

LEARNING ENGLISH IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

LEARNING ENGLISH IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY

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The main aim of this study was to explore how a group of learners, who were new to a university campus, interacted in their new environment and what kind of influences these interactions had on their learning process. By exploring both the social interactions and perceptions of these learners, who have recently started learning English at a Preparatory School of a private higher education institution, I aimed to provide insight on their out-of-class learning experiences in a community of practice. I also aimed to understand how these learners viewed their collaborative experiences in relation to their learning processes.

The study employed a qualitative approach and made use of a case study design since both enabled the researcher to relate to the learning experiences of a small group of individuals in vivid detail and unfold their most striking experiences during the language learning process. I collected data by means of in-class and ethnographic out-of-class observations, individual and focus group interviews and detailed field notes I kept throughout the semester.

The results suggested that this particular group of learners thought their collaboration influenced their English learning process positively. Moreover, their

interactions were shaped by a number of factors which were mutual scaffolding, collective decision making through negotiation, harmony, having an intimate relationship, alignment of expectations, group identity and time constraints. Providing thick descriptions of a particular community of practice, the research outcomes are of use to language learners, instructors, and program administrators who are reflecting on their language learning and teaching practices.

Keywords: social interactions, group collaboration, community of practice, out-of-class learning experiences, learning English

ÖZ

KATILIMCI BİR GRUPTA İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENİMİ: BİR DURUM ÇALIŞMASI

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Bu çalışmanın başlıca amacı, üniversite çevresine yeni katılmış bir grup öğrencinin yeni çevrelerinde nasıl etkileşim kurduklarını ve bu etkileşimlerin öğrenim tecrübelerini nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktır. Özel bir üniversitenin Hazırlık Okulu'nda İngilizce öğrenmeye yakın zamanda başlamış bu öğrencilerin sosyal etkileşimleri ve kişisel algıları incelenerek, onların bir uygulama grubu içindeki sınıf dışı öğrenim tecrübelerini araştırmak amaçlanmıştır. Bir diğer amaç ise bu öğrencilerin katılımcı tecrübelerini öğrenim süreçleri ile nasıl bağdaştırdıklarını anlamak olmuştur.

Bu çalışma, nitel bir araştırma ve bir durum çalışmasıdır. Böylelikle araştırmacı, az sayıda bireyin öğrenim tecrübeleriyle güçlü ve ayrıntılı bir ilişki kurma ve onların dil öğrenimi sürecinde edindikleri en çarpıcı deneyimleri gün yüzüne çıkarma olanağına kavuşmuştur. Araştırmacı, verileri sınıf ortamında, etnografik gözlemler yoluyla sınıf dışında, bireysel ve odak grup görüşmeleri ile sömestr süresince tuttuğu detaylı saha notları aracılığıyla toplamıştır.

Elde edilen sonuçlar, söz konusu gruptaki öğrencilerin, aralarındaki işbirliğinin İngilizce öğrenim süreçlerini olumlu yönde etkilediğini düşündüklerini

ortaya koymuřtur. Öğrencilerin etkileřimleri bir dizi bileřen etrafında řekillenmiřtir. Bunlar karřılıklı yardım saęlama, devamlı müzakere ederek karar verme, grup üyeleri arasında kurulan yakın iliřkiler, grup alıřmasında uyum, üyelerin grup alıřmasından beklentileri, grup kimlięi ve zaman kısıtlamaları olarak sıralanabilir.

Belirli bir uygulama topluluęu hakkında detaylı betimlemelere ulařılmasını saęlayan bu arařtırmanın sonuçları, kendi dil öğrenim ve öğretim uygulamalarını derinlemesine incelemek isteyen yüksek öğrenim kurumu öğrencileri, eęitmenleri ve yöneticileri tarafından kullanılabilir niteliktedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: sosyal etkileřimler, grup iřbirlięi, uygulama topluluęu, sınıf dıřı öğrenim tecrübeleri, İngilizce öğrenimi

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will present the foundations of this study and the factors that encouraged my interest in exploring student learning experiences both as a teacher and a researcher. I will also elaborate on the aims of the study by referring to the research questions it explored.

1.1. Background to the Study

The emergence of local educational contexts has long been acknowledged in the literature. Research in the last two decades has focused on these local contexts where teaching and learning English is shaped in line with both local needs and the fast globalization process around the world (e.g. Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Since globalization has impacts on education systems around the world, learning foreign languages, in particular English, has become one of the most basic necessities of the global world. Likewise, providing English-medium education has become a major trend among educational institutions in Turkey including universities (Selvi, 2014). Having strong historical ties with mainland Turkey and due to its once-colonized status, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, where this study was conducted, is one of the local contexts where English is taught at universities extensively (Kuter & Koç, 2009).

Whether global or local, students are the key actors in each educational contexts. They are the ones who participate actively in these contexts and make use of the practices that provide them with opportunities in their English learning process (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p.311). This process is a long winding road and comes

with its challenges. Most learners have difficulties regarding acquisition while they are learning English and Turkish students are no exception to that group (Karahan, 2007; Kunt & Öztaş Tüm, 2010). However, this is by no means the only difficulty they face. As an instructor who has been teaching English to Turkish students at a very competitive private university in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus for three years, I have been familiar with some of the challenges Turkish learners of English face in this particular setting. I have listened to student stories which did not have happy endings and resulted in academic disappointment on the students', instructors' and the institution's part. At the end of each academic year, I have observed that the students who failed in the English Preparatory School outnumbered the ones who managed to continue with their higher education in their departments. In the light of these issues, I began to question the reasons behind the struggle of a number of students firstly as a teacher. A number of conversations with my previous and current students suggested that these challenges could be rooted in learning a completely new language in a new setting. Getting used to a new environment as well as a new educational institution seemed to create immense pressure on the students and some of them got lost along the way. Some students blamed it on their previous educational institutions (including primary, secondary and high school) which had never required them to work hard. Another confession I continuously heard was that students actually did not know how to study. I found this both unexpected and alarming since these students had chosen to study in a university which is well-known for its competitive learning environment. All of these conversations were short instances of mutual sharing in which students opened up to me about their learning experiences and I was only able to touch *the surface* through

our social exchanges. On the other side of the coin, I have also had some students who were very enthusiastic and hard-working throughout their English learning adventure although they were sharing the same physical context and went through similar adaptation processes with the ones who gave up. What was their motivation and how did they maintain it throughout their learning process? In the light of my in-class experiences as a teacher, I had informally observed with several of my students that one of the factors that seemed to have a strong influence on how well students learned was their social interactions (Imai, 2010; Wortham, 2008). Such students would have a group of peers inside the class with whom they collaborated and their common effort seemed to help them with the language tasks they were required to complete. Did these peer groups spend time outside the classroom as well? Was any of this time devoted to studying English? Did it work for them? These questions appeared in my mind every time I did group work in my classes and thought that my observations of peer interactions constituted only a glimpse. I felt that the huge amount of time these students spent outside the classroom context was left in the dark and I wanted to find out more about group dynamics which provided “richer resources than any single individual” (Oxford, 1997, p.451). That was when my researcher identity came to the foreground and decided to explore how a certain group of students actually bonded and what kind of an experience it was to learn a new language together outside the classroom.

1.2. The Purpose of the Study

In this study, I aimed to turn my curiosity as a teacher into a research project to elaborate on students’ English learning experiences as a group. The main aim was to inquire into how a group of learners, who were new to a university campus,

interacted in their new environment. Secondly, I wanted to explore how they perceived the relationship between these interactions and their English learning process. By exploring both the thoughts and social interactions of these learners, who had recently started learning English, my goal was to provide insight on their in-class and extracurricular learning experiences with a special focus on their new setting. I considered this group of students a community of practice as they interacted regularly to reach a common goal and had certain roles and routines they took on inside their community (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). My focus was more on the outside study sessions the students regularly participated in rather than my weekly in-class observations for two main reasons. Firstly, I had the chance to observe students outside for a much longer time when compared to the limited time they spent doing group work in the classroom. Secondly, student interactions in the classroom have been exploited to a great extent in the literature (e.g. Lee, 2004; Hellermann, 2006; Storch, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 1998) and there was a need for more out-of-class studies which explore student interactions and their relation to learning as such studies suggested that students had more autonomy outside the classroom setting (Gao, 2009; Kobayashi, 2003).

In this study, I aimed to inquire into the following research questions:

- 1a.** How do a group of Turkish learners of English, who are new to a university campus, interact within their community of practice?
- b.** How do these learners view the relation between their collaboration with peers and their English language learning processes?

I used a qualitative case study design which allowed me to focus on the experiences of a small group of learners and to compose thick descriptions of these experiences (Creswell, 2009; Geertz, 1973). Data collection methods included non-participant classroom observations, ethnographic observations outside the classroom, individual and focus group interviews with students, an interview with the classroom instructors and the field notes I have taken throughout the data collection process. As I aimed to explore students' own opinions about their learning process, I relied on the data collected through the interviews and supported them with student dialogues that took place during outside study sessions. Through narrative inquiry, I combined these data with the field notes I had taken regularly and presented them with reference to the stories students shared related to their life and learning experiences.

In this chapter, I elaborated on the reasons why I wanted to explore the relationship between learner interactions, collaboration and English learning processes. In addition, I introduced the aims and research design of this particular study shortly. In the following chapter, I will present a detailed account of the theoretical orientations that inspired this study and a review of the studies that focused on the link between learner interactions and learning.

1.3. The Significance of the Study

This study is of both theoretical and practical significance as it fills in certain gaps in the literature. In this section, I will first refer to its theoretical significance and then move on to its practical significance.

1.3.1. Theoretical Significance

Student interactions and their link to learning a language have been researched extensively in the literature, specifically within classroom settings. I will provide more information on the relevant literature shortly in the *Literature Review* chapter. Although language learning through peer interactions has been researched extensively within formal education contexts, i.e. schools and classrooms, out-of-class contexts have been largely neglected and need more emphasis by researchers (Pearson, 2004). This need is due to the fact that students spend most of their time outside formal education settings and learning is a process that can take place and continue without the presence of classroom instruction (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, shedding light to how learners interact outside the classroom setting is of utmost importance. Moreover, learner voices tend to be neglected in studies that explored peer interactions and their link to learning. The researchers focusing on this link have made extensive use of their own observations with minimum or no reference to learners' perceptions regarding collaboration with their peers and its influence on learning a language. This study, on the contrary, was primarily based on learner voices by giving their own accounts of their interactions with peers and language learning experiences in a new setting. It conveyed learner stories concerning life and educational experiences with specific reference to learning English in order to comment on a group of individuals' collaboration in a community of practice during their language learning process. Also, with the ethnographic elements it embodies, this study explored learner interactions and experiences within everyday settings chosen by the participants themselves. Therefore, it contributes to the literature which includes a small number of studies that explore out-of-class learning.

In addition, this study is of significance due to its data collection procedure and instruments. Unlike the studies that researched learner interactions and learning by using only observations or interviews as their data collection tools, this specific study made use of both in-class and out-of-class observations in which I as a researcher took the roles of a participant and a non-participant observer, individual interviews with each participant regarding their stories and more importantly a number of focus group interviews that shed light to the differences and similarities among the learners' perceptions regarding their learning experiences in a community of practice. The large amount of data collected through these means were backed up by classroom instructors' views regarding the learners' collaboration and interactions as well as the detailed field-notes I have taken throughout the data collection process. All these factors as well as doing the research over a relatively long period of time resulted in deep analysis and thick descriptions of learner experiences.

In short, this study is of significance regarding the context it was conducted in and the data collection procedures it made use of to gain insight on how learners interact and collaborate in a new setting and how they perceive the relationship between their collaboration and learning processes. It contributed to the literature as it provided a holistic account of learning by presenting various perspectives.

1.3.2. Practical Significance

This study is of practical significance for language learners, teachers and higher educational institutions that provide their students with an English-medium education. First of all, as it is a detailed account of one group of Beginner learners' interactions, collaboration and experiences, this study sheds light to what kind of

interactional dynamics learning a language in a community of practice involves outside the classroom. Although the participants of this study were a small group, their experiences might relate to other English learners who have just started to learn English in a new context, specifically at the Preparatory School of higher education institutions in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey. By reading about their peers' learning processes, other language learners might see different aspects of peer collaboration and gain a new perspective which might help them overcome certain difficulties regarding learning English.

Besides learners of English, this study might also provide new perspectives to both instructors of English and higher education institutions that have English-medium programs. Firstly, by reading the detailed accounts of a group of learners' English learning experiences, instructors might become more aware of how students learn English with the help of their peers and what kind of influences there are in their learning process. Once instructors become aware of what their students think about learning English, they might be able to relate to them more easily and provide guidance when necessary. Also, the instructors might approach groupwork inside the classroom more critically and take into the multifaceted interactions of students into consideration while they are designing collaborative activities. As the participants of this study stated that collaborating with their peers helped them to learn English, instructors of English might consider encouraging their students to collaborate outside the classroom. Likewise, by looking at the results of this study, higher education institutions might introduce collaboration into their curricula and create more opportunities for students to work with their peers.

As this study is based on learner perceptions regarding a group of learners' own learning experiences and processes, it might raise awareness among learners, teachers and administrators and provide them with new perspectives about teaching and learning.

1.4. Definition of Terms

In this part, I would like to define some of the key terms I will use in this study briefly. I will provide more information regarding these terms within the relevant sections of the *Literature Review* chapter. Throughout the study, I will use the following terms bearing in mind the definitions provided here to ensure consistency:

Collaboration: The act of a number of people coming together with an aim to reach a common goal by carrying out synchronous activities (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995).

Communities of Practice (CoP): Groups of people who share common goals, concerns and/or interests and interact regularly to accumulate knowledge in order to pursue their common agenda constitute a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder; 2002).

Scaffolding: Refers to the support and help provided by a more knowledgeable learner to a less knowledgeable one in order to achieve learning goals (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): According to Vygotsky (1978), the Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between what a learner can accomplish on his/her own and what s/he can accomplish with guidance from a more

knowledgeable adult and/or a peer. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that if children receive assistance within their ZPD, they exceed their actual developmental level and reveal their real learning potential.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will explain how I conducted the literature research for this study and elaborate on the theoretical foundations of this study in detail. In the first part, I will explore the roots of social learning theory with reference to Vygotsky (1978) and relevant studies conducted on the influence of learners' social interactions on their L2 learning with an emphasis of learner collaboration. In the second part, I will refer to the notion of community as Wenger (1998) explained it in detail and present the ideas that contributed to the communities of practice concept. Finally, I will give an overview of the studies that explored learning outside the classroom, particularly in communities of practice.

2.1.Theoretical Orientation

This study aimed to explore learner interactions through a social view of learning, by specifically borrowing from Vygotsky's (1978) ideas on education of children and Wenger's (1998) *community of practice* concept. Before presenting Vygotsky's (1978) influence on educational theories, I would like to explain how I conducted the literature research. It was an ongoing process in which I made extensive use of online databases of the higher education institution I conducted the study in as well as the online versions of relevant journals. Firstly, I ran multiple searches in two main databases regularly: *EBSCOhost* and *ProQuest*. Secondly, I scanned all issues of the following journals to find relevant studies: *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Modern Language Journal*, *ELT Journal*, *System* and *TESOL Quarterly*. I limited my search to studies published from

1991 onwards in as this was the year the communities of practice concept was coined. Also, it gave me the opportunity to see the research trends regarding the relationship between student interactions and learning within the last 20 years. The key words I used during the literature search included *peer interactions*, *out-of class learning experiences*, *learning communities of practice*, *collaboration in communities of practice* and *peer collaboration learning English*.

Upon giving brief information about the systematic literature research I conducted, I would like to present the social approach to learning this study is based on in the following section.

2.1.1. A Social Theory of Learning

Historically, learning has been explained through many different lenses and they have contributed to our knowledge of the nature of learning immensely. Referring to all of these within the scope of this study does not seem plausible. Instead, I will focus on the social perspective of learning which forms the theoretical basis to my study.

As human beings, we are engaged in different pursuits and, in these, interacting with the world around us is inevitable (Smith, 2003). A social theory of learning places learning in these interactions and considers it a part of every individual's nature and life. A prominent name in social learning theory is Russian education theorist and psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978). He is referred to as the father of sociocultural theory, the field which establishes a connection between language and social interactions by referring to their complementary nature. In his

theoretization, Vygotsky (1978) referred to the significant relationship between social interactions and learning with a special emphasis on the education of children:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that cognition results from communication within social groups and it is connected with social life. In other words, the origins of ideas are social and that they are created through communicating with others (Oxford, 1997). The social interactions a child engages in helps him/her to internalize the knowledge s/he acquired. Put differently, children learn through interactions and make this knowledge 'their own' (Holland & Lacchiote, 2007, p.106). Regarding learning, Vygotsky (1978) referred to the role of Zone of Proximal Development (henceforth, ZPD) which is activated by social interactions between an expert and a novice, who have different levels of knowledge. He defined ZPD as "(It is) the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p.78)." The things that a person can do on his/her own can be considered in that individual's ZPD or "area of self-regulated action" (van Lier, 1996, p. 190). To reveal their real learning potential, learners might need the assistance of someone more knowledgeable than they are. When I was doing literature search about studies that explored the concept of ZPD in language learning, I have systematically seen that this more knowledgeable person, also called an expert, is traditionally a teacher

(Hammond & Gibbons, 2001; Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). In more recent studies; however, researchers have suggested that peers can also be the experts who provide help to other peers (e.g. Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Reichert & Liebscher, 2012). Such studies refer to *peer collaboration* or a *group ZPD* which takes place through the interactions of individuals with a more equal status instead of the traditional and hierarchical novice-expert view (Gunawardena, Hermans, Sanchez, Richmond, Bohley & Tuttle, 2009). The general perspective suggested by the studies is that help provided within a learner's ZPD through social interactions is essential for learning to occur, whether with adults or peers.

Collaborative learning in foreign language education, which is one of the main foci of this study, has its roots in sociocultural theory and the concept of ZPD (Oxford, 1997). In his work, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of learning through collaborative activities instead of independent or isolated activities and introduced ZPD as a key theoretical construct (Moll, 1992, pp. 3-4). Here, collaboration refers to "a coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem" (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995, p.70). Accordingly, collaborative learning is "a *situation* in which *two or more* people *learn* or attempt to learn something *together*" (Dillenbourg, 1999, p.1). In other words, learning something as a group and in harmony is the key element regarding collaborative learning. Similar to collaborative learning, *scaffolding* is a concept that refers to "those supportive behaviors by which an expert can help a novice learner achieve higher levels of regulation (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, p.51). As I mentioned above, this expert is typically a teacher; however, recent studies have identified it as a peer who is more knowledgeable about

a certain subject. Both concepts will be referred to continuously throughout this study keeping in mind the meanings provided in this section.

The literature provides a rich number of studies related to the relationship between learners' social interactions and language learning. The majority of the studies tended to adopt an experimental approach to investigate the effects of collaborative interactions on language learning by focusing on the outcome, i.e. second language acquisition (Reise, Samara & Lillejord, 2012). One group of studies focused on the interactions between teachers and students (e.g. Adair-Hauck & Donato, 1994; Anton, 1999; He, 2004; van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen, 2011), while others analysed interactions of peers to see the link between collaboration and L2 learning (e.g. Baleghizadeh, 2009; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Kim, 2008; Kowal & Swain 1994; Ohta, 1995, 1997; Spielman-Davidson, 2000; Storch, 2005, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Tindale & Sheffey, 2002; Wilkinson & Fung, 2002). All have been conducted in classroom settings and made use of controlled language tasks with a focus on different skills such as writing (e.g. Kowal & Swain 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Storch, 2005, 2007), grammar (e.g. Spielman-Davidson, 2000), vocabulary (e.g. Baleghizadeh, 2009; Kim, 2008) and speaking (e.g. Foster & Ohta, 2005). The main aim of the studies was to analyse the effects of peer collaboration on task achievement and language learning. Their analysis methods included audio-recording students' dialogues while working on language tasks and analysing language related episodes (LREs) in these dialogues. All results suggested that collaborating with a peer and/or a teacher enhanced task completion and language learning. More specifically, peer dialogues served as a tool for L2 learning and communication (Swain & Lapkin, 1998), resulted in co-constructing knowledge

(Baleghizadeh, 2009), helped students outperform their peers who work individually (Kim, 2008), and provided more opportunities to use and learn L2 (Storch, 2007).

In the literature, the question of how social interactions are linked to learning has also been explored qualitatively; however, the number of these studies is quite scarce when compared to the experimental ones (Sato & Ballinger, 2012, p.173). The relevant qualitative studies built upon sociocultural theory and specifically learning a language in one's ZPD (e.g. Beasley, 1997; Carpenter, 1996; Donato, 1994; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Jacob, Rottenberg, Patrick & Wheeler, 1996; Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006; Reichert & Liebscher, 2012; Storch, 2002; Takashi, 1998; Yong, 2010). They have mostly adopted a longitudinal approach and collected data through classroom observations of either pairs or small groups of students. While some of the qualitative studies included the learning experiences of young learners (e.g. Jacob et al., 1996; Takashi, 1998), others focused on adult learners and their collaboration to learn a foreign language (e.g. Donato, 1994; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Reichert & Liebscher, 2012; Storch, 2002; Yong, 2010). Such studies suggested that collaboration provides opportunities for L2 learning as it helps learners to outperform their actual level (Donato, 1994; Takashi, 1998) and promotes discussions and negotiations which would result in restructuring of L2 (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Storch, 2002; Yong, 2010). These studies were conducted in classroom settings with the presence of a teacher and some of them also explored teacher guidance as an element of peer collaboration (e.g. Jacob et al., 1996).

In addition to the majority of studies that explored learning in the ZPD in classroom settings, a small body of research focused on the same topic outside the classroom. In line with the aim of this study, one particular study (Reichert &

Liebscher, 2012) focused on peer collaboration outside the classroom. As in most of the studies conducted on the relationship between collaboration and language learning, the study explored student interactions by means of a single task and looked at task achievement outside the classroom. The study had similar results to that of in-class studies and the out-of-class context was not given special emphasis.

Another group of studies, whose main aim was to explore whether peer tutoring influenced language learning, shared the experiences of pairs of students working together outside the classroom (e.g. Beasley, 1997; Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006). The participants were an expert learner teaching English to a novice language learner outside the classroom. Such studies gave voice to both the tutors' and the tutees' perceptions of their common study sessions. The tutors stated that teaching others helped them with their own language improvement while the tutees suggested that their experience made them more confident about their language skills as well as helping them to acquire alternative learning strategies. However, they also referred to some challenges brought about by peer tutoring such as personality clashes, lack of willingness to participate and different expectations. These studies have important findings related to students' learning experiences outside the classroom context and the strategies they adopt to suit their learning needs and styles. However, they made use of peer tutoring sessions designed not by the learners themselves but the institutions they were part of. Therefore, they provide support for this particular study only partially.

In this section I have elaborated on what social learning theory is with special emphasis on Vygotsky and a number of studies that made use of the concept of ZPD

both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the following section, I will refer to what *situated learning* is and how the *community of practice* concept has emerged.

2.1.2. Situated Learning Theory and the Community of Practice (CoP)

Concept

Vygotsky (1978) suggested that individuals internalize knowledge which is experienced in interaction and that learning occurs via this internalization process. Lave and Wenger (1991) referred to this statement and stated that the concept of internalization neglected “the nature of the learner, of the world, and of their relations” leaving these issues highly unexplored (p.47). They interpreted Vygotskian pedagogy with more emphasis on society and extended “the study of learning beyond the context of pedagogical structuring, including the structure of the social world in the analysis and taking into account in a central way the conflictual nature of social practice” (p.49). In other words, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning cannot be considered as taking place only when a more knowledgeable person instructs a less knowledgeable one or when an individual *digests* the knowledge s/he acquired from an expert to make it his/her own knowledge. Instead, learning is situated in the context the individual exists and takes place through participation in that very same context. Learning through participation is “an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations” and is situated in the social world (p.49). Likewise, individuals do not exist in isolation and they situate themselves in the world and make meaning. They are active agents in their society and their participation in this society is the key to learning. Therefore, in opposition to what Vygotsky (1978) suggested, Lave and Wenger (1991) state that learning involves more than ‘a

teacher/learner dyad' and has a rich variety of different actors as well as different forms of participation (p.56).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretization of learning relied heavily on their ethnographic observations of different kinds of apprenticeship in different societies and practices (eg. Vai and Gola tailors and nondrinking alcoholics). Their research explored learning as social participation in specific contexts and emphasized the importance of becoming a member of the society an individual lives in for learning to take place. They coined the term *Legitimate Peripheral Participation* based on these ethnographic observations. *Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (henceforth *LPP*) refers to learning in terms of becoming a member of a community of practice. Briefly, newcomers in a community are peripheral members when compared to old-timers who have already become core members of that community. Old-timers know the practice well and newcomers join the practice in time through active participation and interactions with the old-timers (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.35). Similarly, schools are learning communities in which old-timers and newcomers interact continuously. With *LPP*, Lave and Wenger (1991) moved from a situated view of learning to the role of communities and practice for learning to occur. After all, learning is our common pursuit, a social phenomenon which takes place in the world we live and experience, through our participations in social communities (p.64).

The notion of community is not a new one and people have been forming communities "which share cultural practices reflecting their collective learning" since the beginning of human history (Wenger, 2000, p.229). Regarding these shared practices, Lave and Wenger (1991) coined the term 'community of practice' towards the end of the 20th century although such communities have existed for as long as

human beings have lived on this Earth. In its most basic terms, a community of practice (henceforth CoP) can be defined as “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor” (Eckert & McConnell-Gillet, 1992, p.464). As Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) explain it, such groups of people have common concerns, problems, interests or passions. These people come together and engage in ongoing interactions in order to have more profound knowledge and expertise in a common topic. There is no limitation as to who can participate in a CoP or what the shared topic is. Communities of practice are everywhere and people are eventually involved in at least one either knowingly or unconsciously. This is not very difficult to imagine when we think about an average individual in today’s complex society who has many roles related to family, work, leisure and so on. A group of new mothers who meet regularly to talk about their breastfeeding practices, students who are getting ready to display a theater play for the end of the year show or a group of space engineers working on the new rocket project all constitute a CoP. Wenger et. al (2002) elaborate on CoPs and suggest that:

These people don’t necessarily work together every day, but they meet because they find value in their interactions. As they spend time together, they typically share information, insight, and advice. They help each other solve problems. They discuss their situations, their aspirations, and their needs. They ponder common issues, explore ideas, and act as sounding boards. They may create tools, standards, generic designs, manuals, and other documents—or they may simply develop a tacit understanding that they share. However they accumulate knowledge, they become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together (pp.4-5).

It is clear from the extract that one of the key elements of a CoP is accumulating knowledge through interaction. People share their knowledge with others who have common pursuits and/or ask them for knowledge, which creates a collective learning space. Their interactions bring them closer and they experience

learning together. The concept of CoP considers experience and learning complementary. In fact, knowledge is regarded as an accumulation of experience (Wenger et. al, 2002). Therefore, it is suggested that knowledge is something experiential and is “much more a living process than a static body of information” (p.9). The researchers use the concept of learning through experience in line with what Dewey (1998) suggested more than fifty years ago. Dewey (1998) believed in the importance of education through experience and suggested that individuals should become active participants in their learning systems through their experiences (p.5).

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) present a structural model that distinguishes CoPs from other groups of people. They suggest that all CoPs have the following three fundamental elements (pp.27-40):

- **A domain** which is a shared area of interest or among the members of a CoP. It can be also called a shared learning agenda which is common for all the members in a CoP. Domain is crucial as it guides the members in terms of organizing and sharing their knowledge. A group of people becomes a community around this domain.
- **A community** which is a group of people who are gathered around the domain, are willing to share their knowledge, who interact and carry a sense of belonging. What makes these people a community is the intimacy they build through their continuous interactions and common pursuits.
- **A practice** which is the actual body of knowledge about the domain that is developed, shared and maintained by the community. In this

sense, a practice brings the past, present and the future of the domain together and creates a common knowledge base for its members.

Domain, community and practice are like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and when they come together, they create a CoP. When these elements function well together, they prepare an ideal ground for developing and sharing knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002, p.29). Before I move on to the studies that explored the CoP concept, I would like to give a brief overview of Wenger's framework.

