students and assessment goals. Third, educators analyzed the challenges that students face in their group dynamics and intervene to promote and increase effective collaboration. Finally, educators have the ability to assure thorough assessments of students at both the individual and group level (pp. 31-32).

Regarding the incorporation of collaborative learning to have possible effect on the learners' attitudes about vocabulary, since there seems to be very few studies which have been conducted to investigate the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning, findings highlighted the effective role collaborative learning to bring about changes in the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning. In fact, it was concluded that almost all the participants in the experimental group held positive beliefs about and were satisfied with collaborative learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques to help them improve their vocabulary learning and change their simplistic and less-positive attitudes about vocabulary learning. Regarding the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning, it can be in alignment with studies done by Li (2011) and Rashidi and Omid (2011) who looked into the learners' beliefs about rote learning of vocabulary, while changes in the learners' beliefs about vocabulary learning, as mentioned in the paragraph above, have not been taken into account by previous research, paving the way for the present research to uncover the complex nature of the learners' changes in their attitudes about vocabulary learning as a result of being exposed to collaborative vocabulary

learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques. It is noteworthy that above-mentioned studies did not take into account the changes in the learners' attitudes about vocabulary learning while the present study aimed to highlight the effectiveness of collaborative learning as a tool to bring about positive changes in the learners' simplistic attitudes about vocabulary learning and, by creating an interactive learning atmosphere by word-webbing and snowball techniques, helping them to hold more realistic attitudes about developing their vocabulary knowledge.

6. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to look into the impact of collaborative learning on the EFL intermediate language learners' vocabulary learning through word-webbing and snowball techniques in one hand, and to explore their beliefs about vocabulary learning on the other. The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

As to the quantitative analysis of the learners' performance on the two occasions of the vocabulary pre- and post-tests, it was found that the learners in the experimental group outperformed the control group, denoting that snowball and word-webbing techniques created a collaborative learning environment for the learners to improve their vocabulary learning. The study, to a large extent, highlighted the practical and productive application of collaborative instruction at the service of teaching language skills and sub-skills in the context of meaningful interaction. It was revealed that almost all the students seemed to initially hold simplistic attitudes about vocabulary learning and were not much enthusiastic in learning vocabularies since it was boring and rather difficult for them. On the other hand, after the treatment sessions of collaborative instruction, nearly all the participants in the experimental group changed their attitudes about vocabulary learning and they put much more emphasis on the role of vocabularies since it assisted them in their better speaking and made the classroom more interactive through group work while creating an enjoyable environment for learning target vocabularies. Findings of the study support the fact that implementation of collaborative instruction in teaching vocabulary in the language classroom can pave the way for both teachers and learners to benefit from a communicative classroom.

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Appendix: 1 Vocabulary Pre-Test

Name	Age.....	Gender	
Please choose the best answer the best fits the blank.			
1. We were not sure about which we should take.			
a) quote	b) route	c) drought	d) caught
2. Large companies often pay better			
a) salaries	b) prices	c) economics	d) high
3. A building where people go to pray God is called as			
a) cave	b) religion	c) temple	d) worship
4. Cockpit is a room for			
a) soldiers	b) army	c) sailors	d) pilots
5. It is better not to remember those years far from hometown.			
a) capable	b) hellish	c) bookish	d) reddish
6. The match attracted a lot of			
a) spectators	b) audiences	c) viewers	d) a&b&c
7. We live in of instant communication.			
a) technology	b) era	c) history	d) case
8. The problem with high-speed internet is that they are not			
a) visible	b) predictable	c) touchable	d) accessible
9. The new planet will be easily in the sky.			
a) capable	b) comfortable	c) visible	d) loveable
10. Not only peace is not harmful for the world, but it is also for the people to live at ease.			
a) useless	b) beneficial	c) positive	d) injury
11. She bought a model of Eifel Tower as a of Paris.			
a) design	b) building	c) souvenir	d) architecture
12. Guests were seated in order of			
a) precedence	b) people	c) priority	d) a&c
13. Our teacher is a leading expert on human sciences because of his successful research. <u>Leading</u> means			
a) scientist	b) prominent	c) special	d) rare
14. Staff were that the company was about to go out of business.			
a) collecting	b) prompting	c) socializing	d) whispering
15. What time shall we for the trip tomorrow?			
a) go off	b) leave off	c) set off	d) travel off
16. Conference rooms were equipped at great			
a) rates	b) expenses	c) cases	d) products
17. Our office building the seaside.			
a) overlooks	b) overseas	c) overload	d) overview
18. I don't want to your fun.			
a) make	b) spoil	c) cause	d) break
19. She stared at me in I was motionless!			
a) implement	b) stunning	c) fascination	d) amazement
20. I don't know what to do with customers.			
a) unreasonable	b) logical	c) fair	d) sensible
21. The passage is not broad. It is			
a) bushy	b) narrow	c) loose	d) open
22. Is your office on a bus?			
a) map	b) traffic	c) route	d) light
23. The word <u>summit</u> is best synonymous with			
a) peak	b) view	c) nature	d) breathtaking
24. There was a put off in the of our plane.			
a) quick	b) road	c) fracture	d) departure
25. His death was not unexpected. It was by the doctors' decision.			
a) predictable	b) justifiable	c) believable	d) controllable