2.1.2.1. Wenger's Framework

In his 1998 book *Communities of Practice: Learning Meaning and Identity*, Wenger provides the reader with a very detailed framework regarding CoPs. He shapes his framework around four components that are crucial for CoPs: *meaning, community, identity and learning*. The following figure shows the nature of these components:

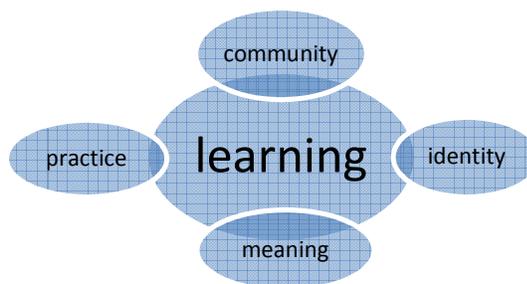


Figure 1. Visual representation of Wenger's (1998) Framework

Wenger (1998) considers these components “deeply interconnected and mutually defining’ (p.5). Therefore, he continuously establishes connections among them and emphasizes their interchangeable nature. He suggests that one can put any of the four components at the center and the connections among them would still be intact (p.5). In his framework, he places *practice* in the middle and discusses *meaning, community, identity* and *learning* in relation to *practice*. The framework, which is very detailed and dense in structure, sheds light to researchers who would like to explore the inner dynamics of a CoP (Bozarth, 2008). A short outline of the framework can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Summary of the components of Wenger’s Framework

Wenger’s Framework (1998)			
Meaning	Community	Learning	Identity
-Negotiation of meaning	-Mutual engagement	-Evolving forms of mutual engagement	-Negotiated experience
-Participation and reification	-A joint enterprise	-Understanding and tuning the enterprise	-Community membership
	-A shared repertoire	-Developing the repertoire, styles and discourses	-Trajectory
			-Nexus of multimembership
			-A relation between the local and the global

Before I elaborate on the aspects given above, I would like to focus on the concept of practice. I have introduced practice very briefly while looking at the structure of a CoP; however, this component needs further elaboration as it is one of the core elements that shape learning in a CoP. According to Wenger (1998), practice is “doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do” (p.47). It is our common production through a process of complex participation which involves everything we associate ourselves with as a community. In this sense practice is always social and it is a place where we develop, negotiate and share our own understanding of the world with others (p.48). The four major aspects of practice will be described in detail in the following section.

2.1.2.1.1. Meaning

Wenger (1998) states that practice is made up of meaningful experiences. Members of a community produce these meanings out of the practice they engage in. According to Wenger (1998) “meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relation of living in the world” (p.54). This requires the necessity to constantly negotiate meanings and create them anew in our relations with the world around us. *Negotiation of meaning* is the continuous construction of meaning among the members in a CoP so that something makes sense to them. Although a practice may have routines and patterns, members create new meanings of experiences again and again (p.52). *Negotiation of meaning* takes place in two processes: *Participation* and *reification*. Here, the writer uses participation with its basic definition of taking part in something. He further elaborates on the term suggesting that it is “the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises” (p.55). Mutual

recognition is a key factor in participation as participation does not happen in isolation of the world and individuals participate by engaging in mutual interactions (p.56). People engaging in such interactions shape one another's experiences of meaning. Each party finds something familiar in another which is what mutual recognition is. Wenger (1998) suggests that participation in a CoP is continuous and becomes part of who the members are. In this sense, participation is much more than taking part in something physically but it also involves becoming part of a CoP as well (p.57). Reification is the way we give meaning to things. Our perceptions of experiences and the meanings we attribute to them exist in the world as independent beings and they are true for us (p.58). Wenger (1998) establishes the connection between participation and reification as complementary and suggest that these two construct meaning together.

2.1.2.1.2. Community

Another level practice is associated with is community. Wenger (1998) describes the relation between practice and community by introducing three dimensions: 1) *mutual engagement*, 2) *a joint enterprise*, and 3) *a shared repertoire*. To begin with the first one, Wenger (1998) states that “practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do whatever they do” (p.73). Therefore, a group of people become a community when they engage in a practice together and “sustain dense relations of mutual engagement organized around what they are there to do” (p.74). Communities are heterogeneous and members of a CoP have different personalities, aspirations, problems and so on. However, they belong to a common practice that is shaped by *mutual engagement* (p.75). *Mutual engagement* helps the community members to complete their missing knowledge.

The overlapping competence of members makes room for missing knowledge – a member does not need to know everything as other members of the community will complete his/her missing knowledge through *mutual engagement* (p.76). Secondly, Wenger (1998) refers to an enterprise as “rhythm to music” (p.82). An enterprise is defined by the community through its members’ mutual engagement and is not simply a goal put forward or assigned by an institution. It’s also a negotiated response of the members to what they understand this goal to be. Therefore, members shape an enterprise and it becomes a joint enterprise with the collective participation of the community in the practice (p.78). It is this *joint enterprise* that connects the members of a CoP, who constitute a heterogeneous group otherwise. Finally, a repertoire is “a community’s set of shared resources” (p.83). It includes everything from routines to stories, the concepts created by the community and through which the community creates meaning. This shared repertoire makes the practice meaningful and is itself a resource to produce new meanings (p.83). All these three components are the characteristics that make a community and thus shape a CoP.

2.1.2.1.3. Learning

Learning is a very important aspect of the concept of CoP as it is one of the core elements practice is shaped around. In fact, it is “the engine of practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 96). The researcher suggests that “communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning” (p.86). Here, Wenger (1998) states that participation and reification of members combine to create these shared histories. We become connected to the CoP (participation) while sustaining a practice. Although as individuals we have our own ways of creating meaning (reification), CoPs have their own reifications (p.89). The interplay of participation and reification can lead to

continuity and discontinuity. CoPs are dynamic, i.e. they are full of continuities and discontinuities. They are constantly negotiated and reinvented due to the dynamic nature of the world (p.94). New members join, old-timers leave, newcomers become old-timers, the practice gets tuned in accordance with the needs of the members or the practice itself. Learning in such a dynamic context includes three processes that the members experience: 1) evolving forms of mutual engagement, 2) understanding and tuning their enterprise, and c) developing their repertoire, styles and discourses (p.95). Members of a CoP evolve forms of mutual engagement by finding out how to engage in the practice, establishing mutual relationships with other members, deciding on the identities of other members, i.e. who is who, who is capable of doing what etc. They also understand and tune their enterprise by deciding what the enterprise is by negotiating different interpretations of it. Finally, members develop their repertoire, styles and discourses which includes continuous meaning making, reshaping or abandoning certain habits and so on. In this sense learning in a CoP does not take place only mentally, but takes place through active participation of the members and the processes mentioned above (p.96).

2.1.2.1.4. Identity

Identity is an essential aspect of practice according to Wenger (1998) and he devotes half of his book to elaborating on identity in detail. He refers to the relation between practice and identity as profound and suggests that a CoP is made up of negotiation of identities (p.149). He introduces 5 main aspects of identity which I will briefly summarize below:

- *Negotiated experience* suggests that just like meaning, identity is negotiated through our experience in the practice. In other words, our identity is formed through our experience in the practice (participation) and our interpretations of these experiences (reification) (pp.150-151).
- *Community membership* refers to the competence members have in a CoP. *Community membership* brings about familiar or unfamiliar territories. Our identity is shaped in these territories by interacting with other members (mutuality of engagement), having a tendency to act in certain ways in accordance with the requirements of the practice (accountability to an enterprise) and knowing the shared repertoire of the practice as well as being able to negotiate your own experience with this repertoire (negotiability of a repertoire) (pp.152-153).
- *Trajectory* refers to the continuous motion our identities are in. There are five trajectories that represent different levels of participation and stages of identity formation: peripheral trajectories, inbound trajectories, insider trajectories, boundary trajectories and outbound trajectories (pp.154-155). I will not elaborate on these trajectories individually as they are not essential for this study.
- *Nexus of multimembership* represents our belonging to multiple CoPs. Our different forms of participation have their influence on the way our identity is formed. We have to reconcile these various forms of participation and create one identity which is in fact a connection point of all the other forms of participation (pp.158-160).

- *A relation between the local and the global* refers to the fact that our identities are firstly shaped within our local context which hosts the CoP we are part of. However, this identity is always connected to a broader context. In other words, identity is an interplay of both the local and the global context just like practice is (pp.162-163).

As can be seen, Wenger (1998) introduced a very detailed framework and some of its components are quite abstract. Elaborating on the foundations of his framework, Wenger (1998) stated that his aim was not to create a new learning theory, but to look at learning from a more holistic perspective by including the elements he considered crucial for learning to take place. As this particular study is an interpretive one, I did not analyse the data directly in line with this framework. That is, I did not code the data I collected under the main categories suggested by Wenger (1998) such as *learning, community, practice* and *identity*. However, my interpretations were informed by Wenger's (1998) approach to learning. Therefore, I believe that it is essential to know the aspects mentioned above which are inherent in a CoP in order to explore learning experiences of its members.

Upon giving detailed information about the CoP concept and its components as explained by Wenger (1998), I will present the relevant literature on CoP concept in the following section.

2.1.3. Studies on the CoP Concept

Communities of practice have attracted considerable attention in the literature since the term was coined by Lave and Wenger (1991). This concept has been explored in much detail in the field of knowledge management with a number of

studies conducted in companies (e.g. Dixon, Burgess, Kilner & Schweitzer, 2005; Eisenhart, 1994; Orr, 1996; Wenger, 1998; Westhaver, 2008). The majority of these studies focus on the ways to cultivate CoPs in the workplace to enhance productivity (e.g. Westhaver, 2008) and the interactional dynamics in such organizational CoPs (e.g. Wenger, 1998). In fact, Wenger (1998) built his framework on an ethnographic project in which he explored the experiences of insurance claims processors by blending their personal stories with their office routines. Through observations and interviews, he inquired into how these insurance claims processors interacted with their colleagues related to work and personal life within the strict hierarchy their community of practice created.

Although the CoP concept started out at an organizational level, Wenger (1998) refers to its relevance within educational settings by suggesting that schools are also organizations whose core element is learning. Therefore, a number of studies utilized the CoP concept in educational research with some of the most researched issues being professional or teacher development (e.g. Baran, 2007; Baran & Cagiltay, 2010; Bopp, 2007; Habhab, 2008; Knight, 2002; Yıldırım, 2008; Yılmaz, 2012), teachers' interventionist practices to promote collaboration and the notion of community in the classroom (e.g. Elbers & Streefland, 2000; Miller & Zuengler, 2011; Senior, 1997; Young, 2011), the opportunities CoPs provide for adult learners who come from indigenous and/or marginalized backgrounds (e.g. Bloom, 2009; Cowan, 2003; Han, 2009; Merriam, Courtenay & Baumgartner, 2003), learning various subjects in online CoPs (e.g. Asoodar, Atai, Vaezi & Marandi, 2014; So & Brush, 2008) and gaining membership in L2 communities through participation, with a special emphasis on *LPP* (e.g. Giroir, 2013; Kanno, 1998; Leki, 2001; Norton,

2001; O'Donnell & Tobell, 2007; Warriner, 2010). These studies explored how learning takes place in a wide variety of fields ranging from Literacy to Science and contributed to the literature by presenting the advantages of learning in a CoP, the most common advantage being gaining better learning opportunities for individuals through their participation in learning communities that comprise members with similar goals who collaborate to achieve these goals (e.g. Cowan, 2003; Yıldırım, 2008). Although these studies have important implications, none of them explored interactions of learners of English with reference to the importance of the new educational context nor did they present learner accounts on their own learning experiences. Therefore, they are only indirectly related to this particular study.

Having a similar aim to that of this particular study, the concept of CoP has been researched qualitatively inside language classroom settings to a great extent (e.g. Ares, 2008; Danielewicz, Rogers & Noblit, 1996; Haneda, 1997; Lee, 2004; Hellermann, 2006; Hellermann & Cole, 2008; Malender, 2012; Mondada & Doehler, 2004; Mori, 2004; Morita, 2004; Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997; Szymanski, 2003; Toohey, 1996, 1998). These case studies focused on the interactions of individual students with their new classroom community (e.g. Hellermann & Cole, 2008), pairs of students with each other (e.g. Malender, 2012) and small groups of learners with one another (e.g. Mondada & Doehler, 2004; Szymanski, 2003). While some of them focused on young learners' collaboration in a CoP (e.g. Danielewicz, Rogers & Noblit, 1996), others worked with students at higher education settings (e.g. Hauer, 2008). Toohey (1996, 1998) is considered the researcher who has introduced the concept into the classroom setting with her ethnographic case study (Haneda, 2006). The researcher observed young learners of English starting from kindergarten and

moving into primary school. She aimed to explore these learners' English learning process through their participation into the classroom community. Toohey (1998) stated that students learned the language as they participated in their classroom communities and if this participation was hindered in some way, learning would be hindered as well. Building on Toohey (1996, 1998), a pioneer study to explore CoPs that comprised adult language learners is by Haneda (1997). This researcher stated that the phenomena of learning in a CoP cannot be explored only by Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory and it should make use of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of ZDP as well. The researcher also emphasized the necessity of teacher help for students to succeed in language learning. The studies that focused on CoPs in classroom settings tended to adopt an inductive approach and analysed recorded interactions and/or interviews of learners to find the emerging themes that marked their participants' interactions. The studies suggested that collaborating in a community encouraged language learning and student interactions in these communities were multifaceted. Some of the key elements in learners' interactions were found to be negotiation (e.g. Malender, 2012; Mondada & Doehler, 2004; Mori, 2004; Morita, 2004), participation (Hellerman, 2006; Hellerman & Cole, 2008) and a sense of belonging to a community (Hardy, 2008; Hauer, 2008).

What about student learning experiences outside the classroom context? Wenger (1998) himself states that schools are CoPs with their own community and they are the places where learning is considered to take place through instruction. However, he emphasizes the debatable nature of the instruction in schools and suggests that this instruction is not obligatory for learning to take place. In line with this view, Heaney (1995) suggests that "without doubt, learning can take place where

there is teaching, but intentional instruction is not in and of itself the principal source of learning” (p.5). This directs researchers’ attention to contexts outside the classroom; however, such contexts have been explored to a limited extent in the literature (Benson, 2001; Pearson, 2004; Shen, Tseng, Kuo, Su, & Chen, 2005). To begin with, in the literature, learning outside the classroom is associated with field trips or study tours specifically designed for language learners (e.g. Freed, 1990; DeKeyser, 1991; Miao, 2006; Miao, Harris, & Sumner, 2006). These trips or tours took place in the target language context with the aim of providing more L2 learning opportunities for learners. The studies suggested that learners considered having learning opportunities outside the classroom and within the L2 setting as having a positive influence on their learning process. While the majority of the learners stated that these trips provided them with language practice opportunities and better learning outcomes regarding fluency (Freed, 1990) and lexical knowledge (DeKeyser, 1991), others suggested that their low L2 proficiency hindered them from accessing such opportunities (Miao, Harris, & Sumner, 2006, p.57). Although these studies provide evidence on some advantages of learning outside the classroom, they are limited in their scope as they focused on single field trips. Moreover, they fail to give detailed accounts of the context where learning takes place with a more holistic approach.

Another group of studies focused on individual students’ experiences who were learning a language and the learning strategies they employed outside classroom settings (e.g. Gan, Humphreys & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Inaba, 2013; Inozu, Sahinkarakas & Yumru, 2010; Lamb, 2002; Mackay & Sinn, 2010; Palfreyman, 2006; Pickard, 1996; Suh, Wasansomsithi, Short & Majid, 1999)

in addition to the kind of learning activities these students engaged in (e.g. Chan, 2011; Ekşi & Aydın, 2013; Freeman, 1999; Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen & Dufva, 2011; Karababa & Karagül, 2013; Pearson, 2004; Shen, Tseng, Kuo, Su, & Chen, 2005; Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002; Wu, 2012). These studies approached language learning as “an ecological phenomenon” suggesting that it occurs in natural contexts beyond the classroom (Menezes, 2011, pp.59-60). In such studies, there was an emphasis on the uniqueness of student learner styles and the reasons for choosing those particular styles (e.g. Pickard, 1996) as well as the influence of cultural background for choosing different learning strategies (e.g. Hyland, 2004). These studies suggested that engaging in language learning activities as diverse as watching movies and/or TV programmes (e.g. Chan, 2011; Wu, 2012) listening to music (e.g. Ekşi & Aydın, 2013) and engaging in conversations using the target language outside the classroom even in EFL contexts (e.g. Gan, Humphreys & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen & Dufva, 2011) resulted in better language learning outcomes for learners. Here, I would like to emphasize a distinction among the studies that explored out-of-class language learning. While some of these focused on learning a language in the target language setting (e.g. Suh, Wasansomsithi, Short & Majid, 1999), others took place in settings where the language being learned was not spoken by the majority (e.g. Karababa & Karagül, 2013). Although the opportunities provided for language practice differed in these two settings, out-of-class language learning strategies adopted by learners and the language-related activities they engaged in were found to be highly beneficial for learning in both contexts.

Moreover, the studies that focused on learners’ out-of-class learning experiences differed in terms of their research design. The majority of the studies

adopted a quantitative (e.g. Chan, 2011; Karababa & Karagül, 2013, Wu, 2012) and mixed-methods (e.g. Ekşi & Aydın, 2013; Hyland, 2004; Palfreyman, 2006; Pearson, 2004) design and relied on survey results to investigate the strategies language learners adopted outside the classroom. They provided statistical analyses as to which activities were preferred by learners to help them learn a language and why. On the other hand, a small number of out-of-class studies which explored individual learners' strategies or preferences adopted a more in-depth approach (e.g. Inaba, 2013; Suh, Wasansomsithi, Short & Majid, 1999). These qualitative studies collected data from a smaller number of learners by means of interviews and journal entries. Developing on learner comments on their out-of-class learning experiences, these studies emphasized the need to connect in-class activities with the ones learners engage in outside the classroom. In other words, they suggested that in-class language-related activities should be designed similar to the ones learners like to do outside such as reading comics (Inaba, 2013) or watching TV (Suh, Wasansomsithi, Short & Majid, 1999). The body of out-of-class studies that presented learner strategies and/or learning activities that influence language learning positively contributed to the L2 literature, specifically in terms of elaborating more on learner autonomy. However, as they focused on individual learners' experiences with an emphasis on the strategies they adopted, they are different when the aims and research design of this study are concerned.

There are also studies from other disciplines than language education that inquired into group collaboration in CoPs outside the classroom (e.g. Allsup, 2003; Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997; Yan & Kember, 2004). I would like to refer to these studies in more detail as they are very similar to this particular study although they

do not focus on learning English. The first one is by Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) who explored how a group of graduate students' collaboration during one of their MA courses. Data was collected by means of observation and document analysis. The study has important findings which suggest that collaborative learning environments are effective when the members provide social support to one another through scaffolding. If group members feel free to challenge one another's ideas and push them to learn more, their collaboration is effective and leads to co-construction of knowledge. These were the results as decided by the researchers and not the participants themselves; therefore, learner views on collaboration were neglected. One interesting study (Allsup, 2003) was related to student collaboration in two music communities outside the school. With the researcher's initiative, two bands were formed and their interactions were explored for four months. The methodology of the study was similar to my study as it made use of ethnographic participant observations as well as interviews with the participants. The results highlighted that willingness to participate, equal participation, having patience and negotiation were some of the key factors for the sense of community to be created. When learners work in such an atmosphere, their collaboration awards them with success and creativity both as musicians and individuals. One final study was by Yan and Kember (2004) who explored learners' perceptions of their learning experiences related to their majors within study groups they have formed. More specifically, the researchers compared the perceptions of university students who were studying in different departments ranging from Medicine to Sociology. Data collection was carried out by means of individual and focus group interviews. It was concluded that students whom the researchers called *engagers* were the successful collaborators as

they negotiated constantly, stimulated others' opinions, completed one another's missing knowledge and gained critical thinking abilities through discussion. The *engagers* were the ones who were willing to collaborate in order to learn more about their departmental subjects which was one of the key factors that brought about success in their collaboration. The study failed to make use of observations as the researchers considered it inconvenient although it would have been very beneficial to support the interview data.

So far, I have given an overview of a variety of studies that focus on learner interactions and the influence of these interactions on learning. They are only partially relevant to this particular study either due to the methodology they adopted, the subject area they focused on or the research questions they asked. In fact, to my knowledge, the number of studies that explored the learning-related interactions of a group of learners of English outside the classroom in a similar way my study did is limited to two. The first one is by Kobayashi (2003) who conducted a qualitative case study to present the linguistic opportunities working together provided for a group of Japanese ESL learners in a university setting. The researcher explored how these students interacted outside the classroom setting and without the interference of "narrowly defined tasks in classrooms" (p.339). This was exactly in line with my aim which was to gain a more holistic, in-depth insight to the research phenomena rather than explore interactions in the limited time provided in classrooms. However, the researcher also focused on the influence of using L1 during group work which he found to be promoting L2 learning and this was not part of my research agenda. Moreover, concerning its design, the study differs from mine in some aspects. Kobayashi (2003) focused on student interactions throughout one year while they

were working on a single task (an oral presentation project students were asked to prepare together) while I had the opportunity to observe students while they were engaging in various tasks. As part of his data collection process, the researcher made use of individual interviews with the participants which I found limiting as he explored group interactions. For that reason, I also conducted focus group interviews so that I would be able to gain insight into the students' common and different perspectives by giving them the opportunity to hear about and respond to one another's opinions.

The second relevant study was by Gao (2009) who presented learning experiences of Chinese learners of English in an informal out-of-class setting. These learners of different age, gender and background participated in English Corners which were famous learning communities that were established to provide learners of different English proficiencies with L2 practice. The researcher conducted his case study with the members of one of these CoPs and observed them while they engaged in conversations with one another to improve their English skills. He also collected data by means of forum entries in which the participants wrote their comments and/or concerns regarding their English Club. The number of observations was limited to four and the study relied heavily on online learner comments. This study was similar to mine as it made extensive use of contextual elements regarding the physical structure and atmosphere of the learning environment as well as learner views on their own learning experience. However, as the study included fifty participants, the researcher provided detailed information about neither the participants nor their stories. I think we can suggest that such a big number of participants are very much likely to have different motives to learn English. Of

course they have a common aim, to learn English, however the reasons behind this aim will probably be different as the participants are of different age and status. I aimed to work with learners who had similar motivations to learn English, i.e. receiving education in English at a university, so that I would be able to dig deeper in their collective learning experiences as shaped by these motivations. Both studies are relevant to this particular study as they aimed to explore the phenomenon of learning outside formal educational settings where the learners have more control and autonomy over their own learning. Some of their findings are similar to those of this study which I will refer to in detail in the *Discussion* chapter.

In this chapter, I presented the theoretical background of this particular study and gave a detailed account of various studies conducted on how learner interactions and collaboration are linked to language learning as well as the studies exploring the CoP concept. I believe presenting an overview of the major studies made it clear that new studies are needed to explore learner interactions with reference to the context and the community these interactions take place in.

2.1.4. Summary

In this section, I would like to provide a brief summary of the research trends I have elaborated on in the *Literature Review* chapter concerning learner interactions and their link to learning as well as learning a language in communities of practice.

To begin with, there has been extensive research on Vygotsky's (1978) notion of ZPD in the literature. The majority of the studies that focused on the ZPD investigated whether teacher and/or peer help had any affect on learning a language within the classroom context (e.g. Anton, 1999; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Storch, 2007).

These quantitative studies recorded and analysed student-student and/or student-teacher collaborative dialogues. They concluded that receiving help from a more knowledgeable person helped learners to accomplish tasks which would not be possible to do on their own and resulted in better learning outcomes. The studies adopted an experimental approach to learner interactions and focused on whether learning took place while the students collaborated during specific language tasks related to subjects such as vocabulary, grammar and writing.

Although scarce, there are also qualitative studies that explored learning in the ZPD within the classroom setting (e.g. Takashi, 1998; Yong, 2010). These studies made use of in-class observations of student collaborations over a long period of time and explored how students interacted with one another during their collaborations. Like the quantitative ones, qualitative studies suggested that interacting with peers and/or teachers helped learners outperform their levels as these interactions promote discussion, negotiation and the restructuring of the language being learned. There are also few studies that explored learning in the ZPD and the influence of peer interactions on learning outside the classroom (e.g. Reichert & Liebscher, 2012) with a special focus on peer tutoring (e.g. Beasley, 1997; Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006). They either focused on the influence of peer interactions on task achievement or whether being tutored by more knowledgeable peers helped learners to learn a language. The majority of the findings were positive suggesting that receiving help from peers helped learners in their language learning process. Although the studies mentioned above that explored learning in one's ZPD provide valuable findings concerning the relationship between learner interactions and learning, they focus more on task achievement within contexts where students do not

have any autonomy to learn in ways they prefer. In addition, they tend to neglect learner experiences and learners' own voices on their language learning processes.

The literature also provides many studies that explored the CoP concept in many fields as diverse as knowledge management, teacher development and language learning. Related to learning a language, a number of qualitative studies explored how students learn in classroom communities (e.g. Haneda, 1997; Hellermann & Cole, 2008; Malender, 2012; Morita, 2004). These studies were conducted within classroom context with the aim of elaborating on the relationship between learner interactions and learning outcomes. They analyzed student dialogues with an inductive approach and/or conducted interviews with the participants and classroom teachers. The results suggested that collaboration in a community encouraged learning a language and student interactions were mainly shaped by complex processes of negotiation, participation and a sense of belonging to the community. Some studies also concluded that help provided by teachers was indispensable for learning to take place and that it should accompany peer help.

When we look at the literature that explored learner interactions outside the classroom context, we see that there are a number of studies that focused on disciplines other than language learning such as sociology, music and medicine (e.g. Allsup, 2003; Yan & Kember, 2004). Such studies aimed to find out whether interacting with peers influences learning in any way. They adopted a longitudinal approach and made use of ethnographic observation, individual and focus group interviews and document analysis. Although these studies were conducted in different educational fields, they suggested that interactions with peers provided opportunities for learning through critical thinking, negotiation and accumulating

common knowledge. In addition, collaborative learning environments enabled learning in a more supportive atmosphere encouraging learners to challenge one another in order to reach knowledge.

To my knowledge, studies that aimed to explore learner interactions outside the classroom and whether these interactions have any influence on learning English are limited to two (e.g. Gao, 2009; Kobayashi, 2003). Both studies are similar to this specific study regarding their research design since both had an interpretive approach and collected data by means of outside observations and interviews. However, their research foci differed from those of this study in that they either focused on the influence of learners' native language on their English learning processes while the learners were doing a single task over a long period of time (Kobayahsi, 2003) or they collected data from a large number of participants via online learner comments about learners' experiences in their CoP which prevented in-depth analysis and rich descriptions of learner perceptions. They contributed to the literature, specifically out-of-class studies that explore learner interactions; however, they completely disregarded or could not make good use of one valuable data source: The learners themselves.

This study was designed to contribute to the literature in ways the studies mentioned above have not been able to. With its research design and the context in which it was conducted, it presents a holistic perspective to learner experiences in a CoP with an innovative way. In the following chapter, I will present the research design and methods of the study and the rationale of choosing such a design. Specifically, I will refer to the data collection procedure including the instruments

and the analysis methods I used. More importantly, I will introduce the setting of the study and share the stories of the participants as they are the core actors of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

In this chapter I will present the study design in detail. I will elaborate on why I chose a qualitative study design, specifically a case study approach, by referring to the data collection tools I used. Moreover, I will introduce the setting of the story along with the participants' stories both of which are key elements in relation to the research foci.

3.1. Design of the Study

In this study, I aimed to capture a group of individuals' perspectives and experiences regarding their English learning process. Moreover, I wanted to explore the interactional dynamics of these individuals in relation to their collaboration to learn English. My aim was to "establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants" (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p.16) and present the reader with the stories the participants' shared with me regarding their English learning process. Therefore, in my inquiry, I adopted a qualitative approach as it allows researchers to gather close-up information from participants in a natural setting by focusing on the meanings the participants themselves make regarding the research questions being explored (Creswell, 2009, p.175). This approach helped me to gather as much data as possible and allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in a natural setting.

Parallel to the nature of the subject I would like to explore, I used a case study design. Yin (2003) defines a case study as an inquiry which "investigate(s) a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the

boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.13). Having a similar objective, I aimed to elaborate on students’ learning experiences in a new university context with a special focus on collaboration in group work. Here I wanted to explore both the phenomenon, which was the collaboration among a group of Beginner level students to learn English, and the context, which was a new university setting and an island waiting to be discovered. A case study design provided many opportunities to explore the participants’ everyday learning experiences closely both inside and outside the classroom as I had the opportunity to focus on a small number of individuals and to do detailed inquiry on a single case (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). I devoted my attention and time to a single group of Beginner level learners of English, and a relatively small one, which enabled me to dig in deeper concerning the experiences and thoughts of the participants on the research foci. The case study comprised ethnographic elements as I aimed to observe the social interactions and behavior of the participants in “everyday contexts rather than under experimental conditions created by the researcher” (Stephens, 2009, p.51). Here, I would like to emphasize one important issue. I did not design this study within the tradition of ethnographic research. Ethnography requires different research skills and techniques as well as extended work in the field; therefore, it should not be confused with designs that require less immersion in the field such as a case study design (Richards, 2003, p.16) As part of the ethnographic elements in my research design, I observed the participants outside the classroom setting mainly while they were studying as a group and also while they were engaged in leisure activities such as having lunch or a cup of coffee. Although my data collection tools included observing the participants inside the classroom while they engaged in group work, my focus was

on the ethnographic outside observations which provided richer data when compared to the in-class ones. This was mainly because the participants were exposed to a rather teacher-centered education in their English Preparatory School and they had limited opportunities to work in groups inside the classroom. However, they made the decisions themselves concerning their study sessions outside. They arranged when and where to meet, what to study and for how long. Therefore, I had a chance to gain more insight about the phenomenon I was exploring outside the classroom.

In this section, I have introduced the research design of this study by providing the rationale for adopting a qualitative approach and a case study design. In the following section, I would like to elaborate on the data collection instruments I made use of in my research. I will introduce the instruments and methods I used as well as the rationale behind choosing them.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative inquiry, researchers do not rely on a single data source and collect multiple forms of data by utilizing different data collection instruments (Creswell, 2009, p.175). This study also required gathering data from multiple sources as the aim was to explore individuals' learning experiences and interactions in a new educational setting by providing as much detail as possible. In the table below, I have presented an overview of the instruments I used, why I chose them and their duration:

Table 2. Summary of the data collection instruments.

Data Collection Instruments	Rationale	Duration
10 Out-of-class Observations	To explore learner interactions and collaboration in more	628 minutes

	autonomous contexts, i.e. contexts chosen by the participants.	
10 In-class Observations	To gain insight on learner interactions and collaboration inside the classroom.	278 minutes
7 Individual Interviews	To hear participants' stories, the kind of life and learning experiences they had in the past and present, their perceptions regarding their new context, group collaboration and learning English.	223 minutes
5 Focus Group Interviews	To find out about participants' similar and different views about their collaboration and English learning experiences through collective discussions	236 minutes
1 Interview with Each Classroom Instructor	To receive a general overview about the instructors' thought on how the participants collaborated throughout the semester.	5 questions were asked, responses were received via e-mail

As can be seen from Table 2, my main sources of data were observations and interviews as data from these sources often complement each other in qualitative inquiry (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). More specifically, I collected data by means of in-class observations, ethnographic observations outside the classroom, interviews (both individual and focus group) with the participants and their instructors. This multiplicity helped me gain more insight about the research foci. Upon receiving the consent of the participants, I audio-recorded both the observations and interviews. Recordings made sure valuable data would not be lost and allowed me the chance to refer to the data repeatedly throughout the research process.

In the next section, I would like to focus on the data collection instruments separately and in more detail.

3.2.1. Observations

Observations are unique in the sense that they provide the researcher with “immediate awareness or direct cognition” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.396). They are generally described under two categories as non-participant and participant. In non-participant observations, the researcher has the aim to observe what is happening in a certain setting and record it without actively participating in the activities being observed (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin & Lowden, 2011, p.197). In participant observations; however, the researcher spends a considerable amount of time with a small group of participants and interacts with them actively (Cohen et al., 2007, p.404). This time the researcher is an insider and explores the research foci while interacting with the participant(s). Throughout the ten weeks of data collection, I took both roles in my observations with the participants. Within the classroom context, I adopted a non-participant approach. As an outsider, I observed the participants and their collaboration during various language activities without interacting with them. When the students were working on a task as a group, I audio-recorded their activity and took notes when necessary. In time, the students got used to my presence and even forgot that I was there. In-class observations were followed by ethnographic observations outside the classroom in which I was a participant observer. I interacted with the students during extracurricular group meetings intended for both leisure and study purposes to collect data “in as raw a form, and on as wide a front, as feasible” (Stephens, 2009, p.51). In such meetings, I engaged in general conversations with the participants regarding their new environment,

challenges in their language learning process, their friends, the activities they engaged in and so on. As Richards (2003) states, becoming a participant observer is challenging as it demands engagement and negotiation with the participants. He elaborates on this by informing the researchers about the five stages participant observers go through to gain access and entry into participants' worlds. These stages can be seen in the following table:

Table 3. Chronological stages in gaining access and building relationships in the field (Richards, 2003, p.120)

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Making contact2. Arranging consent3. Representing your research4. Establishing your role5. Building relationships6. Leaving the field

As a participant-observer, I went through all these stages rather smoothly. However, it took some time to gain the participants' trust and to gain access into their study group sessions without disturbing them. In the first weeks of data collection, the participants expected me to call them and find out about the times they were going to study in the library. After getting used to my presence and enjoying it as they expressed it, they started to invite me to observe them. In time, they got more relaxed around me and I was more comfortable around them, so my presence in their study sessions became something natural and part of their routine. I believe the fact that I interacted with the participants outside the classroom helped me build a closer relationship with them. This might have been due to the fact that they felt the

teacher-student hierarchy less outside the classroom, which might have made them welcome me to their group more easily (Richards, 2003, p.124).

In the classroom setting, I observed the participants weekly for ten weeks. Although one lesson lasted fifty minutes and I was present in the classroom during the whole lesson, the amount of time students engaged in group work together changed in line with the activity they worked on. As I mentioned earlier, there was no specific observation day, and I had the chance to observe the students when their instructors planned to do group work. In these group work activities, the instructors agreed to put the participants in the same group so that I could observe them. When I was not observing them; the instructors made them work with other students in different groups from time to time to encourage them to interact with the rest of the classroom. The number of study group observations (henceforth SGOBS) was the same; however, they lasted much longer than the in-class observations. Except for one outside observation, all were study sessions in the library. One particular observation was carried out in a café on campus as the students were having a cup of coffee together. Apart from audio-recording the in-class observations and the SGOBS, I took field notes during the observations. As this study was an interpretive one, I made use of an observation sheet (Appendix A) on which I noted down the important incidents regarding the collaboration of the participants that occurred while they were engaged in group work. I did not have preplanned categories and wrote down what I noticed to be important during these observations including my own comments regarding the interactions, behaviors, utterances and/or attitudes of the participants (Creswell, 2009, p.182). I will refer to field notes as research tools shortly.

Observations provided useful insight on the researched issue; however, these insights tended to be partial (Menter et al., 2011, p.163). Therefore, I made use of interviews for a more comprehensive analysis which I will refer to in the following section.

3.2.2. Interviews

In this study, I wanted to get students' accounts on how they interacted in their new environment and within their CoP, and also how they viewed the relationship between their group collaboration and their English learning processes. I chose interviewing as one of the data collection tools since it would allow me to explore the views and perspectives of individuals by eliciting their own versions or accounts of situations rather than aiming to establish a universal truth (Wellington, 2000, p.71). In that respect, interviewing provided me the opportunity "to go deeper, to pursue understanding in all its complex, elusive and shifting forms..." (Richards, 2003, p.50). No wonder interviewing has long been considered an art in the literature (e.g. Bryan, 1939; Rapley, 2001; Royal & Schutt, 1976). It is not a "mere question and answer routine" (Richards, 2003, p.50) but an interactional event between the researcher and the participant.

The style of interviewing is of utmost importance and should be appropriate to the research questions the researcher would like to explore. This *appropriateness* is closely connected with the structure of the interviews a research designs. A detailed distinction regarding the degree of structure while conducting interviews is made by prominent researchers (e.g. Brenner, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007). There are *structured*, *non-structured* and *semi-structured interviews* which help researchers to collect qualitative data. In this particular study, I

used semi-structured interviews which can be considered “a compromise” between structured and non-structured interviews (Dörnyei, 2007, p.136). Researchers who conduct this type of interviews develop and make use of an interview guide which is “a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). This does not necessarily confine the researcher to the list of questions. On the contrary, the researcher has the opportunity is quite flexible to explore phenomena within a certain inquiry space (Hoepfl, 1997, p.53). As I wanted to collect in-depth data related to the research questions I aimed to explore, I designed 12 semi-structured interviews in total. Before conducting each interview, I prepared a list of open-ended questions I would like to ask the students (See Appendix B for all interview questions asked during participant interviews). These questions were reviewed by two experts in the field and I made the necessary revisions after receiving feedback from them. These revisions were important as to clarify what was meant by the questions and to avoid possible confusions. During each interview, I would make additions to and/or changes in the questions according to what the participants chose to talk about. This was necessary because sometimes, I would ask one question and the participants tended to answer much more than just that question. The first interview was a detailed autobiographical interview that provided insight about the students’ personal and educational life, learning experiences in general including their current experiences in the Prep School, their first encounter with English, and their thoughts about the campus and TRNC in general. I conducted this interview individually with all four participants. The other individual interview was the final interview conducted with three of the participants as Ceren had dropped out of the study group

by then. This interview focused on the participants' general reflections on the semester as it was coming to an end. It also had more specific questions concerning the participants' collaboration and experiences as a study group. Apart from the individual interviews, I conducted five focus group interviews with the three participants (Ekin, Hande and Seyit) throughout the data collection period. Focus group interviews (henceforth FGIs) were effective tools to collect large amounts of qualitative data from all participants simultaneously. The FGIs were different from one-to-one interviews as they promoted discussion among the participants, creating opportunities for them to clarify, modify and/or justify their ideas about the research foci (Kelly, 2003, p.50). Although I had prepared some preliminary questions I wanted to ask the participants before I started the research, the content of FGIs was shaped by the field notes I took during the observations. In each observation, I noted down the important incidents that happened and compared those to my previous notes to look for certain patterns. Later on, I included questions regarding these re-occurring incidents in the FGIs to be able to see whether my observations were aligned with the actual experiences of the learners. Such interviews were more like relaxed conversations and the participants referred to them as *therapy sessions* pointing out that they really enjoyed sharing their ideas with one another and with me as a researcher. In my study, FGIs encouraged fruitful discussions and mutual engagement through critical thinking with their "synergistic environment" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.144).

I also conducted one interview with the participants' English instructors at the end of the semester in order to get their opinions regarding the participants' group work in general (See Appendix C for the questions asked in the instructor interview).

As the two instructors did not have time for a face-to-face interview, I received responses to questions via e-mail. As the instructors spent a lot of time with the participants inside the classroom every day, I thought that they could provide me with their direct observations concerning the participants' interactions during group work and also their performance in English in general. Except for the interview with the instructors, the language of all interviews was Turkish (the participants' L1) as they were Beginner learners of English and they were not competent in the language yet. In order to make sure that the L1 translations of the interview questions were comprehensible and consistent, the translations were reviewed by another researcher and differences in wording were negotiated. The place and timing of the interviews changed in line with the participants' busy schedules. I showed great effort in order not to intervene with the participants' routines and gave them the opportunity to choose the time and place that suited them. Generally, I conducted the interviews in my office, but some of them took place in more natural settings like the garden of the school patisserie or a silent corner of a café on campus. Most of them took place during the weekends as the participants were quite busy on weekdays.

In the next section, I would like to give brief information about the field notes I kept throughout the data collection period and the weekly narratives I composed in the light of these field notes.

3.2.3. Field Notes & Weekly Narratives

Although field notes and weekly narratives were not data collection instruments, they complemented observational data during the interpretation process. Therefore, I would like to give more detailed information about them.

As recommended by a number of researchers (e.g. Boudah, 2010; Silverman, 2013; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) field notes should be kept while doing qualitative research. This is especially important if the researcher makes use of observations as a data collection tool. Field notes complemented observations as they included information about the observations such as descriptions of what is being observed, dates and times of the observations and reflections regarding the phenomenon and/or participants being observed (Boudah, 2011, p.142). I kept field notes during each observation by jotting down incidents which I thought might be important regarding the participants' interactions and English learning processes. While keeping these notes, I limited myself to one to two pages in order to use the opportunity to actually 'observe' what the participants were doing and how they were engaging in group work. Sometimes important conversations took place among the participants and as I had no chance to write them down in detail, I noted the minutes they took place so that I could turn back to those conversations easily for analysis. In total, I kept 30 A4 pages of field notes. Also, when I was not able to include something in the field notes due to time constraints, I made a small note about it. After the observation ended, I would audio-record my own thoughts and comments about what I had just observed, which helped me not to forget crucial interactions that took place.

Field notes proved to be invaluable and helped me to make meaning of the data I had collected. Every week, I read through the field notes of that week and wrote a short narrative of two to three pages regarding the highlights of that week. I tried to write the weekly incidents by interpreting them under emerging categories. For instance, conflict would be an emerging category if I had observed it in that

week's observations and if it were of importance in terms of influencing the participants, their interactions and/or their learning process in any way. The field notes and highlights I wrote regularly helped me to get into the data and come up with questions to ask the participants during their interviews. They also helped me a lot during the analysis and interpretation stages when the data collection process ended.

Upon referring to the data collection instruments in detail, I would like to move on to the data collection procedure. In the next section, I will provide information about the setting and the participants of the study in more detail.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

I collected the data in the fall semester of the 2013-2014 academic year and it lasted ten weeks. The data collection took place in one of the Beginner level classes in the English Preparatory School (henceforth Prep School) of a higher education institution. I observed the participants once inside the classroom and once outside the classroom each week. As the program in the Prep School was hectic, the in-class observations were arranged according to the times the instructors were willing to arrange group work. Upon my conversations with the two classroom instructors, we did not set a specific observation day for each week so as not to disrupt the routine of the classroom. This way, we tried to keep the learning atmosphere as natural as possible. Outside observations and interviews were carried out when the participants were available and I tried to be as flexible as I could with the timing of these as well. For instance, if the students were studying in library at 10:00 p.m., I would go and observe them if they invited me. Invitation was another important issue. I tried to leave it to the instructors and participants to invite me when they were available and

showed great effort not to interfere with their routines. The instructors were quite understanding as we were colleagues working together at the same institution and after arranging an observation hour each week, they invited me to their classroom. With the participants, it naturally took more time to be accepted and welcomed into their group.

In the next section, I will introduce the setting of the study by providing information about the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the higher education institution the study was conducted in and the English Preparatory Program the participants are part of.

3.3.1. Setting

In qualitative inquiry, setting or context is on the foreground as it provides “the research process with a fabric from which meaning and interpretation can occur” (Stephens, 2009, p.12). Likewise, context is always present in narrative thinking and helps researchers make sense regarding the individuals and/or the phenomena they are exploring (Connely & Clandinin, p.32). Therefore, I would like to describe the setting of this study in detail.

I conducted the study in the Prep School of a private higher education institution in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (henceforth TRNC) during the first semester of 2013-2014 academic year. The institution (henceforth Challenge University) started formal education rather recently as an additional campus to the main campus in Turkey which is one of the most respected universities of the country. Challenge University in Turkey is well-known for its competitive learning environment and has ranked among the Top 100 Universities by Reputation in 2013 and 2014 consecutively. As suggested in the mission statement of the NCC campus,

it follows in the footsteps of the main campus and has the aim to “become a select higher education institution with international character” (official institution website).

Both campuses follow the same curricula for each department including the Prep School. As the university offers English-medium education, all students have to take the Placement Exam to determine their level of English once they are officially enrolled in one of the programs. The students are required to study in the Prep School for one year to learn English if they cannot get a certain score from this exam. At the beginning of each academic year, three levels of English classes are offered: Beginner, Elementary and Intermediate. Beginner students, four of whom participated in this study, typically spend six hours a day and thirty hours a week in their classrooms learning English. They have an intensive English program with special emphasis on grammar, reading, writing and listening skills. The Beginner program lasts 16 weeks and the students who complete it continue their English education as Pre-Intermediate learners starting from the second semester of that academic year. These students can take the Proficiency Exam in June, which allows them to continue their studies in their departments provided that they succeed, if they have a certain GPA by then. If their GPA is low, they have to attend the Extended Summer Program until the end of July in order to take the Proficiency Exam. If the students fail that exam, they can retake the exam in September and if they cannot pass it again, they need to repeat their first year.

Receiving education in such a program, students in Prep School are expected to study very hard in order to complete the program in one year. The institution is famous for the ‘Challenger’ nickname given to its students and graduates to

emphasize their success. One difference between the students studying on the main campus and the NCC campus is regarding their admission status. While students are required to have a very high score from the National University Entrance Exam to study on the main campus, the score required is lower on the NCC campus. This is suggestive of the different student profile on two campuses. Parallel to that, the dropout rate is quite high on the NCC campus, especially in the Prep School.

The context in which the university was established embodies a number of unique elements. The north part of the once-colonized island of Cyprus is home to two communities of the Turkish nation; the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot communities. These peoples share a common ethnic background and a partly common history, yet their culture and language represent striking differences. This requires the newcomers to the island to get used to life on the island, which is drastically different from life in Turkey. As in most other island cultures, life in TRNC is relatively slower, especially when compared to life in Turkey. To illustrate, it is not very common to encounter people rushing to get their daily chores done and there seems to be a relaxed atmosphere even in official places such as hospitals where one might expect things to take place rather quickly. Another example would be the working hours in TRNC. A regular work day is seven hours in most governmental institutions and it is reduced to 5 hours in summer so that people have more time for *siesta*. Such an atmosphere might be due to factors as diverse as the hot climate, low population and habits of the islanders. These factors make life in TRNC very different from the busy life in Turkey; especially in the big cities the majority of the students came from where many people work for longer hours and have a hectic daily schedule.

I have learned from conversations with students that there is a tendency among them to call the campus rather isolated, since the campus was built far away from the main cities. In fact, one of the most common student complaints was related to the lack of leisure time facilities and the opportunity to socialize outside the campus. The campus offered few cafés and restaurants and students seemed to spend more time in some pubs outside the campus. As the institution is education-oriented and disciplined, its focus was more on campus facilities such as the library and the gym. Most students went to the library in the afternoon and studied there either individually or in groups. They had private study rooms on the second floor of the library which had to be booked in advance by students who would like to study in a group without disturbing the other students. These rooms were also the places where the participants I worked with met regularly to study and where I observed them.

As a new and a relatively small campus, most people knew one another. In such a context, the students seemed to be spending a lot of time with their peers both inside and outside the classroom. This provided a great opportunity to explore their social interactions and to see how these are related to language learning. In the following section, I will introduce the students who participated in this study by including their comments on the institution, campus and TRNC in general.

3.3.2. Participants

It is suggested in the literature that sampling in qualitative research should be flexible and open to changes as this type of inquiry is an ongoing and evolving process (Dörnyei, 2007, p.126). I experienced this ‘need of being flexible’ very closely during the sampling process. Since this study had an aim to provide insight to the social interactions of a group of learners in a community of practice, I used

purposive sampling to select the specific group of participants among all students who were observed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The selection criteria included participants' level of English, their level of acquaintance, their studying routines and their willingness to study together. Firstly, I aimed to find a group of students for whom learning English was a relatively new experience. This way I would be able to gain more insight about their learning process from the very beginning and from the perspectives of new students (Gordon, Lahelma, Hynninen, Metso, Palmu & Tolonen, 1999). Secondly, I wanted to work with students who knew one another and interacted with each other both inside and outside the classroom. Finally, I looked for students who were already studying or were willing to study together without a researcher's intervention. My aim was not to form a CoP; on the contrary, I wanted to explore a CoP that had already started forming. Other than these criteria, I aimed to benefit from the contributions of a heterogeneous group as different perspectives might reveal diverse insights to the phenomenon of learning a foreign language. Therefore, I tried to find a group of students who came from different cities in Turkey and if possible a group made up of both male and female students.

Although I had planned to start observing classes 2 weeks after the first semester had begun, I was delayed due to administrative changes. The school administration decided to adopt a streaming policy and mixed the classes with a sudden decision after the school year had started which required students to change their classes. Therefore, students who had just started to get used to each other and had started forming groups were separated. I consulted my colleagues teaching Beginner students about group interactions in their classes and they asked me to wait

for some time because the students needed more time to adjust to their new classes. Two weeks after the streaming policy had been put into practice, I started to observe several classes. In order to recruit the group of students I wanted to work with in my study, I planned to observe five Beginner classes. I chose these particular classes due to the availability and willingness of the instructors. In the first week, I observed three different classes. In my first week, I had the chance to observe both pairs and groups of students while they were working together inside the classroom and took notes about their interactions. In one particular class, I was able to observe different groups as the instructor kindly prepared a number of group activities within one lesson. One group caught my eye towards the end of the lesson since they seemed to be having fun and completing the task successfully at the same time. After observing their group activity in the following hour, I was assured that I had found the group I would like to work with. This group consisted of four students, three females and one male, all of whom reacted to me very positively when I approached them to talk about my research project. They were all coming from Turkey and from different parts of the country. Although I started with four students, one of them left the group after five weeks of group work both inside and outside the classroom due to several reasons. I will refer to these reasons in detail further on. In the following section, I will introduce the participants of this study and share their story by referring to the autobiographical interview and the relevant focus group interviews we had. You will notice that some participants' story is longer than the others. This is directly related to the amount of information they chose to share with me. I will use pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves.

3.3.2.1. Seyit

The only male in the group, Seyit was born and raised in İstanbul. His parents were originally from an Eastern province in Turkey and they still maintained attachment to their hometown through relatives. They were a relatively poor family and lived in an isolated part of İstanbul, which had a reputation for its opposing political views. He mentioned the neighborhood he lived in as “untouchable by the government” with an expression of sheer pride on his face. Like many of the residents of İstanbul, he had experienced both the best and the worst parts of the dream city. While he enjoyed the lively atmosphere of his social surroundings, he suffered financially throughout his education life.

He remembered his early school years as very happy and mentioned that he spent those years out on the streets playing with friends while most of the other kids were stuck in Internet Cafés. The climax of his education was his high school years which were marked by bad memories and failures. Seyit did not give much detail about his high school experiences in the autobiographical interview and it was not until the third Focus Group Interview that he decided to open up more about them. From early in his childhood, Seyit had always wanted to be a marine. As he was a very successful student in primary and secondary school, he was allowed to take the military high school exams. He passed this exam without receiving private tutoring unlike most of his peers used to do. He was called for interviews to enter the military school, but his family – particularly his father- did not let him take the interviews. While he was talking about those times, I could see the disappointment he experienced in his face and hear it in his hesitant voice:

When my father did not send me to military school, I was disappointed because it had been my dream to be a marine since I was 6-7 years old. My

father did not let me and my sister cried her eyes out so that he would. Maybe they did not take me seriously as I was a kid back then... I know that my mother still feels sad because I could not go to military school, but my father would not let me. I think I might not have completed the interviews successfully anyway because of my family's political background, but I felt sad as it was my childhood dream.

This disappointment changed his perspective on education and he simply did not want to go to high school. If it had not been for her mother who secretly registered him in an Industrial Vocational High School, he probably would not have continued his studies. He made a good start at the new school as the 2nd brightest student in his department, but he did not consider this a big achievement as he thought the lessons were very easy and the quality of education was very low. He changed his department to Computer, where the level of education provided got even worse. The teachers used to come to class and leave without teaching anything. Examinations were no different – the teachers gave away the answers during the tests and each student received full points. Even though this was the education he received, Seyit considered himself a hard-working student. He was not very keen on going to that particular school, but whenever there was an exam he would study hard because he wanted to learn new things. He mentioned several times that he loved reading about history and would exploit Wikipedia in the school's atelier sessions in which everyone else (including the teacher) did nothing.

Upon finishing high school, he was not thinking about going to university as he thought it was not possible for him to get accepted into any higher education institution. He had witnessed her sister studying very hard to pass the university

exam and he believed that with the bad education he had received in high school, he had no chance in the university entrance exams. He found a job in an education center which helped its customers go abroad to study. He really wanted to go abroad as well, but financial difficulties prevented him from doing so. He was stuck and did not know what to do. It was his sister and cousin that persuaded him about his potential and encouraged him to take the university entrance exam.

I took the university exam once, but I could not answer any of the questions, which was quite expected. I said to myself 'this cannot go on like this, you have to go to university!'. I prepared for the exam for a year and later.. Actually I was not thinking about coming to this institution, I did not even know that this institution had a campus in TRNC. My exam score was high enough to get me here, so I said 'Why not?'

Starting his higher education in Challenge University was like a fresh start for Seyit. Although his department was Computer at high school and his father insisted that he studied Computer Technology Education, he chose Guidance and Psychological Counseling. This time, he wanted to break away from his father's wishes and continue with a field he was more interested in than Computer Studies.

Seyit was happy to be living in TRNC and especially on the campus. He expressed the happiness he felt due to being close to the sea several times. He considered it motivating to be able to see the sea and the mountains at the same time. One major problem he talked about was the financial aspect of being a student in TRNC. It is common knowledge that TRNC is a relatively expensive country to live in when compared to many other cities in Turkey. This was affecting Seyit negatively; however, he said that he managed it somehow. He also expressed that he

considered TRNC as underdeveloped in many aspects, which again seems to be a common complaint of the majority of students at Challenge University. The following excerpt reflects some of Seyit's negative impressions regarding his new context:

Here, I have witnessed ethnic discrimination, something I try to avoid doing. One day I was going to get my package from the post office and I asked the man about the package. He was stuck on the word package and said: 'You Turks call even a tiny envelope a package!'. I responded to him by saying: 'What do you Turkish Cypriots call it?'. The man got offended and asked me why I was saying you Turkish Cypriots. Well, he started it by calling me a Turk suggesting that I am coming from the mainland. Why would he do that? I felt really offended; after all we are all Turks here... Also, some Turkish Cypriots seem to dislike the Turkish Armed Forces based here and the Republic of Turkey in general. For instance, they are talking about a possible referendum and state that they would rather have the UK as their guarantor. These things really upset me actually. A country that cannot even protect itself is casting you out and adopting a we/you approach.

Seyit had mixed feelings just like some Turkish people who moved from Turkey to live in TRNC, including myself and several colleagues. The first time he came to the island was also the time he settled there, so everything in TRNC was new to him. In the excerpt above, he was complaining about the *we/you approach* he had encountered in the post office. He could not understand why such an incident took place since he considered Turkish Cypriots as Turks. However, despite having the same ethnic roots, the two groups are quite different regarding their language,

culture and history. Turkish Cypriots have a long history coexisting with Greek Cypriots under one state which changed drastically and ended with the separation of the island into two countries. Seyit might have felt offended by the postman's remarks as he was unaware of this historical background.

His comments about the campus environment of the university were much more positive than his remarks on TRNC. He compared it to some other universities in Turkey and felt that this was the most beautiful of them all. He liked the scenery and architecture in general because he found them out of the ordinary. In terms of education he had very high hopes. He was aware that the institution was famous for its competitive atmosphere and was eager to participate in that competition. We specifically talked about his ideas on learning English and his expectations regarding that issue in this higher education institution. He told me how he had first encountered English and the place of the language in his life in detail.

When I asked Seyit about his English learning experiences, I found out that he had always been interested in learning English. In fact, it was not just English and he would like to learn other languages as well. He took a few English courses at secondary and high school which he called 'very basic'. His first real-life encounter with English was when he was working as a waiter in a hotel during his high school years. The hotel would have many foreign customers and Seyit used to try to communicate with them in English. He also used to work in touristic seaside provinces in summer. This required him to talk to foreign tourists and other workers who came from abroad.

I was able to speak to a foreigner for the first time in Antalya. You get stuck and you cannot say anything at first, but later on you eventually tell what you

are trying to say... This was my first encounter and it made me curious about English.

Besides his contact with foreigners in his job, music and TV series in English increased his interest in the language. He suggested that learning English was always important for him and it had become even more important now that he was a student at Challenge University. The more obvious reason was the fact that the medium of education in the institution was English and he was going to depend on it in his department. In addition, he considered studying at Challenge University and learning English there as an opportunity to establish contact with the outside world. He was sure that learning English would provide him many opportunities for his career in the future as he was thinking about starting a career in academia. Although he continuously expressed that he was very happy to have the chance to learn English in that particular institution, he also talked about some of the problems he was having:

I am always anxious... I always want more. For instance, yesterday was a national holiday so we (as a group) just hung out and did not study. I felt really uncomfortable because I got used to studying every day, so when I went back to my room at night I had a quick look at the book. Everybody says that languages are very easy to forget – what if I forget it? I feel anxious about this but other than that I think I am doing well.

Seyit cared about his progress a lot. He was very happy as he was able to start forming sentences in a very short time and he was able to follow the lecture which was in English. Then again, he did not want to fail and this made him anxious. He talked about his instructors who motivated them to try to speak without being afraid of making mistakes. He really looked up to his instructors and followed their advice.

When I asked him about his expectations from the year ahead (in terms of the English education he was going to receive) he expressed his belief in the institution, the instructors and himself. He was confident that he was going to pass the Proficiency exam at the end of the year and continue his departmental studies being able to communicate in English. He suggested that this was due to his enthusiasm about learning English.

I realized something about enthusiasm. For instance, I wanted to learn how to play a musical instrument when I was little. I went to a course, but I could not learn it as I was only interested in it. Later, my mother bought me a saz and I figured out how to play it by myself because I was very enthusiastic about it. Now I know that I am going to learn English because I am very keen on it.

He heartily believed that in order to learn and internalize something, one had to be passionate about it. Wanting to have something in a superficial manner was not enough for Seyit. He had this perspective towards learning English, too. We also talked about his thoughts on collaboration among peers during the autobiographical interview. When I asked his initial ideas about the group work he had recently started with his friends in the autobiographical interview, he had mixed feelings. Studying with a group was a relatively new experience for him as the group work he used to do at high school was compulsory. They had to work in the computer labs as groups due to the physical and technical requirements of the hardware they were dealing with. Other than that, he tended to study individually throughout his education in order not to get confused by multiple opinions coming from group mates. On the other hand, he felt that group work was necessary specifically to learn English as

they were going to learn it from scratch. The main thing that made him happy about this new group work experience was that he was having a lot of fun while studying. His initial reflections about his new collaboration were very positive and he was quite enthusiastic to work as a group.