Appendix: 2 Vocabulary Post-Test

Name	Age.....	Gender	
Please choose the best answer the best fits the blank.			
1. The retired are protesting against their low payment next week. <u>Payment</u> means			
a) food	b) salary	c) house	d) price
2. Indian people usually go to the for praying.			
a) public	b) religion	c) temple	d) worship
3. She introduced me to some of her students.			
a) fellow	b) friend	c) teacher	d) instructor
4. The room where the pilots sit in an airplane is called			
a) warehouse	b) cellar	c) basement	d) cockpit
5. I have never forgotten that experience of falling down the bike. I was about to die.			
a) pleasant	b) hellish	c) ordinary	d) encouraging
6. The football players won the game in front of over 40,000 cheering spectators. <u>Spectators</u> mean			
a) people	b) men	c) TV	d) viewers
7. Today's is the advance of new methods for creating technologies to make human life easier.			
a) computers	b) era	c) screen	d) cell phones
8. The problem with drugs is that they are not			
a) visible	b) predictable	c) touchable	d) accessible
9. Teachers believe that speaking and writing take over reading and listening.			
a) precedence	b) existence	c) interference	d) occurrence
10. I'm absolutely delighted that you can come with us. <u>Delighted</u> means			
a) pleasant	b) practiced	c) pleased	d) purposeful
11. It is one of the most difficult mountain to climb.			
a) valley	b) peak	c) hike	d) climbing
12. He is not a usual person. His behaviors are a bit			
a) sensitive	b) cooperative	c) shared	d) weird
13. Contrary to winter, the trees in spring.			
a) blow	b) blossom	c) ransom	d) branch
14. We bought back a few from our holiday in Chalous.			
a) souvenirs	b) rumors	c) moans	d) seniors
15. What time will we have to for the trip tomorrow?			
a) go off	b) leave off	c) set off	d) travel off
16. There are some students who speak with a low voice together. This type of speech is called			
a) noise	b) whisper	c) presentation	d) talk
17. She stared at me in I didn't know what to do!			
a) implement	b) stunning	c) fascination	d) amazement
18. Please any clothes you want to throw away and give them to me.			
a) wear	b) put off	c) sort out	d) take on
19. My friend is a leading expert on human sciences because of his successful research. <u>Leading</u> means			
a) scientist	b) prominent	c) special	d) rare
20. We went on holiday at my father's			
a) bank	b) price	c) economy	d) expense
21. Not only peace is not harmful for the world, but it is also for the people to live at ease.			
a) useless	b) beneficial	c) positive	d) injury
22. The we had planned, took us right across Tehran.			
a) pass	b) line	c) route	d) aim
23. I haven't seen the film. So, don't it for me.			
a) care	b) soil	c) broil	d) spoil
24. If you tell him what happened, I'm sure he will understand - he's a man.			
a) available	b) trustable	c) respectable	d) reasonable
25. Our hotel room the seaside.			
a) overlooks	b) overseas	c) overload	d) overview