3.3.2.2. Hande

Hande was born and raised in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. She was the only child of a middle class family and had a happy childhood. Her primary school years started in a state school and she remembers having a very crowded class. There was only one class for her level and it required 45 students to receive education together. She considered herself a smart, but a lazy student. School was a place she liked, but she remembered getting bored a lot during the classes. Studying was not her favorite activity due to her hyperactive nature. She blamed it on ‘the mischievous child inside her head’ who would try to distract her while she was studying. Upon finishing secondary school, Hande took the Anatolian High School Exam, which provides access to a lot of respectable high schools in Turkey, and she failed. She continued going to a regular state school for her high school education. When she was asked to choose the field on which she wanted to focus for her university education, she had some problems. The following excerpt gives us an idea about how she made some choices regarding her education:

Normally, I would choose a Turkish-Maths (TM) path, but my family insisted that I go for Maths-Science (MS). So, I had to study Maths-Science for 4 years at high school. After all that time, I decided that I would like to become a lawyer for which I should have chosen the TM path. I took the University Entrance exam, but I failed it as I had no idea about the things taught in the

TM department. Later on, I went to a private learning center for a year and got prepared for the TM curriculum.

Hande was not able to choose the path she knew she wanted because of her family's wishes. The four years she spent focusing on MS did not help her at all at the university exam, so she had to spend another year to retake the exam. It was when she had succeeded in the exam and had the chance to go to Law School when she heard about Challenge University in TRNC. She wanted to become a lawyer, then again she was not sure whether she would be able work as a lawyer freely because of the current political state Turkey was in. One of her friends who was already planning to study at Challenge University encouraged her to study there as well:

I was prejudiced towards TRNC, as you might guess, and I had never felt the need to do some research about the higher education institutions on the island. My friend persuaded me to think about the option. She told me about the Psychology Undergraduate Program, which was a major I had not thought about before. I decided that I would not be able to work in Turkey as a lawyer, so I chose Psychology instead.

It seemed that Hande's coming to TRNC would not have been possible if it had not been for her friend's influence. The prejudice she mentioned is an important one as all the other participants mentioned it more than once during their interviews and ethnographic observations. TRNC has a number of private universities whose quality of education has been debated for many years. There is a general negative impression about the students who choose TRNC for their university education as the universities in TRNC are somehow considered places that you go unless you have no

other chance. Apart from being stereotyped as failures, students who come from mainland Turkey to TRNC are also depicted as partying types who do not have the desire to study at all. The institutions are also criticized for giving diplomas away as long as the student pays the tuition fee. Due to all of these, Hande was skeptical to study on the island, but she seemed confident about the quality of education she would receive at Challenge university:

After all, even though it is a branch of the main institution, I am studying at one of the best universities of Turkey and I heard that it is famous for the quality of its English education.

She had much more to say about living in TRNC and specifically on campus. As a person who had never been to the island before, she quite liked it. The first adjective she used to describe TRNC was ‘different’. Hande came from a big city known for its icy cold weather and it was natural for her to call this small island with its scarce traffic and warm climate ‘different’. She mentioned this difference as very positive and felt that the tranquility of the island and the campus had a positive influence on her school performance. She felt herself more relaxed and rested physically. Another thing that she considered positive about TRNC was the transformation it caused in her character:

I have realized here that I am an individual now. This is the best thing about living in TRNC and on this campus. Everyone always talked about how different being a university student was – what a true statement! I make my own decisions now and act according to those decisions.

Hande felt that she was becoming an adult thanks to her experiences in her new environment. She was living away from her family for the first time and she

considered it ‘a big risk’. She was the only child of her family and had a close relationship with them, so at first she was worried whether she could make it on her own. In the end, she made it and was very happy about it. She also mentioned that she had become more responsible as a student since she came to Challenge University:

It has always been like ‘I will study tomorrow, I will study later’ – typical student psychology. But now I am saying ‘No, I will study today. I have to study today. If I study today, I can relax and study less tomorrow.’

She considered herself a changed person after her arrival at university and suggested that this affected her studying habits positively as well. I also wanted to know her thoughts about the education she anticipated to receive in this institution. In the end, the institution was famous for its English education. She took me a bit back in her education and talked about her early experiences learning English. I should say that she depicted a very gloomy picture:

My first encounter with English was in the 3rd grade in primary school because it was part of the curriculum. What I wanted to do was to get rid of it immediately! I simply hated it! I don’t hate it now of course, not in this institution. As I was studying at a state high school, we did not have English lessons after the 10th grade and at the time I thought that this was a wonderful thing. Now I see that I was mistaken and my previous happiness is a disadvantage for me...

Hande and English were not an ideal couple in the beginning. She did not think of learning English as important at all, so she did not pay much attention. She thought being a 9 year-old child was one of the reasons that she did not care – she

simply did not know it was important. As she did not learn the basics, she could not carry on with higher levels and she decided that she could not learn English. She mentioned other subjects such as Maths, Science and Social Studies being her priority back then and she would just leave English 'to wait aside so that she would learn it one day'. After she told me her negative feelings towards English, I wanted to know whether she felt afraid of coming to study in this institution as the medium of instruction was English. She repeated her belief in the institution and elaborated on her learning experience there:

I have to learn English one way or another. I will always encounter it in my life. Before I came here, I felt learning English as an obligation, but now it has turned into a pleasure thanks to my instructors and my friends. Now, I really want to learn English and not because I have to.

She was happy to be learning English in this institution. When I asked her about what learning English would change in her future life, she said that it would make her more active in both her social and professional life. She wanted to communicate with people from different cultures and she thought that English would be the only medium to do that. If she could not interact with a foreigner due to her lack of English knowledge, she would feel passive. She was sure that she would have to use English in her profession and that it was necessary to be active as a psychologist as well. She was happy with her progress so far, but she also mentioned being anxious. The main reason for her anxiety was the exams. How could Hande learn English better? According to her, the answer was 'without exams':

I got 40 (out of 100) from one of the Pop Quizzes and I keep thinking about it. I am anxious and am wondering whether I will fail because of that score. If

we did not have any exams, I could learn English in a much shorter time. I think the only problem is the examination system and it makes me very anxious.

She had some worries about this anxiety, but overall she was confident that she was going to learn English. Everyone was able to speak English, so would Hande be. When we were talking about her expectations from her learning process, Hande expressed her determination to do everything she could to learn the language. She thought that there would be times when she might not succeed and this would be because of stress. However, she was confident that she would eventually get what she deserved for her efforts.

Hande also elaborated on her expectations from group work. Actually, this was the first time she was participating in a study group. She mentioned some positive and negative aspects of it. It was negative for her to spare some of her time to a friend who did not understand a certain topic. However, she admitted that it was mutual and she would be spared the same amount when she was having difficulty with a topic. The main aspect she was happy about was getting help from her group mates. She thought she could learn from the ones who were more knowledgeable than her. Overall, she liked her group and she considered it a harmonious one.

3.3.2.3. Ekin

Unlike the rest of the group members who grew up in cities, Ekin was born and raised in a small Aegean village. Her family was a wealthy one when compared to the rest of the families living in the village and she had a comfortable childhood. She liked living in the village a lot and called herself 'a village kid' quite proudly. Ekin was a very active child and went to school one year earlier than her peers. She

recalls her kindergarten and primary school years as very happy. These are also the years when her ambitious nature started to show itself:

My elder brother was quite lazy – he was clever, but he would not study. My mom would get very upset about this. Therefore, I would always say ‘I will study so hard that I will be the most successful student in the school!’. In fact, I learned how to read and write in a very short time because I was a very ambitious person.

Until her teenage years she lived in the village with her family. When she was old enough to start middle school her family sent her to Manisa, a city close to their village and she went to a state school there. Ekin told me that she was a bit of a tomboy when she was a teenager – a young girl with very short hair who was taking judo lessons. Her adolescence was not a very easy period in her life and she recalled having some difficulties with school. She had to deal with bullies in the 6th grade and her grades were not very good the next year. In fact, she suggested that she did not study much during her middle school years:

To be honest, I did not study much. Back then, I was getting ready to take the national High School Entrance Exams. If they asked me what I did for the exam, my answer would be ‘nothing’. I showed very little effort and it had little positive influence on my school progress, but that was all.

She continued high school in Manisa, in a boarding school this time. Her school was a very strict one and the best thing about her high school years was friendships. Those were the years she made very good friends with whom she stayed in touch even today. When I read through the transcripts in which Ekin talked about this particular period of her life, I realized that they were marked by her parents’

influence. Ekin's relationship with her parents, especially her father, was one with ups and downs. Her father was quite an influential figure in Ekin's life and he was the person who would fuel the competitive spirit in Ekin:

One word from my father, in fact, one look from my father would be enough for me to gather myself and focus on my studies.

Whenever she felt that she could not focus on her studies, her father stepped in and challenged her to do more. Ekin felt that she had betrayed her parents' trust in the last year of high school. She studied very little like she had done in middle school, but this time she had a reason:

I cannot say that I did not study at all, but I did not study much. It was because I suffered from depression due to stress. I was very worried about my future - I was even afraid of it. You know how people are afraid of the dark? I was afraid of the coming year just like that, because I had no idea what was going to happen.

Marked by exam anxiety and worries about the future, high school was not a very successful time for Ekin. She mentioned that her anxiety reached a level which caused her to use prescribed medication. In such a mood, she did not do very well in the University entrance Exam and she felt as if she had betrayed her parents' trust. She still regretted that, but she was also grateful that her parents agreed to send her to Challenge University. Ekin thought that due to her hyperactive nature, this was a big step for her parents' and it indicated that they trusted their daughter.

Ekin was a stranger to TRNC just as Hande and Seyit were. Her first impressions were very negative even from the very first step she took out of the plane:

We landed and got out of the plane... The first thing that upset me was the heat. Normally, I like hot weather, but it was just too hot. I was soaked with sweat and that drove me mad! And I was very grumpy for some time because my family was going to return to Turkey...

Ekin came to TRNC with her parents so that they would help her settle in her dormitory and provide support in her first days on campus. She did not make a very good start in TRNC due to the hot weather, which is around 45 degrees in September when the new students arrive. Also the fact that her parents would be leaving her was a bit depressing for her:

Normally, I am not the family type – I do not complain about missing my family. I stayed in a dormitory for 3.5 years in high school, so I am used to being away from my parents. I did not cry or anything but I could not sleep for a couple of days... The first impression was bad. You are all alone on an island and you are thinking like ‘What am I going to do here!?’

Although she was used to living on her own, being on an island was a new experience for her and she mentioned being prejudiced at first. The feeling of isolation was quite uncomfortable for her. Later on, as she started to make friends on campus, everything got better. Her negative feelings started to disappear and she even started to consider Turkish Cypriot people much friendlier than mainland Turkish people.

Unlike TRNC, the campus made a very positive impression on her from the very beginning. The main thing she liked about it was the location of the campus. She was thrilled that it was far away from the big cities where the main attractions were located. I found this very interesting as I was used to hearing students complain

that the campus was far far away from ‘civilization’. In fact, Ekin called these attractions ‘distractions’ and was happy that she was away from them:

I get distracted by the environment too easily. I want to go shopping and see a movie all the time, but here it takes 1.5 hours to find a movie theater! I do not think it is worth it, I can just watch a movie in the dormitory instead.

Ekin had a tendency to see the positive side of everything and she was doing it regarding the location of the campus as well. Another thing she liked about the campus was its sports facilities. She liked running a lot and did it regularly as it made her feel good. She had also heard about the student societies on campus and was planning to join some of them. We can say that she was a very sociable individual who liked to be in touch with people around her. Apart from all of these, the most striking thing she mentioned about the campus was that it made her feel like home:

As I mentioned earlier, I am a village kid. Therefore, the campus feels familiar to me and I do not feel like a stranger. For instance, there are very few buildings, which is quite nice.

Living on campus reminded Ekin of the times she spent in her hometown. In addition to this, her being used to living on her own seemed to be one of the factors that quickened her adaptation process. While talking about the campus, she elaborated on her current English learning experiences in the Prep School. Before presenting insight into her experiences in a higher institution, I would like to convey the story she told me about her first encounter with English in her autobiographical interview. The first time she heard someone speak English was when she was 5 years old. In fact, this was the time she realized that a language other than Turkish existed:

We were on holiday in Antalya and went swimming in the famous Manavgat Waterfall. I was swimming with my underwear on when I lost my vest into the strong current. I remember that there was a lady saying 'Go, go!' to me. I asked my mom what she meant and she told me that they were foreigners... That was the first time I had thought about other languages.

Although she was very young, she stated that her first encounter with English made her curious. This curiosity grew bigger when she was introduced to the language in primary school. Ekin remembered enjoying learning English a lot and she was very good at it. She described her experience as 'different'; the language sounded so different that she wanted to learn more. She liked it so much that she did not have to study a lot, she would just listen to the teacher and that would be enough for her. A couple of times she stated that learning English was like a hobby for her and that she did not consider it a compulsory lesson. This positive experience lasted until high school, when she was not very eager to learn the language anymore. This was mainly due to a teacher she had and because she did not like the teacher, she did not follow the lessons carefully. Ekin was one of those students who had to like the teacher in order to like the subject being taught.

This conversation brought us to her current English learning experiences in Challenge University. Her first days had not been the easiest:

In the very first lesson, the instructor spoke in English. It sounded strange; in the end we were Beginner students and we did not know English... At first I felt a bit behind due to my prejudice about teachers talking in English all the time. But when I realized that I should not think in Turkish, I started to do the best I can.

At first, Ekin had difficulties getting used to hearing English all the time. She found it strange that the instructors insisted on speaking in English rather than Turkish. Later on, she thought that this would help her learn the language and she started to try harder to get used to it. Moreover, she was showing much effort to learn more in her own time. She loved listening to popular Western music with English lyrics and she watched movies in English with Turkish subtitles instead of dubbed movies. She frequently quoted from a famous US TV series called Vampire Diaries and suggested that watching it helped improve her English a lot. She mentioned the issue of considering learning English a hobby again while she was talking about her learning experiences at Challenge University. When I asked her what she meant by hobby exactly, her answer revealed her anxiety:

It (Learning English) is something fun. I suffered from stress back in my senior year at high school as I considered my lessons as an obligation rather than a hobby. I do not want to go through that again, so I see English as a hobby. I see it as something fun.

Her anxiety about her lessons continued in university. She was worried that she would have a hard time psychologically due to English, so she was doing her best to internalize English as a pastime activity, something that she can learn spontaneously. She loved English, however, she suggested that she was not confident about her progress. No matter how much she studied, she felt that something was missing and that she needed to study more. She had mixed feelings when I asked her expectations concerning her English education in the coming semester.

I do not think that English is something you can learn in a year. This is like a speeded-up program... I think I will succeed. Yes, I will.

Ekin had her doubts about the possibility of learning English in one year, as required by the institution. However, she believed that she could do it. We also talked about her initial thoughts on the group work she had been part of for some time then. She talked about it positively, especially in terms of providing opportunities for critical thinking. The fact that they engaged in discussions helped her remember the subjects better. The main thing she liked about studying with this group was the fact that she could be like herself and she felt that no one judged her for the mistakes she made.

3.3.2.4. Ceren

The final member of the group, Ceren, was born and raised in Mersin which is a southern city in Turkey. Both her parents were teachers and she had one younger brother whom she talked very highly of. Her primary school was a state school nearby her house and she remembered those years as successful and fun. Middle school was even better for her as she had a lot of close friends. When it was time to start high school, she wanted a better one and as she passed the Anatolian High School Exams, she was admitted to a good school. She mentioned her high school years as ‘torture’ and she wanted that experience to be over as soon as possible:

As I changed schools in high school, it was like torture – especially the senior year. I constantly said to myself ‘Where am I!?’ and I just wanted it to end. I focused only on my lessons so that time would pass faster and I would survive.

This excerpt reveals the difficult times she went through after she changed her school. Ceren suggested that the main reason why she described high school as torture was the fact that she had no friends. She had not been able to make friends

after changing her school, so she felt terrible. That was why she devoted herself to her lessons and waited for high school to end. In fact, having friends was a very important issue for Ceren, which I will elaborate on shortly.

When I asked Ceren about her first encounter with English, she told me that it was in primary school. Her first impressions were very positive and she liked the language a lot. During our interview, she smiled when she remembered those years - she even remembered the examples her primary school teacher gave while he was teaching her English. After seeing that Ceren was getting better at English, her parents decided to hire her a private tutor. Her father already knew some English and her mother had always been eager to learn it, so they wanted their daughter to get private lessons as well. The tutor was a Turkish Cypriot from TRNC originally, but had been brought up in London, so it was like being taught by a native speaker. Ceren suggested that she never warmed up to her private tutor and wanted to quit after some time:

I do not know whether I wanted to quit because I did not like the idea of getting private lessons. My English improved a little, but I wanted to quit. I think it might have been because I was only a kid back then and pushing a 9 year old kid by making her get private lessons was a bit too much.

Ceren did not find any fault in her private tutor; however, she did not enjoy private tutoring at such a young age. This negative experience with English affected her perspective towards the language and even her general school performance negatively. It was in middle school when she liked English again thanks to her teachers. As she explained it, Ceren was a student who enjoyed learning provided that she had good teachers. There was in fact another factor which intrigued Ceren's

curiosity towards English. She had Turkish Cypriot cousins living in London who used to visit Ceren's family in summers. Ceren talked about one summer holiday with the cousins which made her want to learn English more:

My cousins were staying in our summer house with their friends. They were speaking in a completely different language and were sharing jokes among themselves. I was trying to participate with the little English I knew and when I said something they used to laugh at me. You know we have the saying 'One person, one language'; I experienced what is meant by that saying in that summer. It got me curious.

Her somewhat mean cousins had triggered Ceren's interest in English, which would even influence her choices regarding her university education. Like Seyit, Ceren mentioned that getting interested in English particularly was a coincidence. She had an interest in foreign languages in general and if it had not been for her cousins, she might have started learning another language. She mentioned that she deliberately chose a higher education institution whose medium of instruction was English. The first reason was her curiosity towards the language. The second one was Ceren's belief that English, as a global language, would connect her to foreign people whom she referred to as 'all people she would be interested in communicating with'. She did not want this enthusiasm go to waste and she chose to study in Challenge University.

Ceren talked about her English learning experiences in Challenge University in a positive way. She had always given importance to having good teachers with whom she could establish good rapport and she had that kind of instructors in Prep School. She liked entertaining activities such as learning vocabulary by looking at

the lyrics of songs and thought that learning English should be fun. She thought that having fun was an important factor in order to be able to learn English in just one year. She talked about some of her study habits that had changed upon starting university. Instead of taking a lot of notes during the lesson and studying those notes at home as she used to do in high school, she started listening to the instructors and engaging in the lessons more actively. Another new habit was studying daily and revising what she had learnt that way.

What about her thoughts on her new environment, on TRNC and the campus? This question revealed that Ceren's family had ties with TRNC, whereas her own contact had been limited. She explained that her mother had a Turkish Cypriot father and a Turkish mother. Her mother's parents lived in two opposite coasts, one in mainland Turkey and one in TRNC, which are quite close geographically. Although Ceren's grandfather was a Turkish Cypriot, her mother had been born and brought up in Mersin and spoke standard Turkish rather than the Turkish Cypriot dialect. Ceren had never been to the island during her childhood. As her cousins lived in Nicosia, the capital city, she had visited them a couple of times and had had a chance to go around some parts of the island. When I asked her first impression about TRNC, she suggested that she was a bit surprised in her first time in TRNC:

When I first came here I said 'So, this is TRNC!?' I had always thought that it would be more like abroad, but it was not like that.

She expressed that she felt a bit disappointed when she first came to TRNC as she had expected to find a more developed country as in Europe for instance. Another thing she felt strange about was the way Turkish Cypriots spoke. When she told me about her experiences, I suggested that TRNC was not a new environment

for her. She partially agreed with it and stated that this was the first time she had been to the part of the island where the campus was located in, so she considered her living space quite new.

Ceren talked about the campus environment and mentioned the things she liked and disliked about it. Negative comments seemed to outweigh the positive ones. The major positive thing she talked about was the student clubs the university embodied. She had already joined the Music Club as she was playing the drums and was very enthusiastic about its activities. Other than that she was planning to join the Scuba Diving Club and the Sci-Fi Club in the upcoming months. Another factor which she liked was having good instructors in the Prep School. The main issue Ceren focused on regarding the campus was the social environment around her. She was surprised, in a positive way, to see that the people on campus seemed to be very friendly. Also, the majority seemed to love animals, which was a very positive asset for her. Her main concern was related to making friends:

The main thing I complain about is not having made friends yet. This discouraged a lot of people and some even left the school. Some of the people I know and my classmates were among the people who quit, but I am trying not to give up. Eventually, I will have friends.

She mentioned some students dropping out of Challenge University as they felt very lonely. Although she thought positively about the upcoming months, it seemed that she was quite worried about the possibility of not finding friends. In fact, this was the main issue Ceren talked about repeatedly in her autobiographical interview. She gave utmost importance to having friends in her life. Having close friends was what made her middle school years the best in her life and lack of friends

was the reason why she considered her high school years nightmarish. Now that she was in university, she was in need of making close friends. When I asked her how English education had been going at Challenge University so far, the main thing she talked about was this issue again:

I am a newcomer on this campus. If I can find good friends, to whom I can ask about that day's assignments or offer studying together, it will be better. Then, I will be more motivated to study. However, as I am new here, I am finding it difficult to make friends and it is a bit frustrating for me.

When she was talking about this issue, her mood seemed a bit down and it was clear that the issue was an important one for her. One positive thing she mentioned was that she had made friends with some international students which seemed to have a positive influence both on her mood and her progress in English. What I found interesting was the fact that she did not consider her group mates as close friends yet. In fact, she was quite cautious regarding that issue:

I think we still need time to see because it has not been a long time since I met them. I think this is the case for any group, you need time to see.

Ceren expressed that she liked studying with her group and it was good when they were together. She told me the story of their group, how she was the last one joining the group and how coincidental their studying together had been. In the excerpt above, she was describing how she felt to be in that group. She thought that time was needed to understand whether she felt good in that group or not. I noticed her cautiousness when it came to evaluating her new peer group and did not ask about it further. However, she elaborated on this issue more suggesting that she was a very shy person:

I always expect the first move from others. Someone who does not know me thinks that I am a very cold person. After they have made the first move, they say how mature and friendly I am. This is how I am and that is why I give so much importance to making friends. I am not a people person, so I am happy to be in this group coincidentally.

This excerpt gives us a clue about Ceren's character and also shows us her anxiety about making friends. Her shy character prevented her from socializing with others easily, especially for the first time, so it was important for her to find people who would be willing to make the first move. Her group mates seemed to fit that category and Ceren was happy to be with them even if it had been as a result of a set of coincidences. She had also mentioned in the interview that she was used to having people around her and to asking them questions while she was studying. This had been like that since her childhood and it was another reason why she was in need of friends. Overall, she thought that her group had a good system of studying and they collaborated well when they were dealing with projects and assignments.

3.3.2.5. The CoP

As one of the participants suggested, the four students' forming a study group had been rather coincidental. They told me this story the first time I approached them to ask whether they would like to participate in my research project. After noticing them while I was observing different Beginner classes to recruit participants, I asked them whether we could have lunch together after the lesson. The first time I heard the story was during lunch and the group talked about how they met enthusiastically. Later on, they shared more details of this story in the interviews.

Initially, the collaboration had started between Hande and Seyit during the registration period in Ankara in early September along with their relationship as a couple. Once they came to the campus in TRNC, they spent a lot of time together. They stayed in the same dormitory; however, they were in different Beginner classrooms. Hande was classmates with Ekin and Ceren, who already knew each other as they were staying in the same dormitory room. When the institution started with the streaming policy, Seyit had a chance to change his classroom and he requested that he was transferred into Hande's class. Therefore, two weeks after the Prep School opened, the four participants ended up in the same classroom. Hande and Seyit had already formed a small study group of two and went to the library each evening. There, they used to run into Ekin and Ceren separately. One day, they decided to grab something to eat altogether and upon seeing that they seemed to enjoy one another's company, they decided to study together. They were already studying in the same library either as a pair or individually, so why would they not try studying as a group?

While presenting the theoretical background of this study, I referred to the CoP concept as introduced by Wenger (1998). I also referred to the model Wenger et al. (2002) presented regarding the structure of a CoP which makes it different from other groups of people. The model had three fundamental elements: A domain, a community and a practice (pp.27-40). I was able to call the students I worked with as a CoP as their interactions were shaped around these components. Firstly, they had a shared area of interest or *domain* which was to learn English. They had this common goal and their agenda was shaped around this goal. This domain was the main reason they gathered in the first place. Secondly, the four students constituted a *community*.

They were a group of individuals who interacted and collaborated around a common goal. They established intimate relationships, exchanged knowledge and had a group identity thanks to their common pursuit which was to learn English at Challenge University. Finally, they formed a *practice* together. As suggested by Wenger et al. (2002), they developed, shared and maintained knowledge regarding English and created a common learning space for all group members. This practice was not something new as there had been other practices in Challenging University with the same or a similar domain. However, this practice was unique with its participants and the experiences, knowledge and stories they brought into the CoP.

The institution was made up different CoPs on various levels such as the administration, faculty members, students studying at different departments and so on. Inevitably, the CoP I worked with interacted actively with at least one of these CoPs. In such a complex setting, I aimed to focus on the learning experiences of one CoP in much detail within the scope of this study. In this section, I presented the setting in which these interactions took place and the participant stories by giving detailed accounts of the participants' life and learning experiences and their thoughts about their new context.

In the next section, I will refer to how I analysed the data and elaborate on the coding and interpretation process.

3.4. Data Analysis

During the data collection period, I had already started transcribing the interview data and referred to the data repeatedly while writing the highlights. The first step of analysis was to finish transcribing the interviews verbatim and continue with the selective transcription of the observations. I had to be selective while

transcribing the observations because I wanted to keep the data that would be useful to explore my research questions (Lapadat, 2000, p.208). Once the transcriptions were finished, I read through all the transcribed data and noted down categories I had written in the highlights. The reading part was crucial for the analysis process as it helped me “to obtain a *general sense* of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning” (Creswell, 2009, p.185). Then began the coding process during which I used MAXqda, a qualitative data analysis software. By using this software, I read through all the data again in order to start labeling and classifying them by identifying certain patterns that seemed to reoccur (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Seidman, 2006). I used a different color for each label or code and this allowed me to see which codes were interlinked. While coding the data, I constantly referred to the research questions I aimed to explore in order to remain aware of the phenomenon I inquired into and to eliminate the data that was not directly related to my research foci (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p.260). During the coding process, I made a list of all the codes I identified and updated the list frequently as more codes were created (See Appendix D for the initial code list).

Once the coding process was over, I focused on identifying emergent themes. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, some categories had already emerged as I was writing the weekly narratives based on my observations. After the open coding process, I was presented with similar yet more detailed groups of codes when compared to the ones from the highlights. To identify themes, I gathered the codes, analysed them and tried to identify the possible common points among them (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p.268). At this stage of analysis, I also made use of code frequencies to find out the words and/or phrases which were repeatedly mentioned

by the participants (see Appendix E for the list of code frequencies). I interlinked these with the research questions I aimed to explore and this interpretive process led to eight main themes which I will present in detail in the *Results* chapter.

While setting the theoretical orientation of this study, I mentioned the place of experience in learning by referring to John Dewey's definition of experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), two prominent researchers and theorists who advocate the use of narrative inquiry in educational research, suggest that "experience happens narratively" (p.19). As individuals live life or experience it, they create continuous stories that include the past, present and the future. Narrative inquiry, as a way of understanding experience, is then "stories lived and told" (p.20).

As one of the aims of this study was to present a group of learners own thoughts and perceptions about their English learning process, the data analysis process was influenced by narrative inquiry methods. These methods were ideal for analysing and interpreting participant interviews and observations as they enabled me to "present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness (Duff & Bell, 2002, p.209). Narrative inquiry (henceforth NI) is specifically fruitful in educational settings in which the institutions, communities and the people who are parts of these communities interact dynamically (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, pp.66-67). As a teacher researcher, I was already a part of the ongoing narrative and was located within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space which embodied the past, present and the future of the institution (p.55). Therefore, I had the advantage of learning about the learners' narratives as they experienced and told them. By using NI, I was able to explore the complexity a group of learners' learning experiences as

their story unfolded “the complexities of characters, relationships and settings” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.4).

The analysis process required much time and meticulous work in order to present as valid and reliable account of the data as possible. In the following section, I will explain the particular steps I followed in order to increase the validity and reliability of the research data.

3.5. Qualitative Validity and Reliability

As in all research methods, *validity* and *reliability* requires utmost attention in qualitative research (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p.2). In qualitative inquiry which relies on interpretation, these two concepts take a different shape from positivist paradigms and thus require other steps to be undertaken by the researcher. In this particular study, I referred to several checklists provided by prominent researchers (e.g. Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013) who elaborated on the methods that should be used in order to increase the validity and the reliability of qualitative data.

As for validity or “the accuracy of the findings”, the first method I applied was *triangulation* (Creswell, 2009, p.190). I collected data from various sources and compared them to increase the validity of the data. To illustrate, I added questions to the interviews regarding important incidents that occurred in the study group observations in order to find out whether what I observed was in line with what actually took place among the participants. Moreover, as part of member-checking, I shared the results with the participants and received their feedback as to whether my interpretations were in line with their learning experiences in a CoP or not (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I also used some methods to increase the reliability of the research data which can also be referred to as “the stability or consistency” of data (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Firstly, prolonged engagement in the field helped me gain deeper insight and to present various perspectives of the learners through thick descriptions of both the participants and the context in which these participants created learning experiences; specifically while I was presenting the findings (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Secondly, persistent observations enabled me to identify the reoccurring incidents and gain a more holistic perspective related to how learners interact and how these interactions are linked to their learning processes (Bassey, 1999). Thirdly, a second coder with expertise in educational research, specifically qualitative inquiry, reviewed the codes and provided comments during the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Finally, I myself as the researcher checked the transcriptions to eliminate mistakes, compared the data with the codes constantly and wrote memos for the codes so that I would have consistency in my research (Creswell, 2009, p.190).

In this section, I provided details regarding the meticulous data analysis procedure which included the steps mentioned above to increase the validity and reliability of the data. Upon analysis, eight main themes emerged regarding the research questions I explored. In the chapter, I will present these themes in detail by referring to the participant accounts.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, I will present the themes emerged upon analysis of observation and interview data. I will firstly give a very brief overview of the results and then present the themes separately and in more detail by referring to learners' own thoughts regarding their interactions, collaboration and English learning processes.

4.1. Summary of Results

In this section, I would like to provide a brief summary of the results of this study. My inquiry in this study was twofold. As part of my first research question, I wanted to explore how a specific group of Turkish learners of English, who were new to a university campus, interacted within their community of practice. My second aim in this study was to explore how a particular group of learners viewed their relation between their collaboration as a group and their English learning processes. Regarding these research questions, the data I collected by means of observations and interviews revealed emerging themes during the data analysis process. The table below summarizes the emerging themes related to both research questions:

Table 3. Summary of the emerging themes.

Q1a. How do a group of Turkish learners of English, who are new to a university campus, interact in their new environment?
Scaffolding through Sharing of Expertise <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being Interdependent
Making Decisions Based on Negotiation

<p>Ensuring Harmony in Group Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a Joint Enterprise • Roles and Routines • Pace and Equal Participation •
Having an Intimate Relationship
Expectations from Group Work and Group Mates
Interactions with other Peers and Group Identity in the New Campus
Trying to Catch up in a Continuous Race
Q1b. How do these learners view the relation between their collaboration with peers and their English language learning processes?
Group Collaboration and its Influence on Learning English

The findings related to both research questions are by every means complex and multifaceted. As can be seen from the table above, regarding the first research question, the learners' interactions were found to be shaped by mutual help (scaffolding) including sharing of expertise and interdependency, making decisions based on negotiation processes, harmony in group work achieved through having a joint enterprise, roles and routines and ensuring a similar pace and participating equally, having an intimate relationship or friendship, having similar expectations from group work and group mates, group identity influenced by other peers outside the CoP and time constraints resulting in conflicts. As part of the second research question, the findings suggested that there was a relationship between collaboration and learning and that learning took place collaboratively. The factors influencing the collaboration and the learning processes of the participants were closely interrelated with the factors that shaped learners' interactions. To illustrate, having an intimate relationship both influenced learners' interactions by building a friendly atmosphere

in which learners felt safe to express themselves and it also influenced learners' English learning processes positively since their intimacy resulted in caring for one another's success. Similarly, as the learners had similar expectations from group work and group mates, this reflected on both their interactions and collaboration during their English learning processes positively. In other words, *being on the same wavelength* resulted in becoming members of the learners' CoP as well helping them achieve learning goals more easily. The following figure presents a visual summary of the findings:

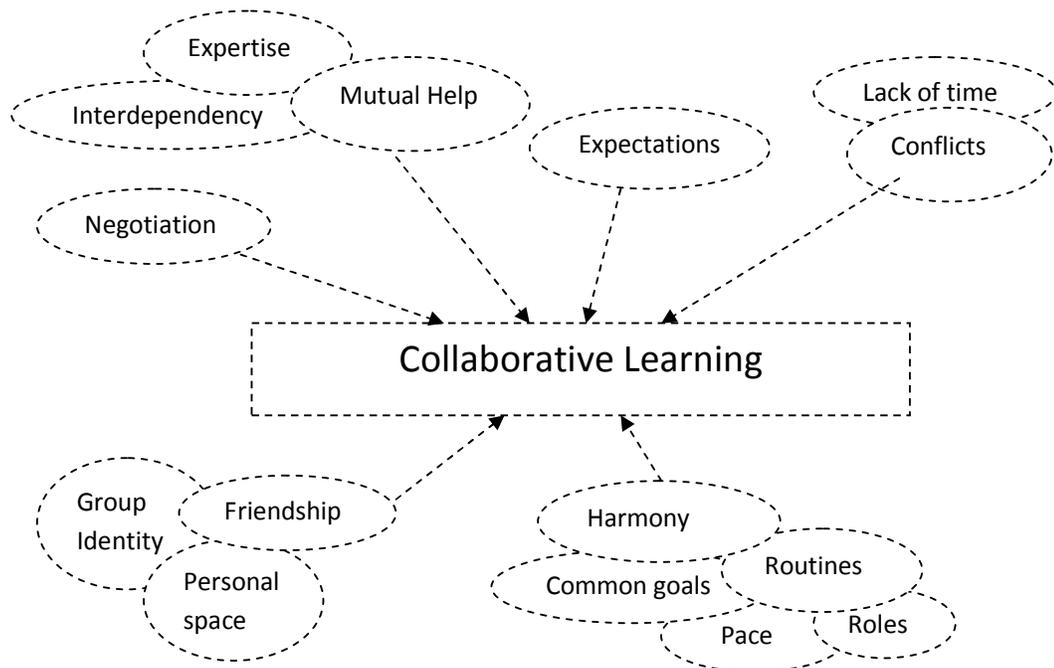


Figure 2. Visual representation of research findings.

As the themes emerged after data analysis tended to overlap and revealed to be interconnected, the themes in the following section are the major categories related to both the participants' dynamics of interaction in their new educational setting and their own reflections on their English learning experiences and processes in a group.

In the following section, I will discuss these themes separately in the order of importance as suggested by the coding process.

4.2. Emerging Themes

4.2.1. Group Collaboration and its Influence on Learning English

As I mentioned above, one of my main foci in this study was to explore whether the participants established any kind of relationship between their collaboration as a CoP and their English learning experiences. The interview data revealed that the participants directly linked collaboration and learning English. In fact, they suggested that learning English was both their main motivation and goal to study as a group. Before elaborating on this link, I would like to present the participants' own definition of collaboration and why collaboration is important for them. Below, you will see each participant's definition of collaboration as they defined the term in FG11:

Ekin: *I think collaboration means exchanging information. It could also mean correcting something we know wrongly.*

Seyit: *For me it means getting extra information and strengthening your knowledge about something. Also, learning quickly...*

Hande: *I think it means getting help from someone else when we want to achieve a goal and also achieving that goal in an easier way.*

For Ekin and Seyit, collaboration was closely related to receiving information, correcting and/or completing one's knowledge and also learning quickly. Hande referred to collaboration as receiving help from others to achieve one's goals and to learn more easily as this was their main goal. When we look at the participants'

definitions, we notice that the keywords *information*, *knowledge*, and *help* stand out. I frequently came across these keywords while I was coding the data and working on the emerging themes. Therefore, they are also the foundations of the themes emerged as part of the second research question.

After defining collaboration, the participants talked about the positive and negative aspects of it. All participants agreed that the positivity and negativity of collaboration depended on the mood of the people who are part of that collaboration. For instance, Ekin and Seyit suggested that when one was in a negative mood, i.e. tired, fed up, distracted etc., engaging with others could have a negative effect on him/her. If this were the case, s/he would like some privacy and would refrain from group work. Regarding the negative aspects, Hande added that collaboration required sparing your own time for a group mate, which would mean sparing less time for yourself. Other negative aspects of collaboration which were continuously expressed by the participants were stress and tension, being interdependent, time constraint and negotiating different ideas and characters. Most of these aspects were interrelated and triggered one another. To illustrate, when the participants had limited time to finish a project, stress and tension would dominate their study session. Similarly, being interdependent on one another created anxiety among them regarding their future studies. I will elaborate on these aspects in more detail within the relevant themes that emerged during data analysis process.

Upon referring to these negative aspects, the participants mentioned that the positive aspects far outweighed the negative ones. Hande focused on the mutuality issue which made their collaboration a positive experience and stated that even though one has to spare his/her own time for a group mate, that group mate would do

the same for him/her which would be very beneficial. For Ekin, the most positive aspect would be completing her knowledge by consulting a group mate:

As I mentioned earlier, you might know something wrongly, might have learned it in the wrong way, or might have misunderstood the instructor. In the end, the instructor is speaking a different language and we might understand it differently. If you express your idea and your group mate says 'the instructor said this, do you remember?', then it is very beneficial for you.

What Ekin referred to as an advantage of collaboration was completing one's own knowledge with the help of other group mates who shared their own knowledge or expertise on the same issue. This was particularly important while learning English, which was a new language for them and which could lead to difficulties in understanding. The participants mentioned a long list of positive aspects of collaboration which included having fun, sharing responsibility, providing opportunities for language practice, gaining self-confidence and making adaptation to the new context easier. Here I would like to focus on only some of these positive aspects as I will refer to the others under different themes further on. According to the participants, one advantage of collaboration while learning English was the opportunity it provided to practice the language being learned. The participants shared their views on this issue in FGI5, which aimed to reflect on the semester as it was the final FGI:

***Seyit:** First of all, we are learning English now and we are practicing the language thanks to group work. I think English is not something you learn*

alone. Sometimes we speak in English, sometimes one of us says a new word and we remember it. We correct the way we speak and our pronunciation of words. Therefore, I think that group work has given us an opportunity to do practice, especially with these kinds of things and specifically to learn a language.

Ekin: *After all we are learning a language... A friend of mine said to me 'Although I study a lot I cannot speak English! If you gave me a piece of paper I could write what I wanted to say though.'. But these people say that they cannot talk in English with people in real life. I think we practice the language as a group, so it has a positive side to it.*

Hande: *(Suggesting Seyit and Ekin mentioned everything) I agree with my friends.*

The participants suggested that their collaboration helped them practice English more, specifically their speaking skills. In every SGOBS I participated in, I witnessed that the participants code-switched a lot during their collaboration. This was evident even in the very first SGOBS although the students have been officially learning English for only a couple of weeks. They would speak in Turkish most of the time; however, they would ask simple questions such as 'Give me the book' or use vocabulary items such as 'dictionary' in English. In addition, it was their routine to read every sentence in English out loud, which seemed to help them focus on the correct pronunciation of words. The participants suggested that another positive influence of group work on learning a language was regarding gaining confidence about their knowledge of English. Hande and Ekin shared their thoughts about it in FGI5:

Hande: *I think it made me more self-confident. For example, if Seyit does not understand a certain subject, I can easily say ‘I understood it and I can tell you about it.’ You trust yourself and help your friend. This increases your self-confidence. Also, if there is something written on the board and it is wrong, we can tell the instructor that it is wrong. I would not do that before because I would hesitate that my answer was wrong. Now that we are used to correcting mistakes in our group work, I can correct that mistake, too. It does not matter even if you are wrong. The important thing is to trust yourself.*

Ekin: *I think so, too. For example, normally I could not discuss things with people. I mean it was like that in the past, but now I can do it because I know that subject well. I trust in my knowledge.*

What the girls suggested was that their collaboration had encouraged them to express their knowledge in a more comfortable and confident way. Both of them stated that they were not able to do that before group work because they were afraid that their answers might be wrong. Making mistakes was still a possibility, but they did not consider it important. The important thing was to share their own ideas and knowledge with confidence. As they were used to doing this in their regular study sessions, they felt more confident about their knowledge of English. I had a chance to observe this increase in self-confidence throughout the data collection period. In their initial gatherings, the students were shy when it came to answering the questions and would ask for others’ approval all the time. However, as their group work progressed, they were more comfortable while speaking out and defended their own answers heartily against the others’ when they felt necessary.

The final positive aspect as mentioned by the participants was group work's contribution to the participants' adaptation process to their new environment. Seyit explained why he thought group work contributed to this process:

I think it made us more sociable and helped us be more inclined in the lessons because English was quite unattractive for all of us at the beginning. We wanted to learn it, but we found it difficult and unattractive. We used to say 'We are supposed to study Psychology and we are dealing with English instead!'. I think our collaboration helped us get over that. Now, we do not talk about such things. I think it made us adapt.

Seyit admitted that they were quite prejudiced towards English at first and considered it as an obstacle blocking the way to their departmental studies. However, as they engaged in group work, their collaboration as a CoP changed their perspective and helped them get used to their new environment including the new educational system. The other members agreed and stated that they adapted to the new things around them more easily as they went through this process together.

The participants reflected on their collaboration with its positive and negative sides. The things they mentioned in their interviews regarding both sides of their collaboration suggest that they were aware of the different dynamics of their collaboration and generally thought of it positively. The main advantage of collaborating for them was the fact that it helped them to a great extent in their English learning process. As I mentioned above, I will elaborate on the participants' thoughts on the other aspects of group work within the related following themes.

4.1.2. Scaffolding through Sharing of Expertise

Scaffolding, which stands for providing help in Vygotskian terms, was the most frequently mentioned aspect of group work in the interviews and it was a notion present in each of my observations. Sharing of expertise was the way the participants provided scaffolding for one another during their English learning process. They were very generous about sharing what they knew best and were also very eager to find out about other group members' expertise. It is important to note here that I am using *sharing of expertise* and *sharing of knowledge* as synonymous. Firstly, I would like to present examples of scaffolding from the SGOBSs. In all these outside sessions, I observed that the participants were constantly teaching one another and learning from one another simultaneously. The following excerpt is from SGOBS3 and exemplifies scaffolding in its simplest form:

Ceren: *How is the word exercise written?*

Ekin: *It is e-x-e-r-c-i-s-e.*

Ceren: *Okay, I got it.*

In this short exchange, Ceren asked Ekin how to spell a certain word and Ekin answered it. With the help provided by her group mate, Ceren noted the correct spelling down. The participants' study sessions were based on this kind of immediate help provided by different group mates. A longer dialogue in which the group mates were helping one another is as follows:

Hande: *'Nancy is my _____.' What might the blank be?*

Seyit: *It continues as 'Ms. Johnsy is our teacher.'*

Hande: *If I am their student, then the answer is 'student'! But wait...*

Ekin: *I could say 'Nancy is my name.' Look what it says here: 'Ms. Johnsy is*

our teacher'. If she is our teacher, then Nancy is my friend, my classmate.

Classmate is the answer.

Hande: *Hmmmm.. Yes, classmate is correct.*

The dialogue above took place while students were doing a gap-filling exercise during one of their study sessions (SGOBS5). It can be seen clearly that they were collaborating by discussing and negotiating the possible answers. Although everybody participated, Ekin was on the foreground and she shared her expertise about the topic by explaining how they should work their logic about the question. In all the study group observations, the participants helped each other by sharing their expertise on various subjects ranging from vocabulary items, grammar rules, sentence structures to critical thinking skills. The main thing to ask here is who the expert was in this CoP. Hande answered that question in a straightforward manner in FGI4:

Whoever is better at the subject, s/he is on the foreground. However, everybody has an opinion and participates. It happens like that...

All participants took the role of an expert in their collaboration in line with the subjects they were good at. As they knew each other well, the participants also knew who was an expert on which subject. Therefore, they consulted that specific expert when they needed help. The following conversation is a good example to this:

Seyit: *'Nazım was arrested for his political idea...' Look, here I used a relative clause. I said '...idea which was communism'.*

Hande: *Do not ask me that. Ekin can deal with it.*

This conversation took place in SGOBS9 in which the participants were giving feedback to one another on their speaking projects. Seyit had prepared a speech about a famous Turkish poet and was reading his sentences to the other group members. He had used a complex grammatical structure, a relative clause, and was showing it to Hande. As she considered herself not very knowledgeable about that certain subject, Hande advised Seyit to show it to Ekin for feedback. Later on, Ekin shared her ideas on Seyit's sentence and they moved on with the feedback session. In fact, there were two major aspects of scaffolding: *respect for expertise* and *confidence in expertise*. The former is related to the respect the participants had for a member's comparatively better knowledge about a subject. Ekin shared her ideas about this issue:

I trust both my group mates. I mean, I think of it like 'I do not know this subject, but Hande knows it, so we can do it together.'

Ekin stated that she trusted her group mates' expertise. She would not worry if she could not understand a grammar point as she knew that her group mate(s) who knew the subject better than her would help her with it. The participants suggested that when they first started the Prep School, they would worry a lot if they missed a class fearing that they would not be able to catch up with what was taught in that specific class. However, upon forming this CoP and establishing some kind of trust among one another, they suggested that they did not have to worry about it anymore. Help would be provided in their close circle. The other issue was about the participants' confidence in their own expertise which seemed to have enhanced due to group work:

Ekin: If I know that the idea I put forward is correct, I will say it and leave it to the others to decide. They will accept it eventually (Everyone laughs). I am a relaxed person, I cannot stress about it. I have learned it like that, so I would suggest that my friends have a look at the book to check it.

Ekin expressed the confidence she had in her own expertise in FGI2. We were talking about the issue of making other people accept one's own idea when she elaborated on the issue. She suggested that if she was sure about the accuracy of a piece of information she provided the group with, she would express it openly to her friends. She would not argue, but she would simply ask them to check the book as she was confident in the accuracy of her own knowledge. This kind of confidence in one's expertise resulted in gaining other group members' respect in that particular member's knowledge.

Sometimes, scaffolding took the shape of *challenging one another* in the outside study sessions the students engaged in. In these sessions, one member would take the role of a teacher and ask questions to his/her group members about a subject of his/her own choice. Although each participant took on this role from time to time, it was generally Hande who would voluntarily do this job. In fact, she loved acting like the teacher and teaching her friends. The following excerpt is from SGOBS4 in which Hande was pretending to tutor Ekin:

Hande: Okay, tell me the rules of Past Tense.

Ekin: Well, it is in the past. We use was/were.

Hande: When do we use was/were?

Ekin: If we do not have another verb...

Hande: *So, I gave an example about it today. What was it?*

Ekin: *I was born in Ankara.*

Hande was testing Ekin's knowledge about the Simple Past Tense by asking her some questions regarding its rules. Very much like a teacher, she asked questions to elicit rules from Ekin and also encouraged her to give examples to the rules she mentioned. I was curious about the issue of challenging one another and opened it up in FGI5. I asked them whether there was a certain reason behind challenging one another. Surprisingly, both Ekin and Seyit turned to Hande as they were curious about the answer to that question as well. Hande answered it in detail:

The questions I ask my friends are related to the subjects we have worked on together in our study sessions. I wonder if they have forgotten it as time passed and I want to know whether our study session was efficient – so, that is the first thing. Secondly, we have an upcoming exam and I do not want any of my group mates to have missing knowledge. Also, I get a chance to revise it myself as we write formulae, etc.

An act that seemed as simple as asking questions to a group mate proved to be multifunctional. Hande stated that she had the chance to see if their previous group work had been beneficial when she asked her group mates questions related to the subjects they had already focused on together. This would benefit both herself and the other group mates. Everyone would have the opportunity to become aware of their own missing knowledge as well as a group mate's and also to complete that knowledge together. This would especially be beneficial during the study sessions before an upcoming exam as it would keep everyone's knowledge fresh. Overall, the

participants seemed to have a lot of fun as well as gaining access to new information and revising their previous knowledge in such sessions.

As can be seen from the excerpt given above, scaffolding comprised a huge part of the participants' collaboration. It was an element that shaped their interactions positively by bringing them closer as group mates and also an important factor that helped them gain access to knowledge related to the new language they were learning. Seyit referred to the importance of scaffolding provided within the group in FGI5:

I think you learn better while you are teaching as it enhances your knowledge about the subject you are teaching. You are trying to teach, you manage to teach and you learn, too. It is like tutoring yourself.

As suggested by one of the participants, scaffolding seemed to provide benefits for all parties in group work. It was beneficial both for the more knowledgeable *expert* member and the less knowledgeable *novice* member in terms of learning.

4.2.2.1. Being Interdependent

Besides its number of benefits, scaffolding, which was one of the core elements in the participants' collaboration and learning process, also seemed to bring about a feeling of interdependence among the group members. These students were engaging in group work both inside and outside the classroom regularly. As they got used to studying together, they developed an interdependency on one another which had negative implications for their learning process. In the final FGI in which the participants reflected on the whole semester regarding their collaboration, I asked

them to compare doing an assignment or a project individually to doing the same thing as a group. The participants talked about a certain assignment they were supposed to do recently and the fact that they were not able to do it. The way Hande explained the situation was suggestive of a different aspect of group collaboration:

Yesterday, we got together to do the assignment. Ekin had already started as Seyit and I were a bit late. I suggested that we continue doing it altogether, but Ekin had already answered the first couple of questions so I started to do them on my own. I tried Seyit this time and asked him to do the assignment together, but he wanted to write a paragraph instead... I knew that we would have difficulties in similar questions if we did the assignment together. Then, I gave up the idea as well and thought that we would do it together later on.

As the excerpt suggests, the participants were very much used to doing their assignments together. In fact, Hande thought that even the mistakes they made while doing these assignments were similar, so it would be much easier to go over the questions together. When some of the members of the group wanted to work on something else or had an assignment that required them to work alone, this influenced the others negatively and they tended to stop studying as well. Hande added that none of them did that particular assignment she mentioned, which proved the point that they either did things together or did not do anything at all. When I asked them what might be the reason for this, Seyit questioned their group work:

I do not know - do we consult one another too much? The grammar assignments are difficult, so naturally we do them as a group. We are successful at them as a group. When you do it individually, you carry all the

workload, but as a group, you share the workload and exchange ideas. When you are alone, you think about something but no one tells you whether it is right or wrong. That's why I think we have difficulties studying alone and we cannot concentrate well.

As Seyit suggested, they preferred to study collaboratively as they were able to complete their assignments easily and more accurately that way. It also gave them opportunities to get the approval of their peers and to exchange ideas with them. However, their collaboration had become such a huge part of their learning process that they were not able to study on their own any more. Therefore, a simple question I asked regarding the comparison of individual and group work turned into an eye-opener conversation in which the participants questioned whether they depended on one another too much while learning this new language.

In fact, the participants had already mentioned this issue indirectly in the very first FGI while talking about getting the approval of other group mates during scaffolding. Hande was a bit worried about constantly getting help from her group mates while studying. Here, she mentioned the possibility of having difficulty during the upcoming exam and the others joined the conversation:

Hande: *In the exam this week, I will expect help from my friends and I will stumble...That was exactly what happened while I was answering two sample tests today. So, I think we are now facing a disadvantage of studying together.*

Seyit: *I had not realized that...*

Hande: *I realized it only two hours ago!*

Ekin: *You get used to it. For example, when I am studying alone, I generally think like ‘I wrote this but this part is definitely wrong. I have to ask’.*

Seyit: *Getting help is not a bad thing, though. In the end, you have to process the information in your head after getting that help...*

Hande: *Of course it is not a bad thing, but at that moment (when you receive help) you do not feel alone. However, in the exam you are alone. You see?*

Ekin: *I think that is why we cannot do well in the exams.*

The core of the conversation was the danger that getting used to receiving help might pose during the exams. This conversation provided a moment of realization for all participants. They had to work individually during the exams and Hande suggested that this would be difficult for her. They had been studying together for weeks and had given up studying individually, so it might not be very easy to focus on the questions by themselves in the Midterms. Ekin added that this could be the reason why they were getting low marks in the exam. Here, I would like to elaborate on one thing. As far as I had inferred from my conversations with the participants, Seyit was getting high scores from exams while Hande and Ekin’s grades fluctuated and were much lower than his. Later on, I had a chance to check their grades myself, which justified their statements (For their Midterm grades, see Appendix). It seemed that Hande and Ekin’s fears regarding the interdependency caused by group work actually reflected the reality. Seyit, on the other hand, did not seem to be affected by it negatively as he had quite high grades. Therefore, it could be said that the interdependency factor affected each participant’s learning process rather differently.

In short, scaffolding was the major element shaping the participants' interactions and learning process. The interview and observational data suggested that there were more positive sides to it than negative ones. However, the participants' concern about the possible negative effects of scaffolding due to their interdependency on one another was also an important issue to note.

4.2.3. Making Decisions Based on Negotiation

In every study session the participants collaborated in, I observed that negotiation was a key component in their interaction. As there were different ideas put forward by a number of participants, the need to negotiate ideas, characters and expectations seemed to arise constantly. Each student participated actively in every project, homework and conversation the group engaged in and they always came up with new ideas and /or alternatives. Moreover, students themselves repeatedly expressed the need to negotiate different ideas in the focus group interviews. Below is an excerpt from an FGI that shed light on one of the participants' opinions regarding negotiation:

The thing is... You are not dealing with Mathematics here or solving equations. You are learning a language and you need to discuss it continuously.

Ekin suggested that learning a language was different when compared to other disciplines. It naturally brought discussion and negotiation along. In the same interview she expressed that this kind of discussion was possible through collaboration in group work and that it helped students a lot in their language

learning process. Seyit explained the need to negotiate in more detail and how they do it in the following excerpt:

We have three options, so which one are we going to choose? Everyone thinks that what they are saying is correct because it is the way they understood it... I was sure that I understood it correctly and kept saying 'The instructor told it like that!'. In situations like this, there might be tension, but later we figure it out and we get used to this tension. Someone opens up the book and shows the others the correct way saying 'Look, here it says how to do it, so we should do it like that'... Then everybody understands it. If we did not make use of any sources as evidence, we would have a lot of confusion.

We see that the way the participants perceived something directly influenced the way they negotiate. They put forward their own ideas in the light of their perceptions and tended to suggest that their way should be accepted as it was the correct one. Their characters also seemed to play a role here. If one was more assertive than the other, s/he wanted her/his idea to be accepted and fought for it more harshly. They also liked challenging one another's ideas as well as their own and they constantly tried to negotiate different ideas to make a final decision. Hande described a specific situation in which she was trying to make others accept her answer to a certain question:

One should at least provide support from a book or a lecture note (in order to persuade others). Generally, I do not take notes, so I do not have the proof but I know that my answer is correct... I insist and say 'I am sure about

this'... Sometimes I even get very angry and say 'OK do it however you want!' to my friends.

Hande suggested that she wanted her ideas to be accepted by her group mates at all times. However, she would have some difficulties as she could not provide support to show that she had the correct answer. Even though this was the case, due to her assertive nature she insisted that others accept her ideas. Otherwise, she would get angry and tension would occur among the group members. Actually, this case was not unique to Hande. When everyone put forward different ideas, this caused some conflicts and tension among all the members of the CoP. They tried to negotiate these different ideas and made collective decisions by providing proof from textbooks, lecture notes and also by explaining their point of view in detail. Unless one provided solid evidence or explained himself, his idea was met with suspicion and the negotiation process lasted longer making it difficult to reach a final decision. Here is a short example that illustrates the negotiation process that seemed to cause tension among the group members:

Ekin: *What does 'tube' mean?*

Hande: *We have Youtube you know. What might it be?*

Seyit: *But the one in the book is not the same with Youtube. It says 'London's underground train systems'.*

Hande: *So, it means 'channel'.*

Seyit: *No, it means 'underground'...*

Hande: *(Checks the book) Okay, it says underground here.*

Upon Ekin's question about an unknown vocabulary item, Hande and Seyit started negotiating the meaning of the word. Hande assisted help by providing an example; however, Seyit corrected her by providing support from the textbook. At first, Hande insisted that she had the correct definition, which created some tension between the two. However, after checking the textbook, she accepted Seyit's answer. The participants talked about this tension in the FGIs and considered it *trivial*. They stated that it was not something that happened very often and consider it as a natural component of group work.

The following conversation is from a library study session in which the students were revising the vocabulary items that would be tested in their upcoming Midterm. They were trying to decide on the most effective way for all members to learn numerous words:

Seyit: We have only 2 weeks until the exam and there are too many words ...

Ekin: I am thinking about how we can work on them together...

Seyit: The way I do it is very effective.

Hande: But it will take too much of our time right now.

Ekin: I think yours is more like individual work Seyit.

Seyit: Shall we memorize the words then?

Hande: I think memorizing is a good way. How else can you learn vocabulary items?

Ekin: Maybe we can make use of online vocabulary games?

Hande: I think we should use flashcards.

Here, we see that the students were negotiating constantly in order to reach a final decision. Everybody suggested a different way to study vocabulary: Seyit wanted to make a list of the words, look them up in the dictionary and write their meaning in English. He was aware that this would take a lot of time, but he suggested that in the end they would be able to learn and remember all the words effectively. Hande did not agree with him as she thought they would lose a lot of time trying to understand the meanings given in English. Instead, she suggested using the flashcards she had already prepared and memorizing the Turkish meanings written at the back of the cards. Ekin had a different suggestion and she wanted to turn studying vocabulary to a game. She wanted them to take turns to try and explain the meanings of the vocabulary items to one another so that it would become a guessing game. It was clear that all three students would like to study vocabulary together, but they wanted to do it in a way in which they learned best. They provided explanations as to why they think their suggestion was the best way and tried hard to negotiate. The negotiation process continued for several minutes and ended as follows:

Hande: *(Still trying to negotiate) Pffff...*

Seyit: *What's up? Are you stuck?*

Hande: *Okay then, everyone can study the vocabulary items on their own and then we can ask each other questions about them. How about this?*

Ekin: *So we can pick up 5 words and try to explain them in our own words. I think it will work.*

Seyit: *If we do it my way the work load will be much less and each of us will have less to do.*

Hande: *(To Seyit) But I am telling you that I cannot study vocabulary your way.*

Seyit: *So, what shall we do?*

Hande: *Everybody can study on their own and then we can ask each other questions.*

Seyit & Ekin: *Okay...*

The negotiation process came with its conflicts and it was not always possible to make a common decision right away. About the issue of vocabulary, students decided that they could not study the vocabulary items together; however, they could collaborate to practice them later on. Even if individual preferences clashed, they were eager to find a way to make it a group effort in the end and everybody contributed to the decision making process. Apart from deciding on how to move forward with an activity or negotiating the meaning of a word, giving a common decision was also very important for the participants in situations that could seem trivial at first glance:

Hande: *Can I go out and have a smoke?*

Seyit: *Sure.*

Hande: *Ekin, is it OK if we give a break?*

Ekin: *Yeah, go ahead.*

Obviously Hande needed a break to have a smoke. The fact that she was asking her friends whether she could do so indicated the habit of making collective decisions. Even when one needed a break, there was a need to consult others: Was it OK for everyone to have a break or would one member like to go on studying? In

order to give that decision, the approval of all members was needed. Overall, they tended not to make any decisions without the consent and contribution of all group members.

4.2.4. Ensuring Harmony in Group Work

Upon analyzing the interview and observational data, I have identified another emerging theme to be harmony in group work. This was something the group members paid special attention to and showed effort to maintain. Firstly, they elaborated on what they understood from group harmony. The following conversation reflects their perceptions about harmony in group work:

Hande: *I perceive harmony as having an equal amount of knowledge. This is impossible, so I think we are not a harmonious group at all in that sense.*

Ekin: *When I hear the word harmony, I thought about getting on well with one another because people do not like studying with the ones they do not like. I think we are harmonious in that respect.*

Seyit: *What I understand from harmony is closer to what Ekin mentioned. We like one another as a group and we also like studying together. I think we are harmonious.*

Ekin: *I mean, we have common ideals and these create harmony among us.*

The participants did not necessarily have a single common definition of harmony in group work. While Hande thought of harmony as having the same level of English and considered this impossible, Ekin and Seyit defined it as enjoying the time they spend studying together and also getting on well with one another. The point where they met was about having common ideals. These ideals ranged from

completing a certain project and getting good scores from exams to passing the Proficiency Exam and graduating from Challenge University. They believed having these common goals make their interactions and collaboration more harmonious.

4.2.4.1. Having a Joint Enterprise

The importance of having a common goal or a joint enterprise as Wenger (1998) calls it turned out to be much influential regarding the participants' English learning process. Before I move on to these influences, let us look at how the participants named their common goals:

Ekin: *For instance passing the Proficiency Exam...*

Seyit: *Being successful in the Midterms...*

Ekin: *Yes, smaller exams than the Proficiency like Midterms and Pop Quizzes also count.*

Hande: *Completing a project...*

Ekin: *Or in its simplest form: Graduating from university. This is the biggest goal. Graduating from the department you like. We are here for these common goals and we are working to achieve them.*

The dialogue above showed that their common goals were education-related. Firstly, they wanted to fulfil their goals related to their English learning such as passing the Proficiency Exam. Secondly, they focused on the bigger picture which was studying in their own department and graduating from that department with success. Besides such common goals, the students had a lot of commonalities regarding their physical space. They were in the same class, were learning English from the same instructors, had the same classmates, and were sharing the same

spaces such as the dormitory, dining hall and library as they were living on the same campus. This commonality was not temporary as Ekin and Hande were going to study in the same department and all members of the CoP would inevitably interact in some way until they graduated from the institution. Sharing the context they lived and studied was the major factor that made them a CoP. It was also a big motivation for them to study together and support one another in their learning process. Ekin talked about the professional outcomes of having a joint enterprise in our final individual interview:

When I met Hande and Seyit, I said to myself 'if I hang out with these people, I will not go out of track in the way that leads to my goal. I thought like this and the events unfolded in that direction. Whether you want it or not, you are influenced by your friends and this is also true while studying - you just keep up with them.

Ekin's goals included completing the Prep School education successfully and continuing to her departmental studies. More specifically, her goal was to learn English and make use of that knowledge in every way she could, both in and outside school. Meeting Seyit and Hande was a positive incident as they had the same goals as Ekin. She realized that they had a disciplined studying system and wanted to join them so that she would study like them. According to her, their collaboration proved exactly what she was hoping for and keeping up with each other, the three became a group. They influenced and motivated one another positively to study and learn English after meeting around their common goals.

When talking about the importance of having common goals, Seyit emphasized one point about Ceren, who had dropped out of the group:

Only if the level of the group mates or their goal is the same will their collaboration succeed. Sometimes people's goals do not match – there is one person who has left the group and her goal did not match ours. As we aimed to be successful and had the same goals, we three succeeded in the end.

This excerpt shed light to the relationship between having a joint enterprise and being successful. Seyit suggested that having common goals was a major motivation to succeed in group collaboration and in learning English as well. It was also the reason why they ended up studying as three people instead of four. The alignment of their goals was one of the factors that kept them together as a group and helped them in their language learning process.

One more important commonality among the participants was their wish to meet their parents' and instructors' expectations. Firstly, all participants were driven by their family's expectations which mostly focused on graduating from university. In the autobiographical interviews I conducted to learn about the participants' background, they elaborated on their educational experiences in detail. Ekin, Hande and Seyit had one common thing in their stories: Their families were expecting a lot from them in terms of being successful students. They talked about this issue again in FGI3 and suggested that one of their motivations to study harder was to prove themselves to their family members. Hande's words presented a clear picture of her thoughts related to this issue:

... I was not successful at the University Entrance Exam. I took it again, got into this university, but not with a good score. When you think of it, I would not be studying here if it were not for the money my parents paid. I think I have not had successful educational experiences until now and I have to prove myself to my parents. I think this is my ultimate chance.

Hande was not happy with her school performance up to that point and considered herself an unsuccessful student. She expressed her gratitude towards her parents as they were paying a lot of money for her university education. Her main motivation was to prove to them that she could be hard working and she could succeed even in a challenging institution. The other group members shared her motivation and Seyit shared his story:

I am learning English here and I will learn more. If I cannot pass the Proficiency Exam and go back, everyone would say 'You could not learn English!'. Even if I talk to them in English, they would say so. I mean, I have a fear that I will not be able to prove to them that I have learned English...There is something expected from me and not being able to give that to my family would upset me terribly. It would upset me more than failing in the Prep School.

The fear of not being able to prove their success to their parents was common. Seyit was happy to be learning English and was positive about his future success. However, there seemed to be one thing stressing him: How would he be able to convince his family that he had actually learned English and achieved something important if he were not able to pass the exam at the end of the year? The fact that

the students' success was measured to a great extent by one big exam at the end of the year seemed to worry the participants greatly. Ekin's family's expectations were not very different from that of her group mates' parents:

My family has always wanted me to get excellent degrees because my elder brother was a very lazy student... My mom would get very upset about this, so when I was little, I would always ensure her that I would be very successful when I started school. With that ambition, I did everything myself and did not ask them for help. That's why they still say 'Ekin can do it on her own' and that's also why they sent me here by myself.

Ekin was trying to prove her parents right by showing them that she could really be successful if she set her mind to it. She was determined to meet their expectations and succeed at university despite the difficulties she had experienced during high school when she struggled with low grades. The pieces of stories the participants shared with me revealed another common point among them. They were studying hard to meet their families' expectations and to show them that they could be successful if they wanted. This was another joint enterprise that motivated them to focus on their group work in order to learn English. The participants' other motivation was to meet their instructors' expectations. They suggested that the instructors' were showing great effort to teach them English and that they had to learn it so that this effort would not go to waste. While talking about this issue, the group members referred to a specific incident in which one of the instructors had given an assignment which no one in the class completed. The following excerpt is reflective of their feelings on that incident:

Hande: *The instructor stopped the lesson that day. I felt really bad and I was much embarrassed. I wish somebody had done the assignment, I mean one student would be enough. I noticed that the instructor felt terrible when he saw that noone did it. The other day we had another assignment, but we were so tired...*

Seyit: *I mean we were exhausted...*

Ekin: *Yes, we were and we started doing the assignment at 8 p.m. The instructor's face came before my eyes and I said 'Come on, let's do it'*

Seyit: *We were about to fall asleep, but we did the assignment. Otherwise we would have felt uncomfortable.*

Even though they were exhausted, they finished their assignment as they felt guilty for not showing as much an effort as the instructor was doing. Meeting the expectations of the instructors was another source of common motivation for the participants as they all liked their instructors a lot and felt great responsibility towards them. This commonality helped them continue their collaboration even at times when things got stressful and they got fed up. This also contributed to their harmony as a group.

4.2.4.2. Roles and Routines

Harmony in group work was also closely related to the roles and routines within the CoP the participants formed. They did not seem to be aware of the fact that each member had a certain role in the group and that they had some routines as a group until I asked them about it in FGI1 and FGI4. I had observed these roles and

routines clearly, so I wanted to hear how they perceived these. The first thing they mentioned was the spontaneity of these roles and routines:

***Seyit:** Generally, the person says what s/he would like to do and start doing it.*

***Ekin:** It happens without much thinking actually...*

***Hande:** Well, generally Seyit comes up with an idea and Ekin completes that idea. What am I doing!?*

***Seyit:** Well, in a short time roles emerge.*

***Hande:** I think the roles change according to the activity.*

***Ekin:** Yes, I think it happens spontaneously like the way this group was formed. Someone claims a role, the other person chooses another role...*

***Seyit:** Yes, exactly.*

The participants suggested they took on some roles quite spontaneously. Generally, one member chose a part of the activity they worked on in which s/he wanted to take place parallel to the requirements of the activity. Although this was the case, there were also certain roles participants were more willing to take on during each activity. Generally, Ekin was the writer of the group both inside and outside the classroom. She was the one who took down notes and/or wrote their answers. Seyit was the one who formed the sentences. He constantly referred to books and notes to make sure that they were forming a sentence in the correct way. Hande was more like an editor. She was the one who questioned the way they thought and wrote. Also, she liked playing with the sentences and put forward ideas to express them differently. I observed this to be a routine in each study session I was part of. In some instances, they helped one another with these personal roles and

took on some part of one another's responsibilities. However, generally every member tended to stick to their own roles. That might be the reason why Seyit suggested that they work 'like a factory'. This was also observed by one of the instructors, Mehmet, and he mentioned it in the interview I conducted with him at the end of the semester:

I think they worked good as a team. They could focus on the task and have a successful work distribution. Thus, I believe their collaboration was fruitful.

The instructor considered the group's collaboration as successful and focused on the fact that there was an equal distribution regarding the work load. What he observed was good team work, rather than individual work. We also talked about teamwork with the participants and I asked them whether they had a group leader. Instead of the notion leader, Seyit coined it as 'a person who has more responsibility' and stated that it again depended on the project they were working at. The one who was more knowledgeable in a certain subject tended to be the one in charge in assignments related to that subject. The important thing was to get that day's work done as a group and whoever could answer the needs of the group in the best way would be the leading figure. Other than that, the participants believed in equality among group members and interacted with one another as equals. This helped them keep the harmony in their collaboration.

One analogy Ekin used in our final individual interview summed up the importance of harmony in group work ensured through certain roles and its positive influence on the participants' English learning process:

Collaboration is like the branches of a tree. How can I put it in words – it is like the leaves, branches and roots of a tree. If we think of the tree as a whole, we see that all its parts have their own duty and the goal is to help the tree grow. We have a common goal and we collaborate to reach that goal; in the same way the roots, branches and leaves do.

Here, Ekin used the analogy of a tree to describe the collaboration of their CoP. Very much like the parts of a tree, the members of this CoP had certain duties which were complementary – if one member failed to fulfil his/her duty, the collaboration would collapse. She expressed that these duties served reaching the common goal, which was in their case learning English. Ekin believed that without collaboration, they would not be able to reach this goal and their individual efforts would be useless.

4.2.4.3. Pace and Equal Participation

Another issue they mentioned regarding harmony was the pace of the group. I observed several times that the group members paid utmost attention to achieve a similar pace while they were studying. When one of the members got a bit faster and moved on to the next question, s/he would be warned by the others. The following conversation is a good example for this intervention:

Hande: *Wow Ekin! You have done the 2nd question, huh?*

Ekin: *I answered 3 as well, I think the answer is...*

Seyit: *Ladies, wait. What kind of group work is this?*

Here, there was neither tension nor a bitter tone; however, Seyit politely warned the others to wait up. If they were working as a group, then they should be

dealing with the same question at the same time. We also talked about this issue in one of the FGIs and Seyit summed up the reason for the importance they gave on having a similar pace:

The continuity of the projects and assignments we are doing is important. If somebody has missed something we had dealt with before, s/he will not be able to understand further on and this will cause problems. Therefore, we try to keep up with the one who is left behind. That's why we warn the ones who are faster than the rest.

If one of the group members was a little behind when compared to the rest, the others would slow down to help him/her catch up. This was done in order to ensure that particular member's progress and the group's progress as well. By dealing with this issue immediately, the group would not have to go back to that point again in the future. Therefore, keeping a similar pace helped them to reach harmony in their collaboration.

Another way the group established harmony was through equal participation. The participants mentioned several times that a member of their group should be willing to participate and should take place in the projects actively. I will elaborate on these expectations as part of another theme that focuses on participants' expectations from their peers and group work. As for participation, the students considered it as obligatory to be able to collaborate effectively. Hande talked about this issue and emphasized why active participation was important in their collaboration. She specifically referred to an outside study session in which there was a lot of tension:

That poster project was really bad. I felt bad because I was not able to help the group with anything. I could not participate as I was not very knowledgeable about the topic we were working on. For me, not being able to participate was terrible. In order for group work to be effective, I have to participate in it and contribute to it somehow.

Hande mentioned that specific study session as she considered it ineffective. According to her, the ineffectiveness was due to the fact that she was not able to participate actively. Not being able to contribute to their common work made her feel detached and she considered herself of no use to the group. What Hande suggested was in line with my ten-week observation period. The participants' collaboration seemed to be effective only when everybody participated actively and equally. They paid attention to this equality and negotiated their participation as well. To illustrate, if Seyit was the one who seemed to be talking a lot on a particular study session, he would give the floor to either Ekin or Hande and suggest that they should carry on. This was an important way to achieve harmony in their group work. This also seemed to be one of the reasons why Ceren dropped out of this CoP. In fact, Hande stated that Ceren did not participate in group work much, so their harmony changed for the better after she had dropped out of the group.

4.2.5. Having an Intimate Relationship

The level of intimacy in the participants' relationship was one of the main factors that shaped the dynamics of their interaction and contributed to their language learning process. As I mentioned in the Methodology section, the participants had met at different times for the first time, but ended up in the same Beginner class.

There were multiple levels to their relationship. To begin with, Hande and Seyit had a much more intimate relationship as they had met during the registration process in Ankara before coming to TRNC. They were also romantically involved and spent almost all of their time together. Ceren and Duygu were sharing a room in the dormitory apart from being classmates; therefore they spent a lot of time together outside the classroom as well. All four of them were together in the same classroom and they were also meeting outside to study together. Apart from their study sessions, they did not seem to meet much at the beginning. This trend continued after Ceren left the group; however, in time Seyit, Hande and Ekin became much more than just group mates.

During one of our FGIs, the participants talked about their relationship as a group and this shed light to their dynamics to a great extent:

***Seyit:** I consider our communication healthy. In the end, we engage in group work together and are quite successful at it. I think this shows that our communication is strong. Also, all of us love having fun and fooling around. Naturally, your communication becomes strong, it becomes more entertaining and you like it more.*

***Ekin:** I think that our communication is intimate... I think we're good.*

***Seyit:** And if it were not like that...*

***Ekin:** ...the group would have already fallen apart.*

***Hande:** I mean, we do not have a feeling like 'I wish the study session finishes early so that I can leave!'... We like spending time with one another.*

Although the group members' main aim was to study English together, they did not do it simply because they had to. They met regularly because they liked to be around one another. In the excerpt above, they made it clear that if they had not enjoyed spending time together, their collaboration would not work. I was curious whether it had been difficult for them to achieve this level of intimacy and their response to my inquiry showed how spontaneous everything had been:

Hande: *We have not showed any special effort.*

Ekin: *Yeah...*

Seyit: *Hande and Ekin already knew each other, but they were not as intimate as they are today. Occasionally, when I was going to meet Hande I would see Ekin as well. Later on, when I joined their Beginner class I noticed that Ekin had a sincere character. I am also like that and Hande already knew her, so we three bonded immediately.*

Hande: *I think we can say that it took only a lunch together to become closer.*

Seyit: *After that lunch, I noticed that Ekin had become the Ekin she is now.*

Ekin: *Exactly.. I will not forget that day.*

According to the three participants, the way they bonded had a very natural flow. When I asked them about a possible reason for this spontaneity, their immediate answer was “being on the same wavelength”. They instantly got on well with one another. The second reason was sharing a lot of commonalities such as being in the same class, having the same instructors and dealing with the same courses. Then again, Hande suggested that chemistry was a more important issue than sharing the same physical space and her friends approved heartily:

I think being on the same wavelength is one of the reasons we are three group mates now. I mean, chemistry is a major issue.

What I inferred from the participants utterances was that they simply did not have this synergy that paved the way to a close relationship with Ceren. In the end, they were sharing the same classroom with her, too. However, it was not enough and something did not seem to work among them. Moreover, it was obvious that they considered their group as comprising three of them from the very beginning since there was hardly any mention of Ceren when they were talking about their relationship as group members.

Another important concept related to the intimate relationship among the group members was personal space. While the group members were talking about their relationship, they emphasized the fact that studying as a group did not mean spending a lot of time together apart from the study sessions:

Hande: *Ekin and I, we are not texting each other all the time or going out every day. It is not like that, but we have another kind of intimacy. If I am upset about something, I can call Ekin immediately and ask her to come over. I would not have to say 'please come over' even, 'come' would be enough... She can ask the same thing from me. If I am not mistaken, our intimacy is of this kind.*

Ekin: *Yes, you are right about it...*

Hande: *But we are not always next to each other. She has other friends in other groups as well; but we are intimate about more private matters. What I mean is, I am not shy around Ekin...*

Ekin: *I am not shy around you either.*

Hande: *We are not as thick as thieves, but I think we have a good friendship.*

The girls' conversation revealed a lot regarding the importance they gave to personal space. They had built a close relationship in which both parties would feel comfortable to confide in each other. They trusted one another and knew that they would get help if and when they needed it. However, this did not mean that they would do everything together. They socialized inside and outside the classroom regularly, but they were also involved in other social circles. Seyit elaborated on the kind of activities they participated in as a group of three in more detail:

Actually, Hande mentioned most of it, she and I, we are always together. Sometimes, when we get bored of all the classes we take, we talk to Ekin and decide to do something together. We do fun stuff; we play games, watch movies and cook together. Actually, we in a way use one another to get rid of out stress and to have fun. We do these things together, so I would say that we are intimate. As Hande said, we all have friends in other groups, but the three of us are intimate on private matters.

This excerpt revealed that their relationship was a flexible and a relaxed one allowing them to have some room for personal matters. They spent time together when they felt like it in order to get away from their worries concerning their English education and simply to have fun. Although she agreed with the other participants' views on the relationship the three had, Ekin mentioned something else about personal space:

Ekin: *I like Seyit and Hande a lot and consider them as close friends... Then again sometimes, I say to myself 'These two are dating, I should leave them*

alone!'

Hande: *Sometimes she gets such ideas.*

Ekin: *Yes, sometimes I think like that and sometimes I envy them because they are so sweet as a couple...*

Seyit: *We sometimes say 'Wait Ekin, let's do something together', but she insists on leaving saying 'No no, I had better leave!'*

It was evident that the different levels of intimacy among group members brought along different dynamics in their interactions. To illustrate, Ekin wanted to give 'the couple' extra space and refrained from invading their private space. Overall, their conversations suggested that they had formed a friendship which was intimate yet respectful enough to leave personal space for all parties.

Besides the FGIs, I had a chance to observe the participants' close relationship several times during the study sessions. The following conversation took place while the students were working on a poster project. The students also had a lot of fun during that session and had conversations that signal their intimacy:

Hande: *(cutting a piece of paper in the shape of a cloud) If it were for some of our friends (referring to Seyit), he would cut this paper like an idiot!*

Seyit: *Yes, but I did not go to kindergarten for 15 years...*

Ekin: *15 years!*

Seyit: *(in a sarcastic manner) I dropped out of kindergarten.*

Hande: *I might have grown up in the kindergarten, but both my parents were working, so there was nothing I could do about it!*

***Ekin:** And I went to kindergarten for 2 years. I failed it the first time, what do you say to that!?*

The participants were constantly making fun of one another in a manner which could easily be considered harsh by an outsider. However, no one seemed offended and they had a great time making fun of one another's sarcastic comments. They were always very comfortable around one another and had a lot of fun together. They seemed to have accepted every member as s/he is and were open to criticism. Here is another excerpt which shows that the participants came to know each other well:

***Hande:** (To Ekin) How come an obsessive person like you could cut this paper so unevenly?*

***Seyit:** Wow Ekin!*

***Ekin:** Ssshhh! Do not talk, you two...*

Here, Hande and Seyit were calling Ekin 'obsessive' referring to her perfectionist nature. As the 'writer' in the group, Ekin always bragged about her handwriting and how neat it was. Knowing that she was very careful with details, Hande and Seyit made fun of her because she spent a lot of time cutting a piece of paper. Ekin did not look offended at all and pretended to be angry with them.

Another factor that contributed to the intimacy among the group members was caring for one another. They cared for other members' success in learning English and also about the matters in their personal lives. Firstly they showed great effort so that everyone in the group would be successful. Instead of competition, they

would rather focus on each member's success. Seyit suggested that they felt responsible for one another and paid great attention to mutuality in their group work:

For instance, when Hande asks me about what to write in her paragraph, I show an effort to help her write well because I feel myself responsible for her success. As Ekin said we are sharing ideals and it makes you sad when your group mate who is close to you fails. When you fail, s/he gets upset as well.

The excerpt above is a good example of the group members' intimate relationship and its connection to their English learning process. Seyit mentioned that he felt himself responsible for his group mates' failure and would get upset over it. They were spending a lot of time studying together, so it became a collective effort in the end, rather than an individual one. Therefore, they considered their success to be a collective one as well. Ekin called this 'a kind of mutual responsibility' and Hande suggested that this notion of mutuality made their collaboration work effectively. They also cared for the private problems some members might have and tried hard to cheer them up. Collaborating to learn English was the main agenda of this CoP; however, they prioritized personal issues when it was necessary. Hande summed it up in a nutshell:

If one us is unhappy or cannot focus on the thing we are working on, the other two try to motivate that person. Otherwise, we do not understand anything from that day's study session and we cannot help our unhappy friend either...I really think that there are more important things than lessons. Sometimes you need to give a break.

At times, helping a group mate in need might become more important than revising vocabulary items or doing homework. If one group member is feeling down, the others see it as their duty to cheer him/her up. This is a good indication of their intimacy and the value they gave to one another.

Upon observing the students' interactions both inside and outside the class regularly, I have witnessed their relationship dynamics change in a positive way through time. From classmates who met in the library to study, Ekin, Hande and Seyit became close friends who supported one another during their English learning process and built trust regarding more private matters.

4.2.6. Expectations from Group Work and Group Mates

The participants had clear expectations from group work and other group members, which influenced both their interactions and learning experiences. Focus group interviews revealed these expectations to a great extent and I believe that they also gave the participants an opportunity to learn about one another's expectations. Although each participant seemed to express different expectations, they had a common point. When I asked them whether their expectations about group work matched, they gave answers which shed light to their collaboration. To begin with, Seyit suggested that the expectations changed according to the daily agenda of group work:

I think our expectations change according to the activity we are engaged in.

If doing an assignment is what has brought us together, then our expectation is to get that assignment done.

In the group's English learning process, the members' expectations changed in accordance with the activity they were dealing with. Here, Seyit seemed to focus on the outcome of their collaboration as part of their expectations. His way of explaining the expectations from group work was very product oriented as he identified the most important expectation as *getting the job done*. Hande's expectations seemed to have a different focus. Her main focus was time, which she considered very valuable for their English learning process:

I think, shortly our expectation is that the time we spend does not go to waste. We know that spending time together doing nothing will benefit none of us, so we prefer getting the best we can out of group work and finish the day having done that. What I mean is that we expect to spend our time efficiently...

Here, Hande wanted to express that time was crucial for all group members. It is something never to be wasted, so her expectation from group work was that they used the time they had efficiently. Her words were backed up by the other group members when she talked on behalf them. Ekin took her friends' ideas further and stated that she expected to gain knowledge from group work. The following conversation took place during FGI4:

Ekin: *I expect to gain knowledge from group work. I feel that something is missing when I am working alone...*

Seyit: *You start stalling yourself with other things than studying, right?*

Ekin: *I need Seyit and Hande to be next to me... While we are studying as a group, there is a piece of information that I learn – in fact there is much more*

than just a piece of information, there is a lot that I learn. In the end, I think we complete one another's knowledge.

Although she shared the expectations of her group mates, Ekin's main expectation from group work was to exchange information and to learn more. She felt that she could actually do that when the other members of the group were around. In fact, she had difficulty studying alone as she needed group collaboration to complete her individual knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, the participants' different expectations had a common point: they wanted their collaboration to take them one step ahead in their English learning journey. They did not get together just to have fun or pass the time; their meetings meant much more than that both professionally and personally. In addition to these, all participants mentioned that they were looking for perfectionism in group work. This was a common trait in all of them and they needed everything to be perfect all the time. They did not seem to tolerate failure and/or making mistakes well, which was one of the reasons they spent so much time studying together. They expected their productions to be perfect and creative at the same time. Hande reflected on this issue when she mentioned a vocabulary project the group had worked on recently. They were complaining that it took them forever to finish the project as they wanted to create something flawless and unique:

When we looked at the other students' projects, they were just like the Pop Quizzes given to us. They had prepared some fill-in-the-blanks exercises and that was all... We did not want to do that because we knew someone else was going to do it. So, I think the instructor also thought that our presentation was different.

They seemed happy with their final productions despite the huge amount of time and effort they spent on them. They were driven by a competitive urge and wanted to be the best at all times. I did not observe much competition among the group members throughout the semester; however, competition was evident when it was among the participants and the other students. Although it helped them succeed in doing whatever they were focusing on, I do not think that the combination of perfectionism and competitiveness was always constructive for their interactions and language learning. In one of the library study sessions (SGOBS9), the participants were preparing a poster on relative clauses (See Appendix for the final product of the project). It was a session to be remembered as their perfectionist and competitive nature clashed causing continuous tension among the group members. The following Vignette might give us an idea about the conflicts the participants had during that particular study session:

Seyit: *Okay, let's not dwell on it too much. Come on Hande...*

Hande: *I am not doing anything Seyit... I just want our project to be beautiful....*

Seyit: *I know, but we should make the content good not the shapes of the clouds.*

Hande: *This is the usual me and you know it...*

The participants worked on the poster project for two hours and most of this time was spent arguing with one another. As I observed it, this was partly due to their perfectionist nature and different styles of doing things. The girls spent a lot of time on designing the project and decorating the poster while Seyit insisted that they should not focus on these *trivial matters*. All participants wanted to have a good

production in the end, but their definition of good had drastic differences, which caused tension. Therefore, group members' common expectation of perfection in group work brought along conflicts with it.

We can say that the participants' expectations from group work influenced their interactions and the dynamics changed according to whether these expectations were met or not. When I read through all the interviews, it was evident that the participants had expressed more expectations from the other members of the CoP when compared to the ones from group work. Also, these were expressed in richer detail. This time, their expectations matched perfectly and were like the missing pieces of a puzzle. They talked about how they wanted a group member to behave towards them in their difficult journey of learning English and what s/he should and should not do as a member of that group. The following Vignette presents a fruitful discussion on this issue. During the very first FGI, the participants opened up and I think the timing was very good:

***Hande:** I expect a group member to act as if s/he were also having trouble about a subject I am having trouble with. Let me give you an example about an issue we had with Seyit... It was about a grammar subject which was simple for him, but with which I was having difficulty. He was going to explain the subject to me, but he, not on purpose of course, acted as if he was saying 'How come Hande does not know this subject!?' I noticed his attitude and we started arguing. (Everyone laughs). You feel offended; you feel sorry that you are having difficulty in a subject and in an easy one. And you are asking for help and your friend has an expression of astonishment on his face...Also, I am a person who gets offended too easily, so the person*

opposite me should act and think as if s/he had a lower level of English than me. S/he should behave as if s/he needs to help me even if s/he already knows that subject. Otherwise, I feel humiliated.

Ekin: *Yes, I think so, too. For instance, if I tell someone that I do not know a subject, it would really irritate me to receive a response such as ‘Wow! You really do not know that!?’ Your group mate should not offend you; in the end knowing English is not an innate ability.*

Upon hearing Hande’s remarks, Seyit felt the need to defend himself and expressed that he did not do it on purpose. He also admitted that he would not want to be treated that way by a group mate and apologized. This conversation revealed that each participant wanted all group members to have empathy and to be able to internalize any problem another group mate might be having. They wanted the members to have an understanding, sharing, caring, motivating and helping nature during their collaboration. In fact, Seyit once mentioned that they want the group mates to be ‘something similar to their instructor’ who would provide help without judging. They were very clear and outspoken about this issue. Learning English was a relatively new experience for them and they needed motivation. Any demotivating and/or humiliating comment would affect both their interactions and learning negatively. Everybody agreed that a member of this study group should be motivated to learn English and also should be able to motivate others when they were having difficulties. Seyit shared his thoughts about this issue in the following way:

We all have a desire and motive to study, even though sometimes we fool around a lot... A person who might join this group should be willing to study

as well. I have observed something in group work. If one person says ‘I cannot do this anymore, I am bored!’, the others are affected negatively by this comment. They tend to act like that person – it is like that among all students. So, a person needs to be very active and enthusiastic to be in this group and I think being so is an implication that s/he cares for the others in the group.

Seyit suggested that one should try hard to keep motivated while studying and refrain from comments that might affect others’ performance and group collaboration negatively. S/he also should share other group mates’ willingness to study. During my observations, there were times when one group member expressed his/her wish to quit or did not want to continue studying anymore. At those times there was always someone who motivated the others and encouraged them not to give up. The following conversation took place while the participants were revising adverbs and they were going over the rules together. After a while, Ekin seemed to be feeling a bit desperate:

***Ekin:** I think we can also use two adverbs together.*

***Hande:** Can you give an example?*

***Ekin:** Pffff... I am stuck...*

***Hande:** Noo, just think about a little bit. In fact, if you write it you remember more easily.*

***Ekin:** Okay... Give me two adverbs please.*

***Seyit:** Very.*

***Hande:** Quickly.*

***Ekin:** Okay then, very quickly. Mehmet Hoca is very quickly.*

When Ekin felt stuck, Hande was the one who motivated her to go on. She gave her some advice about the ways to remember the rule and encouraged her to try writing a sentence. Then Seyit joined to help Ekin and in the end Ekin was able to give an example to the rule they were talking about. As Seyit suggested, if one of them had made a negative comment after Ekin's desperation, it might have demotivated them and they might have stopped dealing with that problem. Instead, one of the members encouraged the rest of the group to carry on and motivated them by saying 'let's look at it together' or 'okay, calm down and look at this example'. This seemed to be a pattern and the same issue was mentioned by one of the group's instructors, Will, when he shared his comments about the participants' collaboration in our interview at the end of the semester:

Both Seyit and Hande had a serious attitude towards the task of learning English. This would keep them on task and avoid distractions. Ekin was more of a 'happy go lucky' character, so she would be more susceptible to going off on tangents. It seemed that the influence of Seyit and Hande was stronger on Ekin, which helped her keep a focus on the task more than if she had been working alone.

Will elaborated on the group's dynamics in much detail and suggested that when one member tended to get distracted during the lesson, the others intervened and helped him/her get back to the lesson. As engaging in group work meant focusing on a task together which required each member's attention, the members ensured that this requirement was fulfilled. According to the instructor, it was Seyit and Hande who helped Ekin focus on the task and/or lessons as she tended to get distracted more. What Will observed was in line with the expectations the

participants expressed during their interviews. They considered it their duty to motivate one another so that everyone would be active during group work.

I think that sharing their expectations helped the members of the group to become aware of one another's expectations from the very beginning of their collaboration. Starting from the first FGI, the participants had the chance to convey a clear message to their group mates about what they expect from them and also how they would like to be treated. Obviously, they had not talked about these things when they started a study group together, so it seemed like a good opportunity for them to hear about their expectations. The participants had started studying together rather coincidentally, but the alignment of Hande, Seyit and Ekin's expectations was one of the major factors that kept them together throughout the semester and created synergy among them. Also, these expectations seemed to be the major reasons that led to the departure of one the members from the group. Here, let us look at Ceren's thoughts on group work as well. Although Ceren did not stay in the group long enough to participate in the FGIs, her autobiographical interviews gave hints regarding her expectations from group work and her group mates:

I am now in a new environment and would like to have people around me to whom I can ask questions. I have been like this since my childhood. For instance, my father is a Turkish teacher and I used to ask my parents questions all the time while studying. This is how I am used to studying. I would like my homework to be without any mistakes. So, I am hoping to find an environment in which I can get my work checked and I can consult others.

Ceren's expectations seemed to be on a more individual level when compared to other's expectations. She never mentioned the ways she could contribute to her group mates' English learning process and her focus was more on herself and getting the help she needed. As she suggested, she was used to having someone around her who would help her while studying. In fact, the way she expressed it seemed to imply that she *had to* have that person in order to succeed. On the contrary, Hande, Seyit and Ekin were used to studying individually until their study group formed upon starting university. Naturally, their expectations were shaped during group work unlike Ceren's expectations which were shaped very early on in her education. While Hande, Seyit and Ekin were talking about their expectations, they referred to Ceren, who had left the group after 5 weeks of observation. It was in the autobiographical interview when the first comment about Ceren's different position in the group was expressed. Hande talked about this when she expressed how she felt studying with her new group:

Of course there are some negative aspects, but I generally feel good about it. This is mainly due to being with Seyit as he is my boy friend. In fact, Seyit, Ekin and I are a bit more active and Ceren prefers to be passive. I think the three of us can study together more efficiently. When Ceren joins us we help her; we both feel happy because of helping her and also in a way we get something in return from her later on.

These were Hande's initial thoughts about Ceren's participation in the group work. When we talked about this issue they had only been studying together for 3 weeks (without my presence) and she thought that Ceren was a bit passive when compared to the rest of the group. This did not seem to be much of a problem back

then. However, in time, the participants suggested that Ceren had become more and more passive during their in-class and outside study sessions. When I was transcribing the outside study sessions, I noticed that Ceren barely spoke or commented on the project they were working on as a group. One of the reasons why Ceren stepped back was the problems she and Ekin were having outside the classroom about their common living space. They were having problems as roommates and this tension reflected on their collaboration as well. However, the problem did not seem to be only between Ceren and Ekin. A distance seemed to be forming among Ceren and all other members of the group. While Ceren suggested that this distance was only between Ekin and her, others had different opinions about it. Ekin refrained from making comments and looked rather uncomfortable about the subject. Hande, on the other hand, stated that she was no longer happy studying with Ceren as she was not participating actively. She was not staying in touch with the group and making any effort to come to the study sessions. Seyit added that Ceren was not contributing to their learning process in any way. On the contrary, she was starting to slow them down. They reflected back on this issue in the final FGI when I asked them whether something has changed in their group work after Ceren's departure:

***Seyit:** Maybe this will sound funny, but she was not really present in our group, so how are we to notice her absence?*

***Hande:** Seriously, nothing has changed at all... I think we have removed an obstacle out of our way because we were starting to trip over that obstacle.*

If we remember the group members' expectations, it will become clear that Hande and Seyit did not see Ceren as meeting these expectations. She was not active

and she did not contribute much. That is why they thought her absence in the group did not seem to change things for worse. In fact, from week 5 onwards, I observed more collaboration than conflict in the group's study sessions. Hande, Seyit and Ekin's expectations seemed to be more tuned when compared to those of Ceren, which influenced the participants' interactions and learning experiences in a positive way.

4.2.7. Interactions with Other Peers and Group Identity in the New Campus

Setting

Group members' interactions with other students in their new campus setting seemed to have influenced the way they located themselves within their new setting and also how they formed an identity as a CoP. Before moving on to this influence, it is important to draw a clear picture about the participants' ideas on other students in the university. Having described the new campus setting and the students' opinions of it in the Methodology section, I think it is also important to focus on the participants interactions with other students on campus. As I mentioned before, all participants were happy to be a member of a higher education institution and specifically, the Challenge University. The participants believed that this institution would provide them with a high quality education and many opportunities for the future. Starting from the very first interviews, the participants also expressed their thoughts on the student profile in Challenge University and most of these tended to be negative. Specifically, the final FGI which took place in the 9th week of data collection, revealed a lot regarding participants' thoughts and feelings on the institutions' student profile as they had been sharing the same context with those students for almost one semester by then. The main criticism of all participants was

related to the immaturity of the majority of students. The following excerpt reflects Seyit's feelings about this issue:

I am observing other students and I cannot be a part of their groups. I see their behavior and hear their conversations. I do not want to talk about those issues. I find them very childish. Even their way of talking is childish.

Seyit did not like the conversations that took place among students who were part of a university setting and he was surprised that they were not discussing more important matters such as politics. He thought that the conversations he was hearing on this campus were very much like junior high school conversations. Another criticism was related to student behavior in common living areas. Ekin talked about some students' selfish behavior and compared her present dormitory experience with her previous one:

I lived in the dormitory for 3.5 years back in high school and shared a room with 6 other students. Everyone was very respectful towards one another and I do not remember fighting even once. I was very relaxed around them; they were like my family. When somebody bought something to eat, everyone would share it. This is not the case here.

While criticizing the lack of sharing among roommates, Ekin referred to a specific incident in which she and her roommate was going to order food together. The fact that her roommate did not wait up for her and ordered food only for herself surprised Ekin very much. While the roommate was eating her meal happily, Ekin was hungry and she was not offered to share the food. Seyit and Hande had had

similar experiences in their dormitory and they were quite uncomfortable with it. They regarded this kind of behavior as selfish and inconsiderate.

A more problematic issue seemed to be related to the studying habits of the students around the participants. While talking about this issue, they were mostly talking about their peers in the Prep School. They suggested that the majority focused on other things than learning English as they got distracted by their environment. Some of them were playing online games the whole day and some of them were out partying. The participants were critical of the Prep students for not being responsible enough when it came to studying English:

Seyit: If you see a Prep student studying, s/he most probably has a study companion. I have observed that if his/her friends are not interested in studying, s/he does not study either. We have a classmate who is a successful student. He will be studying engineering with a 50% scholarship when he passes Prep School. We see him struggling during the classes. He can be good at English, but his entourage is full of lazy guys. He meets other students and plays online games the whole day.

Seyit told the story of a classmate who was having a lot of difficulty in classes because of his friends. Although he could be successful, he was spending his time with leisure activities and having fun with his friends. All members of the CoP were very critical of some friends' bad influence on others. Due to such negative influences, the participants seemed to have closed themselves up to their environment. Hande and Seyit mostly spent their time with each other and did not socialize with others much. This was of course mainly due to the fact that they were

dating; however, they clearly stated that they did not want to get involved with other students for the reasons mentioned above. Ekin seemed to socialize more with other students, but she also complained about the fact that most of the people she had met so far did not have enough respect for others' opinions. The case seemed to be so especially with Turkish students. Therefore, she had started to make friends among the international student community on campus and was quite happy with those friends' contributions to her English learning process.

Participants' negative ideas about the student profile of Challenge University seemed to bring them closer as a group of 3. They thought that they were different from the other students in terms of the manners they had learnt from their parents, the effort they were showing to learn English and the level of awareness regarding the requirements of studying in this institution. When all were talking about this issue, I noticed a clear *us vs. them* approach which was evident both in the content of what they were saying and the language they used as well. The way Hande located their CoP within the institution exemplifies this kind of content and language precisely:

In my opinion, we definitely belong in this institution and they do not. In the end, the ones who do not belong here will leave – I mean, I hope so! I think there is something as 'deserving to be in a higher education institution'... Okay, I admit that I got accepted to this university with a low score from the University Entrance Exam. However, I wish that the administration would give another compulsory exam to the students who would be studying in this university and especially on this campus because there are a lot of students who should get more mature in order to study here.

Hande was very critical of the majority of students who came to study at Challenge University. She admitted that all students (including herself) got the chance to study in the institution without getting high scores; however, she believed that *she* and *her study group* deserved to receive the education provided by the institution more than *the other students*. Hande heartily believed that the CoP she was part of would eventually succeed due to the effort they show by studying regularly while others would have to leave the institution at some point. She even suggested an extra exam to be given once all students started their education in Challenge University so that the ones who were not willing to study would be eliminated early on. The other members of the CoP approved Hande regarding this matter. The group identity the CoP seemed to have formed was also observed by the group's English instructors at Challenge University. I did not ask them about it directly and wanted to know if they had any further comments about the participants and/or the study in general in the last question of the interview. Both instructors mentioned their impressions suggesting that the participants seemed to consider themselves more special and created a stronger bond within the group while keeping a distance with other students in the classroom. They suggested that the *us vs. them* approach showed itself inside the classroom and reflected on the classroom dynamics rather negatively.

Another important issue was the participants' interaction with students who had already passed the Proficiency exam and were continuing with their departmental studies. As I witnessed a number of times and the participants mentioned themselves, these old-timers had a considerable impact on the participants' thoughts when they talked about their previous experiences in the Prep

School. The participants were eager to learn from these old-timers' experiences and they sometimes got confused due to their negative comments. Once, as I had entered the library to join the participants for their study session, I found them chatting with a 1st-year student. After the student left, I noticed that the participants' mood seemed to be down and asked them if everything was alright. Our small talk revealed that their friend was a student who had been learning English since childhood. However, he had told the participants that he had barely passed the Proficiency Exam the previous year. This demotivated the members of the group to a great extent. Hearing about another student's struggle with English despite a better educational background when compared to theirs, the participants expressed that they were worried whether they would be able to pass the exam or not. In fact, Seyit had expressed this concern in the very first FGI:

There is a tendency among the students on campus to demoralize others...The other day we met some classmates and they told us that 80 students out of 300 were able to pass the exam last year. How are we going to pass it? What are we going to do? When we hear such comments, we feel down inevitably and worry about what would happen if we lost control or fell behind. Thank God that we are on track right now, but it gets you thinking. I do not know why people are doing this, but they are scaring us by saying that no one actually stays here in the 2nd semester or that no one can even take the exam in June...

Seyit shared their worries upon hearing the negative comments of old-timers and peers who quote old-timers within their social network. Generally, negative stories were being told as in urban legends and these stories got the participants

stressed about the exam they were studying for. Although hearing that a small number of people passed the Proficiency Exam each year created anxiety among the group members, they tried to take lessons from the negative experiences of old-timers. They were studying regularly and motivating one another so that they would be among the students who passed the exam. They considered themselves different in that sense as well and considering themselves more hard-working when compared to other students.

4.2.8. Trying to Catch Up in a Continuous Race

As suggested by the participants themselves and the observations revealed, time constraint marked the participants' interactions and English learning process drastically. For all participants, the notion of time was very important as it was limited. This limitation seemed to affect the participants negatively on many levels. To begin with the first level, the participants referred to the two-semester Prep School program which started in September and ended either in June or in August. Seyit focused on this issue and seemed to be looking at the bigger picture when he was talking about the notion of time:

Well, do we have little time? I do not think so. The thing is that we have a specific amount of time given to us. They gave us time until the beginning of August. Therefore, we need to spend that time effectively. That's why even one minute is important for me.

Seyit was doing simple Maths here. As they had time until August and they were Beginner level learners who had very limited knowledge of English, they did not have the luxury to lose even one minute. They had to make use of every minute

they had in order to complete the Prep School English program successfully. On another level, Ekin referred to something more specific related to time and reflected on the problems she was having inside the classroom:

I find our outside study sessions more efficient because we have a specific time given to us inside the classroom. They give us a task and tell us to do it in that amount of time. I cannot work within that limitation.

Ekin was upset about the short amount of time given to them to complete certain tasks while they were working as a group in the classroom. She considered their in-class work ineffective due to this limitation. It was more like *give and take*, leaving less room for discussion and deep understanding. She suggested that their outside study sessions gave them much more flexibility in terms of deciding which subject to focus on and for how long. Hande was the participant who mentioned her concerns about time more than the other participants and she talked specifically about time constraints in group work. Starting from FGI1, she mentioned losing time as the main negative aspect of group work. She considered the time they had as inefficient when she referred to their studying routine outside:

I think time is not enough, I mean to study after school. Our classes finish at three thirty in the afternoon. After we eat something and have some rest, it is around six in the evening. Until we get back to our rooms and gather our stuff to study, it is almost seven thirty and we have not done anything yet... We are in the library at seven thirty and it closes at twelve. Then I say to myself 'I have not done anything today!'

Hande complained that there was not much time left for them to study outside the classroom. The lessons started early in the morning and finished in the afternoon, so the participants needed some time to get some rest and get ready for their evening study session. Once they were ready, it was past seven in the evening which left them a couple of hours to study until the library was closed. Hande and her group mates suggested that their study sessions seemed insufficient to them. Having limited time made the participants anxious and they constantly questioned whether they were studying effectively or not as they always felt that they needed more time to study. Time constraints also created a lot of tension among the group members during their study sessions. The following conversation took place in FGI2 when the participants were talking about what created tension among them while studying:

***Hande:** It happens only when we are racing with time. I do not remember it happening at other times.*

Hande mentioned tension occurring among them mostly when they had limited time to complete a task or an assignment. As an illustration to Hande's point, Seyit referred to their paragraph writing sessions specifically as a source of stress for the group members as the writing process lasted longer than the other activities. These in-class sessions, in which students were required to write a paragraph of 180-220 words about a given subject in 50 minutes, took place regularly. It seemed to create a lot of stress among the participants to finish the task on time. This was mainly because they were used to taking their time while sharing their ideas and negotiating these ideas, but it was not possible to do so in a limited time. Although not in a paragraph-writing session, the following conversation took place in an outside study session where time seemed to be a major issue:

Seyit: Ekin, you ruined the paper...

Ekin: We are going to use the back side, right? I do not think that there is a problem...

Hande: But you are wasting our time right now.

The students were preparing a poster when this conversation took place. Ekin was designing the poster meticulously and Hande and Seyit thought that it was taking a lot of time. In fact, Hande accused Ekin of wasting the precious time they had and the tense atmosphere continued until they were able to complete the project. In each activity that seemed to take a lot of time, there would be conflicts among the participants and they would rush one another to finish the activity as soon as possible. The fact that they needed to catch up with a lot of subjects at the same time caused tension among the group members. Hande summed up their struggle in the following excerpt:

There are too many subjects to learn, but too little time. We are trying to do everything at once; we are dealing with writing and reading simultaneously. Sometimes I wish that the Prep School were designed as a two-year program. Really, I would definitely study here for two years. I wish it were spreaded in two years so that it would not be such an intensive program. I get fed up with the lessons because of this, or else I love English. Having too little time is what makes me fed up...

Hande shared her heartfelt wish about the Prep School program they were part of. She believed that a program as loaded as this should be designed as a two-year program. If that were the case, they would not have to rush so much and have

conflicts among them. Also, Hande believed that they would have learned English better if they had more time. While the participants were talking about this issue, their anxiety was something almost visible. It was evident that they were happy to be working hard and learning English; however, the feeling of being in a continuous race seemed to stress them out. Seyit even suggested that if there was a pill that would enable human beings to survive with two hours of sleep every day, he would definitely take it because he had started to consider sleep as a waste of time.

The conflicts, tension and anxiety resulting from time constraints influenced both the participants' interactions and English learning process negatively. As students who came from the Turkish educational background, they had been forced to race with time especially during the University entrance exam. Such negative experiences concerning lack of time seemed to prevail at their university setting. This seemed to mark their experiences within their new context in a negative way and limited them in their learning adventure.

In this chapter, I presented the themes which emerged after the interpretive analysis of observation and interview data. I tried to give the learners' own accounts of their social interactions, collaboration and English learning process in their CoP by providing as much detail as possible. I will discuss the various components which shaped both the learners interactions and learning experiences in the following section and conclude the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

In this case study, I aimed to explore how a group of Beginner level Turkish learners of English interacted in their new university setting and how they viewed the relationship between their collaboration and learning process. The study followed an inductive approach and eight major themes emerged upon detailed analysis of observation and interview data. In this section, I will interpret and discuss these themes with reference to the field notes I have taken throughout the data collection process and also the small number of relevant studies in the literature. As the themes overlapped in many ways, I will discuss them by combining the two research questions. Finally, I will conclude the study by sharing its limitations, implications and my suggestions as a researcher for future research.

5.1. Discussion

One of the major themes that emerged was directly related to the second research question, which inquired into the learners' views on the relationship between group collaboration and learning English. The participants suggested that working together influenced their English learning directly and in a positive way. In order to present the participants' views on this issue coherently, I elicited their own definition of what collaboration is. Although collaboration among peers has been defined by many researchers in the literature (e.g. Donato, 1994; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000), presenting learners' own perceptions of what collaboration is seems to be an innovation. As this study was shaped by the participants' accounts on their learning experiences, I also wanted them to explain what collaboration meant for

them in their own terms. The participants dwelt on both the positive and negative aspects of it. For this group of learners, gathering regularly to study English gave them opportunities for language practice (Gao, 2009; Kobayashi; 2003), helped them to be more self-confident regarding the target language, especially in terms of making mistakes, and eased their adaptation process to the new setting. Although the positive aspects of collaboration outweighed the negative ones, some downsides were also important to note. At times, collaboration caused some conflicts among the members of the CoP especially when they had limited time and/or there were too many ideas put forward. Overall, the participants stated that group work was the main reason that they were able to learn English and that it helped them overcome the prejudices and fears regarding English as well as their new context.

In this study, the terms collaboration and scaffolding overlapped to a great extent as the learners frequently used them interchangeably. Learners' collaboration was built on scaffolding, which was provided by everyone in the group. The interactional dynamics in this group suggested that scaffolding involved more complex relationships than the traditional expert-novice dyad between a teacher and a student (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and that peers could be the experts providing help to one another. Moreover, the expert-novice relationship among the participants was a rather flexible one when compared to Vygotsky's (1978) original definition. In fact, their relationship challenged the rigid expert-novice hierarchy (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) and was closer to what Wenger (1998) considered as members' having equal status. The participants were equal in that each participant had their own field of expertise which they were eager to share with group mates. Whenever someone needed help, the expert would step in and provide it. Therefore, this expertise was

constructed locally in relation with the certain context it was needed in (Reichert & Liebscher, 2012; van Lier; 1996). I also observed the participants co-constructing this expertise when each member of the CoP contributed with his/her own piece of knowledge together through the scaffolding provided by all of them. The learners were confident about their knowledge and this expertise was highly respected by the other members. Sharing of expertise took place either directly, i.e. by providing answers to questions asked by a group mate, or through challenging other members by asking subject-specific questions. The latter occasion involved the expert testing his/her peers just like a teacher would. In fact, some even imitated the teacher's voice to be less face-threatening when sharing expertise with peers (Kobayashi, 2003, p. 354). This helped to create a more relaxed and safe learning environment, as suggested by the participants. All participants stated that receiving help was compulsory as they were learning a completely new language. They also mentioned that together they were able to complete tasks which they would not be able to individually. However, scaffolding also led to too much interdependence among the members. In the literature, interdependence is mentioned as positive due to its contribution to task achievement (e.g. Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Yong, 2010). However, the participants in this study referred to interdependence as negative with reference to the education system. They considered the workload they had to deal with daily as too much, so it was highly beneficial to work together outside the classroom and exchange ideas while getting this work done. However, once they were in the classroom, they had little time and/or fewer opportunities to work together. More importantly, their individual knowledge was tested in the exams and not their collective knowledge (Allsup, 2003; Resnick, 1987). The small community

they created had become like a house in which they felt comfortable and free to share their ideas and dreams (Hauer, 2008, p.95). When they realized that they would have to leave the *safe zone* and be alone at some point in their learning adventure, being interdependent became a source of anxiety for them.

Negotiation was another key element to influence the learners' interactions and learning experiences. It was always present when students were interacting, either inside or outside the classroom, while the students were studying or having a cup of coffee. It was also one of the mostly mentioned elements by the participants in the interviews. They thought that negotiation was inevitable as they were dealing with a new language, something which required discussion in order to be learned. The other reason why they negotiated constantly was more obvious according to them; they were a group of three and whenever they were discussing something, they had at least three different ideas put forward. In their study sessions, they negotiated these different ideas in order to decide what to do and how to do it (Kobayashi, 2003). In addition, different characters were at play and they constantly negotiated their identities to be recognized as a member of their CoP (Morita, 2004). The learners' identity was also shaped by their participation in their practice as they engaged in negotiations with their group mates (Wenger, 1998). All negotiations had to be supported by some kind of proof, i.e. an example the instructor gave or relevant evidence from the course book. If the member who put forward an idea failed to provide support to his/her idea, that idea would not be accepted by the group. Negotiation brought about some conflicts and the learners were not able to make decisions quickly or easily most of the time. The participants did not think of this conflict as something negative, though. On the contrary, they considered it a natural

part of their interaction and something that leads to fruitful discussions (Llejord & Dysthe, 2008). Whether they had difficulty or not during the process, making collective decisions was a pattern for the learners. Without the consent of all members of the CoP, no final decision would be made.

Harmony was another crucial factor that influenced the interactions and learning experiences of the participants to a great extent. Just as I wanted the participants to define collaboration in their own words, I wanted to find out about their perceptions of harmony in group work. They basically defined it as getting on well with one another and having the wish to study together. Our interviews throughout the semester revealed more elements that the participants considered essential to have harmony in their collaboration. The main one was having a joint enterprise. As the learners had “common endeavour(s)” (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p.2), the ultimate one being learning English, they were more motivated to study together. Meeting around their common goals, they constantly motivated one another which influenced their socialization and learning process positively (Gao, 2009). Sharing the same physical space was another positive factor that made it easier for them to focus on their joint enterprise. Since they were in the same classroom and lived on the same campus, it was easier for them to keep in touch and study regularly. The alignment of the learners’ joint enterprise determined both the interactional dynamics of the CoP and the effectiveness of its collaboration. As Ekin, Hande and Seyit had similar goals, they formed a more harmonious collaboration causing Ceren to be left out eventually. The second important factor that helped the group members maintain harmony in their collaboration was having certain roles and routines. Through certain roles and routines the members took on quite

spontaneously, they developed a shared repertoire of their common practice (Wenger, 1998). In the initial interviews, the participants stated that they adopted certain roles in line with the activity they were working on and that this process was quite flexible. However, as the members spent more time and established certain study routines, I witnessed that some roles became more individual-specific, i.e. Ekin being the *writer* of the group. In each observation, I noted down who specifically did what during group work which led to an emerging pattern regarding these roles both inside and outside the classroom. In fact, towards the end of the semester, the participants noticed this specificity themselves and likened their collaboration to that of the parts of a tree which worked together so that the tree would be able to grow. Through their complementing roles and common routines, the participants seemed to interact more harmoniously and approached their common goal more easily. In addition to these, the learners considered having a similar pace and participating equally as factors that contribute to their group harmony and learning experiences respectively. Each time they gathered to study, they made sure that everyone participated equally and that no one was left behind. In time, this became a rule which seemed to be applied as if there had been a secret arrangement among the group members and it would be obeyed at all times. Thanks to this rule, the members made sure of both each individual member's success and the group's success. When they worked in a similar pace, it was easier for everyone to contribute to group work and it was more likely that no one was left behind having to struggle about a subject on their own.

The intimate relationship established among the group members was a major factor that shaped the learning experiences of this CoP. This intimacy had multiple

levels and changed drastically through time. Hande and Seyit were the core members who actually started the study group along with their romantic attachment. Later on, Ekin and Ceren, who had already established a relationship due to their common living space, joined Hande and Seyit to form a study group of four. As the members of this CoP got to know each other better in time, some members started forming a closer relationship while some were left out. In time, Hande, Seyit and Ekin decided to continue their group studies together and Ceren dropped out of the group due to the better alignment of the three members' goals and some conflicts they had with Ceren. These three members had actually established a friendship that was built on mutual respect and trust which they thought made their collaboration more effective. They were concerned about the other members' success and even held themselves responsible when their friends failed. In fact, the positive influence of friendship on peer learning has been presented in studies and it is suggested in the literature that being close friends leads to better learning outcomes among learners who work together (e.g. Reise et al., 2012). Being close friends did not mean spending all of their time together for these learners, though. They mainly met to collaborate for their common goal and at times they met for leisure activities. They had an intimate relationship in the sense that they felt comfortable enough to share private matters with one another. However, all refrained from invading others' personal space and wanted their personal space to be protected. After all, they were individuals who belonged to multiple CoPs (Wenger, 1998) and participated in various activities with other people. Therefore, they respected one another's personal space which helped them to establish a kind of intimacy with certain boundaries. Another important point was about the spontaneity of the intimacy that was formed among the learners. They

stated that they had not shown a special effort or spent too much time together to be close friends. One of the participants linked this to *being on the same wavelength*, which she believed the three of them had right away. Although learning English caused them to feel fed up at times, they enjoyed their study sessions and did not give up mainly due to this chemistry.

In addition to the alignment of learners' goals, the alignment of their expectations, both regarding group work and other group members, marked their collaboration. Their expectations from group work ranged from more immediate ones like getting their assignment done to more long-term ones like completing their missing knowledge with the help of group mates and using their time efficiently. In addition, all three members expected a perfect production at the end of each study session due to their perfectionist nature, which they thought was one of the common points they had among themselves. Their expectations from their group mates were expressed in a much more comprehensive way. They wanted their group mates to be understanding, patient, helpful, willing to study and motivated enough to motivate other group members. In fact, one of them admitted that they were expecting their group mate to have many of the qualities of an instructor and to act like one. The main quality they focused on was being understanding. For the participants, this involved not being judgmental towards others and providing help even when one thought that help is required for a subject that is too trivial or simple to spend time on. When I heard about these conversations for the first time, I found them quite overwhelming and unrealistic. However, throughout the semester I observed that students were very outspoken about this issue and were careful to meet one another's expectations. That was why Ceren, who did not meet the common expectations of

group members and who herself had different expectations from group work had been part of the CoP only for a short time. One striking thing about the participants' interactions was that no one judged the others regarding their English skills and they were very comfortable around one another while they were studying together. It was due to the alignment of these expectations that they were able to collaborate in a safe, intimate and inviting atmosphere knowing that they would be supported by their peers rather than being looked down on (Balabuch, 2011; Gao, 2009; Merriam, Courtenay & Baumgartner, 2003) .

Although my main focus was on the interactions of the participants among their small CoP, the accounts they presented regarding the interactions with other peers proved to have influenced the way their group identity was formed. The participants specifically referred to their peers in the Prep School and they were very explicit regarding their feelings about such peers. Strikingly, their accounts were dominated by an *us vs. them* approach. They suggested that most of the students in the Prep School were very immature, who did not know how to act in certain situations and they did lack the feeling of responsibility required to be a student at a higher education institution as challenging as theirs. They clearly did not think that these negative feelings towards their peers resulted from prejudice. On the contrary, they made generalizations by referring to their interactions with these peers inside and outside the classroom, including their experiences in the dormitory. The participants did not want to socialize with *such people*, which brought them much closer as a group. The instructors also mentioned this issue in our short interview and stated that the participants' *othering* approach reflected on the classroom dynamics negatively. They added that this group of participants considered themselves

somehow *special* when compared to the rest of the class and did not interact with them frequently. In fact, the participants did consider themselves special as they were studying very hard when compared to their peers. They thought that due to the efforts they showed, they *deserved* to be in this institution more than the other Prep School students. I think the participants had noticed very early on that Challenge University requires them to be disciplined. After this realization, studying had become their main focus and their interactions were influenced by this focus to a great extent. Meeting people who had similar aims to theirs and knowing that “they were not alone in this journey” brought them closer and isolated them from peers with different aims (Merriam, Courtenay & Baumgartner, 2003, p.186).

Participants’ interactions with *the old-timers* were also very influential in their learning process. Here we can consider the participants as positioned on the periphery of their institution, the larger CoP, as they were in the Prep School (O’Donnell & Tobell, 2007). The old-timers, on the other hand, were the students who had studied English in the Prep School and who had passed the Proficiency Exam to start their departmental studies. The participants engaged with them to learn some tricks of the trade and to find out about different students’ experiences in the Prep School. Such conversations seemed to be instructive and demotivating at the same time. The old-timers’ comments on their previous learning experiences tended to be rather negative and they constantly told the participants that it was *very difficult* to pass the Proficiency Exam. The participants had mixed feelings about such utterances and they were worried whether their study sessions were sufficient or not. About one thing they were certain, passing the Proficiency Exam would make this

group of learners full participants of their new CoP and their sense of belonging would get stronger.

The last factor that influenced the learners' interactions and learning experiences was time constraints. Firstly, this was a major issue inside the classroom as the learners were given very limited time to accomplish tasks (Kobayashi, 2003). They had to race in order to finish the tasks on time and their wish to do these tasks flawlessly created a lot of tension among them. The time constraint was not limited to the classroom and was ever-present in the outside study sessions as well. Knowing that the Prep School program gave them two to three semesters to pass the Proficiency Exam, the students were always in a rush. As one of them pointed out, they had too much to do in so little time. They thought that they had a very loaded program, which comprised of six hours of formal teaching every day. When the classes finished, they felt that they had little time to study as a group. This was the case even though they had already given up the thought of participating in social activities to spare all their extra time for their group studies. This feeling of running and rushing stressed the participants a lot which created tensions when they were studying together. Tension would occur whenever one of the members spent more time on something trivial such as cutting a piece of paper or designing a poster as the participants thought that they did not have even one minute to lose. The participants mentioned their past educational experiences and suggested that their years in secondary and high school had been also marked by time constraints. They had been much stressed in high school as they were going to take the National University Entrance Exam and had to revise many subjects in a very short time back then. I think, seeing that they had to go through a similar assessment process in the Prep

School had a negative impact on their new experiences in their new setting. Here, the dynamics of the collaboration in this CoP clashed with the requirements of the program drastically. These learners established a practice which allowed them to learn through socialization, which included negotiation of ideas and identities, collective decision making, fruitful discussions and tuning this practice with respect to their common goals. Their new context was helping them logistically to collaborate and they considered their collaboration to be the main reason that helped them learn English. However, the requirements of the institution and the much loaded program seemed to be creating a number of obstacles for these learners. Although in their own terms, these learners “had succeeded in doing group work”, which was quite a new experience for them, they had to struggle with feelings of inadequacy and anxiety in their first semester learning English.

In this section I discussed the themes by which student interactions and English learning experiences were influenced. As can be seen from the small number of relevant studies I referred to in the *Discussion* section, there is an urgent need for qualitative studies that explore the the phenomenon of collaboration in learning English by paying special attention to the out-of-class settings learning takes place. In the final section, I will conclude the study by referring to the limitations it embodies. Finally, I will share the implications of the study for the field of English Language Education; specifically for learners and instructors of English.

5.2. Implications and Conclusion

This study presented the interactions of a small group of Beginner level learners of English during their first semester in a higher education institution. As

these experiences were created and lived by these learners, I wanted to share their own perspectives on their interactions and learning experiences by blending them with my observations as a researcher. With its small group of participants, this study showed that learner interactions are by all means complex and multifaceted. As members of a community of practice, the participants created a collective learning space or *a practice* which was shaped by their interactions (Wenger, 1998). In time and as they engaged in more interactions, this learning space became a common ground where they shared their life experiences as well. This is in line with the view that learning is holistic and not limited to English; it includes sharing life experiences as well (Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 2000; Gao, 2009).

I believe that this study contributed to the literature in several ways. Firstly, it provided a “behind-the-scenes” perspective (Kobayashi, 2003, p. 354) to the phenomenon of learning in a CoP, a perspective that has not been explored much. It shed light to a particular period of the huge amount of time spent by learners outside the classroom and how they collaborated in a CoP without the presence of a teacher. To my knowledge, no other study has focused on the relationship between learner interactions and their English learning experiences in a new educational context in Turkey or in Cyprus (both North and South). Moreover, it is one of the few studies that made use of a number of data collection methods rather than a single one to focus on the phenomenon of learning in a group outside the classroom context. Secondly, the ethnographic approach integrated in the research design contributed to the literature by observing the learners in their “natural” environment and to see the how they took charge of their own learning in a setting which would otherwise be “invisible” to a teacher’s eye in the classroom (Benson, 2011, p.8). Thirdly, I believe

the study presented a comprehensive account of learner experiences which were marked by moments of effective collaboration and deep conflict at the same time, both of which are inherent in the interactions that take place within CoPs (Wenger, 1998). Through the thick descriptions it presented, the study gave voice to the participants' own accounts of their learning experiences through as many windows as possible in addition to their life stories which shaped these experiences. Finally, the longitudinal approach adopted in this study helped both to gain more detailed and consistent accounts of the English learning process of a group of learners and to relate this process to the new context students were situated in. More specifically, it contributed to the out-of-class literature on learning English by taking into consideration the context in which learning took place.

As in all studies, this study has certain limitations. Overall, the participants considered learning English in a CoP as having many advantages that directly promoted learning. However, they also referred to some disadvantages which might hinder learning. These disadvantages need to be explored more within the scope of qualitative L2 research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the interactional dynamics of language learners during collaboration. Also, a similar study could be designed with different groups of English learners to see whether learners' level of English has any influence on their collaboration and social interactions in their CoPs. To illustrate, collaborations of Intermediate or Advanced level learners of English might be explored to see what kind of interactional and language learning-related experiences they have within their CoPs. In addition, multiple case studies might be conducted with English learners from similar language levels to find out whether there are certain patterns in the interactions of these groups of learners. Moreover, a

more longitudinal approach might reveal more interesting phenomena regarding how groups of students interact in their new setting. Although this specific study revealed important data regarding learner interactions, collaboration and English learning processes over a 10-week semester, a study conducted throughout the academic year might shed more light to learning English in CoPs and allow for a more in-depth analysis.

This study showed that the collaboration of a particular group of learners of English influenced their learning experiences positively. These learners situated themselves as good language learners within their new context due to the collective time and effort they spent outside the classroom. The dynamics of their collaboration was complex and shaped by factors which varied from being able to establish a close relationship with one another to having common learning-related goals. Although this study does not have the aim to make generalizations in the light of a small group of learners' experiences, the results suggest that Beginner learners might need academic help when they are learning a language and this help can be provided by their peers. Collaborating with peers might provide the learners with more opportunities for learning an L2 through the negotiation processes and fruitful discussions it embodies. Therefore, learners of English at Prep Schools of higher education institutions might try studying in groups and experience how collaboration and learning takes place within their own CoP. As the participants of this study suggested, English instructors working in Prep Schools of higher education institutions can encourage their students to form collaborative study groups from which they would benefit greatly by sharing both learning and life experiences. In addition, the administrative units of such institutions might develop collaborative

learning programs by refraining from applying standard procedures which are not “well-tailored to particular learners at a particular stage” and would hinder learner autonomy (Jeong, 2004).

As this study presents detailed accounts of the interactions and the English learning processes of a CoP, it might guide other researchers, English teachers and institutions become more aware of and respect learners’ perspectives and needs both inside and outside the classroom and create collaborative learning environments which would promote learners to share their expertise with one another and give them the opportunity to learn English with their peers’ support.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: In-class /Ethnographic Observation Sheet

IN-CLASS OBSERVATION NO:	DATE:
DETAILS:	

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APPENDIX B: Interview Questions for the Participants

a. Individual Interview 1 (Autobiographical Interview)

1. Bana okula ilk başladığınız yıllardan bahsedebilir misiniz?
Could you tell me about your first years at school?
2. Küçükken okulu sever miydiniz? Niçin severdiniz/sevmezdiniz?
Did you use to like school back then? Why/Why not?
3. En iyi ne şekilde öğrenirdiniz?
How did you learn best?
4. Öğrenirken ne tür aktivitelerin daha etkili olduğunu düşünürdünüz?
What kind of activities did you find effective while learning?
5. Dersleriniz ve öğretmenlerinizle ilgili bilgi verir misiniz? Örneğin en sevdiğiniz ders neydi veya en sevdiğiniz öğretmen kimdi?
Could you tell me about your lessons and teachers? To illustrate, what was your favorite lesson and teacher?
6. İngilizce ile ilk karşılaşmanızdan bahsedebilir misiniz?
Could you tell me about your first encounter with English?
7. İngilizce öğrenmeye başladığınızda İngilizce'yi sevdimiz mi? Sizce bunun sebebi neydi?
Did you like English when you started learning it? Do you think there was a particular reason for that?
8. İngilizce öğrenmek sizin için önemli miydi? Niçin önemliydi/önemli değildi?
Was learning English important for you or not? Could you elaborate on that please?
9. İngilizce eğitiminizi göz önünde bulundurduğunuzda ne tür tecrübeler yaşadınız?
What kind of experiences do you think you have had concerning your English education?
10. Şimdiki İngilizce öğreniminize gelelim, bana nasıl tecrübeler yaşadığınızdan bahsedebilir misiniz?
Let's talk about your current English learning experiences. Could you tell me about those, please?

11. Önünüzde bir sene var. İngilizce eğitiminizde nasıl şeyler olacağını düşünüyorsunuz?
You have one year ahead of you. What do you think this year will include regarding your English education?
12. İngilizce konusunda kendinize güveniyor musunuz? Neden/Neden değil?
Are you confident about English? What might be the reason for that?
13. “İngilizce öğrenmek -cek/cak.” Bu cümleyi geleceği düşünerek nasıl tamamladınız?
Could you please complete the following sentence: “Learning English will...”
14. Yeni bir çevreye geldiniz. Öncelikle Kıbrıs’la ilgili neler düşünüyorsunuz?
You have come to a new environment. Firstly, what are your thoughts and feelings about TRNC?
15. Peki ya kampus?
What about the campus?
16. Yeni çevrenizle ilgili sevdiğiniz ve sevmediğiniz şeyler neler? Sizce böyle düşünmenizde etkili olan nedir?
What are the things that you do and do not like about your new environment?
What might be affecting this?
17. Çalışma grubunuzla yaklaşık ne kadardır görüşüyorsunuz?
How long have you been studying with your study group?
18. Bu grupla çalışmayı nasıl buluyorsunuz? Birkaç sebep verebilir misiniz?
How do you like studying with them? Why do you think it is like that?
19. Bu grupla çalışırken kendinizi nasıl hissediyorsunuz?
How do you feel when you are studying with this group?
20. Birbirinize yardım ediyorsunuz. Bu yardımlar size verilen görevleri tamamlamak için yeterli oluyor mu?
Do you think that the help you give and receive during group work is enough to complete the tasks you are given?

b. Focus Group Interview 1

1. Katılımcı/Berber çalışmayı nasıl tanımlarsınız?
How would you define collaborating as a group?

2. Bu çalışma şeklini olumlu mu yoksa olumsuz olarak mı değerlendirirdiniz?
Neden?
Would you consider this kind of studying as positive or negative? Why do you think so?
3. Sizce başarılı bir ortak çalışma için kesinlikle gerekli olan şey(ler)/en önemli öğeler nedir?
In your opinion, what are the most essential elements for a successful group work?
4. Diyelim ki arkadaşlarınızla birlikte İngilizce bir etkinlik/ödev yapıyorsunuz. Birlikte çalışmanın en güzel tarafı ne olurdu?
Let's consider that you are working on an assignment/project with your group mates. What would be the best part of your collaboration?
4a. Peki birlikte çalışmanın en kötü tarafı ne olurdu?
What about the worst part?
5. Birlikte çalışırken karşınızdakinden neler beklersiniz?
What do you expect from your peers when you are studying together?
5a. Karşınızdakinin nasıl davranmasını beklersiniz?
How do you expect them to behave?
6. Beraber çalışırken arkadaşlarınızın onayını ister misiniz? Neden/Neden değil?
Do you ask for your peers' approval while you are studying together? Why do you think it is so?
7. Sizce aranızda nasıl bir iletişim var?
In your opinion, what kind of communication do you have within your group?
7a. Bunu neye bağlıyorsunuz?
What might be the reason(s) be for that?
8. Birbirimizle iletişim kurarken çatışmalar/anlaşmazlıklar yaşayabiliriz. Siz yaşadığınız çatışmalardan bahseder misiniz? Bu çatışmalar genelde neyle alakalı oluyor?
We might encounter some conflicts while communicating. Could you please talk about the kind of conflict you have in your collaboration? Generally speaking, what do you tend to have conflicts about?
9. Grup dinamiklerine gelelim. Grubunuzdaki rolleri/görevleri nasıl tanımlardınız?
Let's talk about group dynamics. How would you define the roles and duties within your study group?
10. Peki hem beraber çalışıyorsunuz hem de arkadaşsınız. Birbirinize hitap şekillerinizden dolayı alınır mısınız?
You are both studying together and are also friends. Do you get offended by the way(s) your group mates address you?

c. Focus Group Interview 2

1. İngilizce öğrenirken sizi en çok ne zorluyor?
What seems to be causing the most difficulty while you are learning English?
1a. Bununla nasıl başa çıkıyorsunuz?
How do you deal with that?
2. İngilizce öğrenirken üzerinizde en çok ne stres yaratıyor?
What seems to create stress in your English learning process?
2a. Bununla nasıl başa çıkıyorsunuz?
How do you deal with that?
3. Yeni ve zor bir konu öğrenmenin üzerinizde ne gibi etkileri oluyor? Bireysel ve grup düzeyinde düşünebiliriz...
How does learning a new and a difficult subject affect you on individual and group level?
4. Dil öğrenirken yanlış yapmak size ne ifade ediyor?
What does making a mistake mean to you in your English learning process?
4a. Yanlış yapınca nasıl hissediyorsunuz? Sizce bu neden olabilir?
How do you feel when you make a mistake? Why could it be so?
4b. Bu hep mi böyleydi peki?
Has this always been like this?
5. Rekabeti sevdiğinizden bahsetmiştik; ama bu gözü kör eden cinsten bir hırs değil demiştiniz. Peki sınıf içindeki diğer gruplarla rekabet içinde misiniz?
You already mentioned that you like competition, do you consider yourselves in competition with the other students in the classroom?

d. Focus Group Interview 3

1. Sürekli birlikte çalışıyorsunuz. Grup çalışması yapacağımız zaman motivasyon kaynağınız nedir/ ne sizi çalışmak için motive eder?
You study together frequently. What is your source of motivation to come together and what motivates you to study?
1a. Sizce neden?
Why do you think so?
2. Grup arkadaşları olarak yakınlık derecenizi nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
How would you evaluate your level of intimacy as group mates?
3. Beraber çalışırken ruh halinizde değişiklikler olur mu? Nasıl değişiklikler olur?
Does your mood change a lot when you are studying together? If so, what kind of changes can you talk about?
4. Grup çalışması yaparken bıkkınlık hissi geliyor mu?
Do you ever get fed up while you are studying together?
4a. Sizce neden/neden değil?
Why/ Why not?

4b. Bununla nasıl başa çıkıyorsunuz?

How do you deal with that?

5. Sizce özel hayatınızda yaşadığınız şeyler (olumlu veya olumsuz) grup çalışmanıza yansır mı?

Do you think that an issue you have in your private life (positive and/or negative) affects your group work?

6. “Bu grupta olan kişi şu şu şu özelliklere sahip olmalıdır.” Buradaki boşluğu nasıl doldurursunuz.

How would you complete the following sentence: “A person who is a member of this group should be ...”

7. Aranızdan bir arkadaşınız ayrıldı. Grubunuzda herhangi bir değişiklik oldu mu? Nasıl değişiklikler oldu?

One of your friends dropped out of the group. Has there been any change in your group? If yes, what kind of changes?

e. Focus Group Interview 4

1. Sizce grup olarak bir rutininiz var mı?

Do you think that you have a group routine?

1a. Bu rutinde değişiklikler olduğunda bir problem olur mu?

When this routine is changed by one of you, do you think that this causes any problems?

2. Sizce grup çalışmasında kendinizi her zaman iyi ifade edebiliyor musunuz?

Do you think that you can always express yourself well during group work?

3. Grup içinde ihmal edildiğinizi/sesinizin duyulmadığını düşündüğünüz oluyor mu?

During group work, are there times when you feel neglected or that your voice is not heard by your group mates?

4. Hepiniz benzer hızlarda mı çalışıyorsunuz? Birisi biraz öne geçse bu bir problem oluyor mu?

Do you all work in a similar pace? Do you think that it would be a problem when one of you gets ahead of the others during group work?

5. Sizce grup çalışması konusunda uyumlu musunuz?

Do you consider your group a harmonious one?

6. Grup çalışmasından beklentileriniz birbirine uyuyor mu?

Do you think that your expectations from group work are aligned?

7. Birbiriniz adına sorumluluk hissediyor musunuz? Mesela biriniz bir konuyu anlamadığında diğerleri ona yardımcı oluyor. O arkadaşınızın sizin yardımınızla başarılı olması önemli mi?

Do you feel responsible for your group mates? To illustrate, you help one another when someone does not understand a certain subject. Is it important that your friend succeeds in something thanks to your help?

f. Focus Group Interview 5

1. Grup arkadaşlarınızın bilgilerini test etmenizin sebebi nedir?
Is there any particular reason why you test one another's knowledge in English?
2. Grup halinde çalışmak size neler katıyor? Eğitiminizle ilgili? Kişisel olarak?
Professionally and personally speaking, how does studying together contribute to you?
3. Grup olarak çalışmaya başladığınızdan beri bireysel çalışmalarınız nasıl gidiyor?
How has your individual studies been going since you started your study group?
4. Farklı kişiliğe, öğrenme tarzlarına ve çalışma alışkanlıklarına sahip öğrencilerin ortaklaşa çalışması hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? Sizce bu iyi mi yoksa kötü bir fikir mi?
What do you think about students with different backgrounds, learning habits and styles studying together? Do you think that this is a good or a bad idea?
5. Sizce katılımcı çalışma şekli ile İngilizce öğreniminiz arasında bir bağlantı var mıdır? Açıklar mısınız?
Do you think that there is a connection between your collaboration and learning English? If so, could you elaborate on that please?
6. Bir ödevi/görevi yalnız yapmakla arkadaşlarınızla yapmayı kıyasladığınızda, sizce ikisi arasında benzerlikler mi var farklar mı?
Are there more similarities or differences between doing an assignment on your own and doing it with your group?
7. Sınıf içi ve sınıf dışı ortak çalışmanızı kıyaslayabilir misiniz?
Could you compare your in-class and outside group work?
8. Diğer öğrencilere beraber çalışmalarını önerir miydiniz? Neden önerirdiniz/önermezsiniz?
Would you recommend other students to study together? Why/ Why not?
9. Bu kampüsteki yerinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
How would you locate yourself in this campus?

g. Final Individual Interview

1. Genel olarak döneme bakarsak, İngilizce öğrenmek açısından beklentilerinizin karşılandığını düşünüyor musunuz?
Thinking about the semester that has come to an end, do you think that your expectations regarding learning English were met?
2. Tecrübe ettiğiniz grup çalışmasını genel olarak değerlendirir misiniz?
Could you please evaluate your group work experience in general?
3. Grup çalışmasını göz önünde bulundursanız, dönem başında beklentiniz neydi? Bu beklenti karşılandı mı? Neden/neden değil?

Regarding group work, what were your expectations at the beginning of the semester? Have those expectations been met? Why do you think so?

4. Yaptığınız grup çalışmalarını düşünerek, aklınıza gelen en olumlu şeyi/anıyı söyley misiniz?

Keeping in mind your study group sessions, could you tell me one good memory that comes to your mind?

5. Yaptığınız grup çalışmalarını düşünerek, aklınıza gelen en olumsuz şeyi/anıyı söyley misiniz?

Keeping in mind your study group sessions, could you tell me one bad memory that comes to your mind?

6. Şu cümleyi tamamlay mısınız?: “Grup çalışmasından önce ...”.
How would you complete the following sentence?: “Before group work...”.
7. İşbirliğini nasıl tanımlarsınız?
What is your own definition of collaboration?

APPENDIX C: Interview Questions for the Classroom Instructors

1. How would you comment on the collaboration among Seyit, Ekin and Hande?
2. Do you think that their collaboration has influenced their English learning experience? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
3. Do you think that they were a harmonious group in terms of working together? Why/Why not?
4. As you know I started doing my research with 4 students, but after working together for a couple of weeks, one of the students left the group. What might be the reason for this?
4a. Do you think that anything has changed after that member left the group?
5. Please feel free to share any other comments you would like to make about these students’ collaboration and/or English learning process.

APPENDIX D: Initial Code List

1. The Institution
 - 1.1. Exam anxiety
 - 1.2. Social interaction w/ other peers
 - 1.3. Past educational experiences
 - 1.4. Identity/belonging in the new context
2. Learning English
 - 2.1. Achievements
 - 2.1.1. Collaboration=Lear
ning English
 - 2.2. Making mistakes
 - 2.3. Difficulties
 - 2.3.1. Distraction
 - 2.3.2. Responsibility
 - 2.3.2.1 Family
issues &
expectations
 - 2.3.3. New Context
 - 2.3.4. Stress
 - 2.3.5. Getting fed up
3. Group Work
 - 3.1. Interaction in gw
 - 3.1.1. Negotiation
 - 3.1.2. Feeling neglected
 - 3.1.3. Expressing oneself
 - 3.1.4. Personal Space
 - 3.1.5. Caring&Feeling
responsible for
group members
 - 3.1.6. Roles&Routine
 - 3.1.7. Conflict during
interaction
 - 3.1.8. Intimacy
 - 3.1.9. Joint enterprise
 - 3.2. Scaffolding in gw
 - 3.2.1. collaboration
 - 3.2.2. expectation from gw &
peers
 - 3.2.3. approval
 - 3.2.4. challenging one another
 - 3.3. Group work/Collaboration
definition
 - 3.3.1. positive aspects of gw
 - 3.3.1.1. producing sth.
 - 3.3.1.2. adapting to new
context
 - 3.3.1.3. language practice
opportunity
 - 3.3.1.4. indiv. vs. gw
 - 3.3.1.5. having fun
 - 3.3.1.6. completing missing
knowledge
 - 3.3.2. negative aspects of gw
 - 3.3.2.1. stress
 - 3.3.2.2. being dependent
 - 3.3.2.3. time constraint
 - 3.3.2.4. different
ideas&chrs.
 - 3.4. Expertise in gw.
 - 3.4.1. competition
 - 3.4.2. respect for expertise
 - 3.4.3. confidence in expertise
 - 3.5. Harmony in gw
 - 3.6. Gw among other sts.
 - 3.7. Gw in class vs. outside
 - 3.8. Perfectionism in gw.
 - 3.9. Originality in gw.

APPENDIX E: Frequency of Codes

Code	All coded segments
sharing of expertise	80
negotiation in gw	65
making decisions through negotiation	59
roles & routine in gw.	57
participating actively&equally	55
having an intimate relationship	50
conflict during interaction	44
expectations from gw&peers	37
scaffolding&collaboration	33
motivation in gw	32
different ideas & chrs	32
caring & feeling responsible for group members	31
time constraint	31
Competition	29
social inter. w/ other peers	28
having harmony	25
expressing oneself	24
paying attention to mutuality	23
indv.vs.group work	23
family issues & expectations	22
seeking approval in gw	22
Feeling responsible	20
being dependent	19
collaboration = learning Eng.	18
getting stressed and angry	17
having a joint enterprise	17
The Institution&the campus&TRNC	16
reflections on gw among other sts&st profile	15
conf. in expertise	15
completing missing knowledge	15
getting fed up	14
groupwork/collaboration defntn.	14
having fun	14
respect for expertise	13
Achievements	12
Difficulties	12
identity in the new context	11
Fear of making mistakes	11
having positive influence on one another	11

challenging one another	11
lang.practice opport.	10
exam anxiety	9
personal space	9
stress&tension in gw	9
teacher scaffolding	8
comparing in-class vs. outside gw	7
interaction in gw.	7
giving feedback/sharing ideas	7
sharing responsibility & trusting	6
gaining confidence&discipline	5
adapting to new context&becoming sociable	5

APPENDIX F: Midterm grades of the participants:

	Midterm 1 (Out of 100)	Midterm 2 (Out of 100)
Ekin	43	47
Hande	54	51
Seyit	83	78

APPENDIX G: Final Poster Project completed during SGOBS 9

RELATIVE CLAUSE

Subject Relative Clause

- The subject performs the action of the verb in the main clause.
- The subject performs the action of the verb in the main clause.
- The subject performs the action of the verb in the main clause.

Non-Deriving Relative Clause

- The clause provides extra information about the noun in the main clause.
- The clause provides extra information about the noun in the main clause.
- The clause provides extra information about the noun in the main clause.

REFERENCES

- Writing and Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class
- Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class
- Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class

EXAMPLES

Subject Relative Clause:

The student who studies hard always gets high marks.

The teacher who is kind to his students is my favorite.

Non-Deriving Relative Clause:

The student who is sitting next to me is my friend.

The teacher who is sitting next to me is my friend.

KEYWORDS: THAT, WHICH, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY, WHAT, WHICH, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY, WHAT

REFERENCES:

- Writing and Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class
- Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class
- Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class

EXAMPLES:

The student who studies hard always gets high marks.

The teacher who is kind to his students is my favorite.

The student who is sitting next to me is my friend.

The teacher who is sitting next to me is my friend.

KEYWORDS: THAT, WHICH, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY, WHAT, WHICH, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY, WHAT

REFERENCES:

- Writing and Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class
- Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class
- Grammar Handbook for SGOBS class

Appendix H: Tez Fotokopisi İzin Formu

PROGRAM

SEES

PSIR

ELT

YAZARIN

Soyadı: Özbay

Adı: Esra

Bölümü: İngilizce Öğretmenliği

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce): Learning English in a Community of Practice: A Case Study

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans

Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

3. Tezimden bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ: