

Changing the Learning Culture of Iranians: An Interplay between Method and Educational Policy

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to identify the effect of using a modern teaching technique, i.e. cooperative learning, in a changing system of educational policy on students' and parents' perceptions towards learning. So, 71 male students studying at seventh grade in four high schools were randomly selected to participate in the study. The students' parents (N=71) were asked to participate in the study to get their opinion on the matter as well. Using the cultural dimensions of learning framework, first the cultural aspects of students' perception towards learning were identified within eight categories. Then, the effect of cooperative learning on these dimensions was examined. Finally, the areas of changes were closely explored using open-ended questions. The results of the study revealed that some previously reported cultural features were evolving among students. The results also showed the effectiveness of cooperative learning in making significant shifts in cultural perceptions of the students. These results can be applicable for all those who are involved in the language teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, cultural dimension of learning, educational policy

INTRODUCTION

The issue of nature or nurture is a long-debated one. Who we are cannot be easily distinguished from who we can

become. In other words, what we are now is an interwoven representation of the characteristics we were born with and the ones we have earned from our surroundings. It is acknowledged by many researchers that both nature and nurture play important roles in language acquisition (e.g., Bates, 1999; Gruber, 2013; Hughes et al., 2005; Meaney, 2001; Siegel, 1999). To separate these two seems an impossible task. However, researchers have been trying to characterize what are so-called individual (natural) and

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group (nurtural) differences. What a person is nurtured with is often known as culture. An individual born in a specific cultural environment is affected by the beliefs, values, ideologies and whatever is around him or her. These cultural characteristics are known to influence every aspect of one's life. Learning is no exception to this fact. Consequently, various cultures challenge the perceptions of effective language learning among different nations.

Examples of these differences are reported by different scholars. Bennet (2003), for instance, referred to Asian students as having high tendency to be quiet in classes while European American students were known to take part in active classroom discussions. The difference also exists between parents from eastern cultures, who do not interfere with educational decisions, and European American parents, who volunteer in assisting teachers and being involved in the education of their children (e.g., Diaz, 2000; Valdés, 1996).

Although there is tremendous variability in the learning preferences within cultural groups (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), these differences are known to follow universal traits. These traits (see Table 1) are identified and introduced by different scholars (e.g. Hall, 1981; Hofstede, 1986; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Levine, 1997; Lewis, 2006; Nisbett, 2003).

Nevertheless, the issue of culture is a concept with an extended range. The focus of this study, however, is on the cultural dimensions of teaching and learning English in Iran, which is representative of an

EFL context. To this end, first the Iranian students and parent's cultural perceptions towards learning were explored followed by identifying the effect of cooperative learning on these perceptions to address the challenge of cooperative learning methods' instruction in Iran (e.g., Jahanbakhsh, 2014; Zarei, 2012).

An important effect of culture in learning, in general, and learning English, in particular, comes to the center of focus when comparing western and eastern countries. The eastern students, e.g. Iranians, are argued to be passive recipients of knowledge (e.g. Gow & Kember, 1990; Go & Mok, 1995). The teacher-centered classes, where learners are mostly mere listeners, are common among these countries. Such behaviors are, perhaps, the result of Confucianism where the ultimate goal of education was to reach the state of supreme virtue and wisdom. In order to reach the goal, one is expected to follow every lead of one's leader, i.e. teacher (Li, 2013, as cited in Zhang, 2015). This pursuit of the teacher has to be done without question since the leader knows best. Students, therefore, are prevented from exploring new knowledge. Although Confucianism is not a common practice in all eastern countries, the orientations in learning of countries such as China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, etc., until very recently have shown the characteristics of this ideology, though to different extents.

The cultural studies usually focus on the cross-cultural differences (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Inglehart, 1997) among

the nations. While the body of literature is replete with numerous studies on the learning styles, attitudes, and individual differences, there are a few researchers (e.g., Omidvar, Chan, Yap, & Boong, 2012) who have considered the group differences as an influential factor in learning and teaching, specifically in the context of Iran.

Iranian students have been following eastern perception towards learning. The context of education in Iran also was founded based on such beliefs. The Ministry of Education introduces the curricula and syllabi for each grade and expects students to only learn the introduced issues. The teachers are also expected to teach what is imposed on them by these syllabi. The learners are going to sit in a written exam at the end of each semester and their scores are mainly determined by these single exams. Therefore, the individualistic and competitive identities among students are reinforced and they only seek to take care of their own learning. The teachers are also considered as instructors of the materials and their attempts are aimed at enriching students with the knowledge that they may need in their final exam.

The literature has some information about the cultural behaviors of Iranians regarding teaching and learning. According to Noora (2008), for example, the culture of teaching in Iran was primarily teacher-centered. Omidvar et al. (2012) also reported Iranian learners as individualistic with a moderate tendency towards femininity. Some research (Askarzadeh, Elahi, & Khanalipour, 2009; Pishghadam & Pourali,

2011a, 2011b; Pishghadam & Navari, 2010; Pishghadam & Najj Meidani, 2011) has been conducted to investigate the students' and teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning. The results of these studies showed major inclination, especially in the periods of educations in school and Bachelor programs in universities, towards the methods of teaching and learning which followed behaviorism principles. Such beliefs and cultural orientations have made application of communicative methods very challenging in Iranian contexts. Jahanbakhsh (2014), for example, addressing the influence of the competitive nature of educational contexts in Iran, stated that "in such a competitive culture, it may be very difficult to convince learners to learn in cooperative groups, particularly when they know they will be tested individually" (p. 96). However, while different issues about such beliefs and orientations are addressed from different perspectives, no attempt, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, has been made in specifying the learning dimensions of the culture among Iranians.

Furthermore, the recent change in the in the scoring system of the primary schools in Iran's educational system has made this study to look into a critical period of change. The previous numerical scoring system was replaced by a descriptive one. As a result, the students are not expected to compete for higher scores until they start junior high school. Therefore, the present study was conducted on the junior high first-grade students who are expected not to be deeply involved in the race for higher scores. This

study was interested to examine if students' involvement in cooperative learning at the right time could change their cultural perception towards learning. In line with this purpose and to address the problems just mentioned, the following research questions were formulated.

Q1: What are the cultural dimensions of the perceptions of Iranians towards learning?

Q2: Is there any significant difference between the perceptions of Iranian parents and students regarding the cultural dimensions of learning?

Q3: Does cooperative learning have any significant effect on the perception of Iranian students of the 7th grade towards learning?

Theoretical Background

Dimensions of Culture. Cultural factors are viewed as those aspects of culture that members of cultural groups have acquired, consciously or unconsciously, and carry with them where ever they go. As Hofstede (2011) maintained, it was "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 3). It has always been considered as an essential part of any language teaching/learning situation (Akbari, 2008; Choudhury, 2014; Dema & Moeller, 2012). The two, actually are known as rigidly interwoven in a way that separation of one is not possible without losing the significance of the other (Brown, 2007).

Due to the complex nature of culture, providing a commonly-accepted framework is a challenging task. The first well-known categorization of culture was done by Hofstede (1980). In his national culture framework, Hofstede introduced four dimensions of power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Later, two other dimensions, namely long-term vs. short-term orientations (Hofstede & Bond, 1988), and Indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Some other aspects of culture were also introduced by other researchers. Hall and Hall (1990), for example categorized nations based on the high vs. low context. Lewis (2006) added a social relationship as an indicator of the culture of learning in countries. A series of studies by Nisbett and colleagues (Nisbett, 2003; Nisbett & Masuda, 2003; Nisbett et al., 2001) also proposed the cognition shaped by the societal organization in ancient Greek and Chinese civilizations as the underlying cause of difference between the eastern and western countries. Finally, Levine (1997) and Hall (1983) introduced the dimensions of time to these cultural differences.

A more comprehensive framework was recently proposed by Patrick Parrish and Jenifer A. Linder-VanBershot. In a series of works, Parrish and Linder-VanBershot (2009a; 2009b; 2010) developed and validated a questionnaire, named the Cultural Dimensions of Learning Framework (CDLF), by incorporating the issues proposed by the above-mentioned

scholars into a comprehensive framework. Table 1, illustrates the components of CDLF. The present study has used this framework

in investigating the participants' perceptions towards learning.

Table 1
Cultural Dimensions of Learning Framework (CDLF) (Adapted from Parrish and Linder-VanBerschoot, 2010)

Cultural Dimension	Related issues and adaptation references
Social Relationship	
1. Equality and Authority	How is inequality handled? How is status demonstrated and respect given? What interactions are appropriate for those of unequal status? (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Lewis, 2006)
2. Individualism and Collectivism	Which prevails—the interests of the individual or the interest of the group? To what degree are interpersonal relationships valued? (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Nisbett, 2003)
3. Nurture and challenge	Which is the more important set of goals—cooperation and security or recognition and advancement? Which achieves better learning outcomes—supportive acts or challenging acts? (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005)
Epistemological Beliefs	
4. Stability seeking and uncertainty acceptance	How is uncertainty dealt with? Is it avoided or accepted? Is structure assumed to be more important than flexibility? What is the status of knowledge—established or in a process of development? (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Nisbett, 2003)
5. Logic argumentation and being reasonable	How are arguments developed? Which is more important—logical consistency or practical outcomes? How is disagreement managed? (Nisbett, 2003)
6. Causality and complex systems (analysis and holism)	How is causality assigned typically? Is it assigned to a single, most likely source, or is it assigned to the broader context? (Nisbett, 2003)
Temporal Perception	
7. Clock time and event time	Do people conform to an external measure of time, or do they allow the event at hand to unfold in its own time? Which are more important—deadlines or relationships? (Levine, 1997)
8. Linear time and cyclical time	Do people see time as a path and see goals as necessary destinations, or do they see time as a pattern of interlocking cycles into which they step in and out over the course of a life? (Hall, 1983; Lewis, 2006)

Cooperative Learning. Cooperative Learning (CL) roots date back to the social interdependence theory, cognitive developmental theory, and behavioral learning theory. Piaget's developmental theory (1954) and Slavin's (1995) cognitive theory assigned intrinsic motivation (IM) an enormous significance in learning and learners an operative role in constructing learning. The motivational theory also

pioneered the empirical investigation on CL; that is, the behavioral perspective which highlighted that CL is grounded on extrinsic motivation (EM) which results from rewards

and tasks. Figure 1, below, demonstrates the theoretical perspective proposed by Slavin (1995).

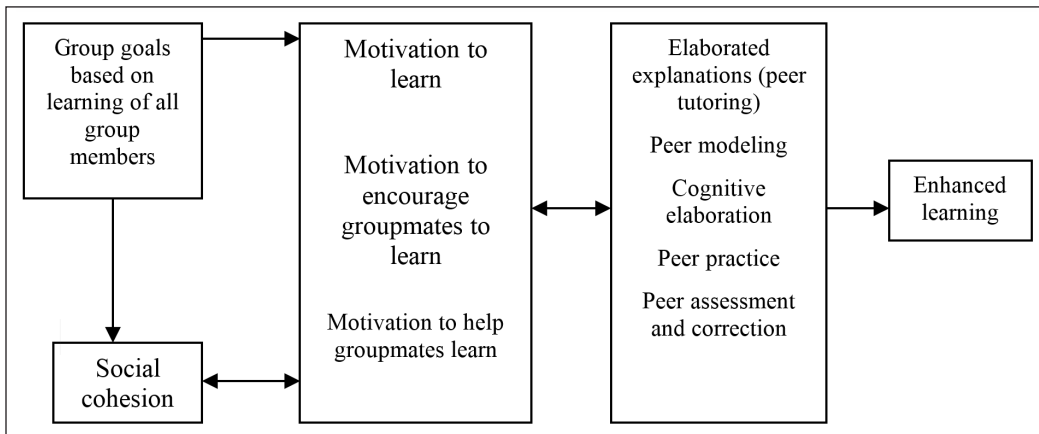


Figure 1. Integration of theoretical perspectives on cooperative learning effects on learning (Adapted from Slavin, 1995)

Proponents of cooperative learning (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993; Slavin, 1995, 2011, Webb, 2002) address five elements as the principle factors, the administration of which are essential to achieve the ultimate goal of effective learning. These elements are: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promoting interaction, social skills, and group processing. Accordingly, the learners are engaged in the following: a dual duty of learning the material and making sure that all group members have done the same (positive interdependence) where every individual's efforts are accounted for (individual accountability) since "the team's success depends on the individual learning of all team members" (Jacobs, 2006, p. 5);

the face-to-face interaction in the groups which helps learners to promote each other's success and learn the social skills such as communication to manage conflicts, making decisions for the group, etc.; and the group processing where members' learning process are continuously analyzed (Webb, 2002).

Generally, these five elements are the defining bases for CL. Their incorporation in the process of teaching makes this technique successful. Each element has an effective interdependent role which differentiates this technique from the traditional ones. To achieve this goal, different methods of operationalization, such as Learning Together and Alone, Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), Jigsaw, Student Teams Achievement Division

(STAD), Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI), Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) are offered for different purposes (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000).

Many studies on factors affecting the learning have been done by both Iranian and foreign researchers (e.g., Dotson, 2001; George, 1994; Johnson et al., 2000; Mohammadi & Salimzadeh, 2009; Zarei, 2012). A synthesis of research on cooperative learning indicates that cooperative learning strategies improve the achievement of students and their interpersonal relationships. Johnson et al (2000) point out that cooperative learning strategies are widely used because they are based on theory, validated by research, and consistent with personal philosophies. The present study takes STAD as its operational method of cooperative learning to seek its effect on the cultural dimension of the learning due to following reasons. STAD is most appropriate for teaching well-defined objectives, such as mathematical computations and applications, language usage and mechanics, geography and map skills, and science facts and concepts. The number of confirming research studies on the effectiveness of STAD in teaching different courses, such as math, sciences, language and linguistics, and arts, in comparison to traditional methods is large (Johnson et al., 2000; Reid, 1992; Slavin, 1995; Zarei, 2012). Considering the requirements of the tasks provided in the students' coursebook, STAD can be easily incorporated to the process of teaching in the classroom.

METHODS

Participants

Seventy-one male students studying seventh grade in four junior high schools (Mirzaei-2, Mirmiran, Edalat, Bahonar) in Tehran, participated in the present study. They were all students of 7th grade in the educational system of Iran and their ages ranged from 12 to 14. Seventh grade is when the students start to learn English in Iran; thus, the students are at the beginning level of their language learning. Furthermore, due to the policies of the Ministry of Education in Iran, male teachers are not allowed to teach female students. That is why female students did not participate in the present study.

The students were asked to include either of their parents (N=71) to participate in the study to get their opinion on the matter as well. The questionnaires were answered by either of students' parents with their own consent. As a result, 29 fathers and 42 mothers with ages ranging from 31 to 48 contributed to the study. The whole process of the study was done by the consent of parents taken at the outset.

Procedure

Initially, the students and their parents were asked to answer the CDLF questionnaire. The perceptions of students and parents were analyzed to check if there were any significant differences at the outset. Subsequently, the researcher taught English using STAD (a method of cooperative learning) during the first semester of the educational year (one session per week

for four months). The method requires the students to work in groups of 3 or 4 members to reach the group score. The participants' assignments to the groups were done, based on their experience in learning English outside the school, in the first session by the teacher. Each group consists of a head, who had at least two years of experience in learning English; an assistant who had a lower number of years of experience; and two other members with little or no experience.

In STAD, the teacher presented a lesson. Then, students worked within their teams to make sure that all team members had mastered the lesson. Finally, students took individual quizzes on the material, at which time they could not help one another. Students' quiz scores were compared to their own past averages, and pointed based on the degree to which students met or exceeded their own earlier performances. These points were then summed to form team scores, and teams that met the assigned criteria were rewarded. The students were told that they will receive a group score not an individual score, which is the mean score of the group members plus extra-scores for the groups who have shown progress or great contribution to each session's lesson, at the end of the semester.

At the end of the semester, the students were asked to answer the same CDLF questionnaire. Their results were analyzed and the changes in respect to their answers at the outset were identified. Then, both students and parents were asked to answer 6

open ended questions which aimed to further explore the dimensions which showed changes.

Design

The present study followed a mixed methods design to provide both descriptive and referential answers to the raised questions. Random sampling was done to select four classes in four different schools in Tehran. However, due to the limitations explained above, the sampling was done only from among schools with male students. After getting permission from the Ministry of Education, the corresponding author took the responsibility of teaching English courses in these schools and ran the treatment.

Instruments

Two measurement instruments were used in this study: the CDLF questionnaire and open-ended questions. The CDLF is a questionnaire developed by Parrish and Linder-VanBerschoot (2009b). The questionnaire examined the subjects' cultural dimensions of the perceptions towards learning using 36 Likert-scale items in three main categories and eight subcategories (see Table 1). Since the students were not competent enough to understand the English version of the questionnaire, it was translated into Persian. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach's alpha formula (Table 2). The results assured the researchers that the instrument had an acceptable index of reliability. A factor analysis was also done

and the three underlying components of the questionnaire as well as the subcategory contributions to these components were acknowledged (see Appendix A). The reliability index proved to be acceptable.

Table 2
Reliability Index of CDLF questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.690	0.675	36

RESULTS

As mentioned before, prior to the treatment, the participants' perceptions towards learning were sought using the Persian translation of the CDLF questionnaire. In order to answer the first research questions, the mean score of the participants' answers to each dimension of the CDLF were explored. Table 3, presents the descriptive statistics of the results. Using Chi-square Test of Independence (Table 4), the significances of the results were also examined for each sub-category.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' answers to CDLF questionnaire

		Group				
		N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Equality/Authority	Parents	71	5.47	1.00	10.00	2.28
	Students	71	4.98	1.00	9.33	2.20
	Total	142	5.23	1.00	10.00	2.25
Individualism/Collectivism	Parents	71	6.4	1.0	10.0	2.6
	Students	71	5.9	2.0	9.5	2.0
	Total	142	6.2	1.0	10.0	2.3
Nurture/Challenge	Parents	71	4.26	1.20	8.80	2.08
	Students	71	4.88	1.60	10.00	1.85
	Total	142	4.57	1.20	10.00	1.99
Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance	Parents	71	6.22	2.33	9.33	1.80
	Students	71	5.57	2.83	8.00	1.47
	Total	142	5.89	2.33	9.33	1.67
Logical argumentation/ Being reasonable	Parents	71	4.93	1.00	9.33	2.07
	Students	71	5.38	1.67	10.00	2.07
	Total	142	5.15	1.00	10.00	2.07
Causality/Complex system	Parents	71	5.15	1.25	8.00	1.84
	Students	71	4.88	2.75	8.00	1.57
	Total	142	5.01	1.25	8.00	1.71
Clock time/Event time	Parents	71	6.46	2.25	10.00	1.69
	Students	71	5.65	1.00	8.75	1.64
	Total	142	6.06	1.00	10.00	1.71
Linear time/Cyclical time	Parents	71	5.63	3.17	10.00	1.44
	Students	71	5.75	2.50	8.50	1.37
	Total	142	5.69	2.50	10.00	1.40

The results show that Iranians are authority-oriented, collectivist, nurturing, accepting of uncertainty, reasonable, event-focused, and cyclical-time oriented (see Appendix B for the distribution of average survey scores for each dimension). However, examining causality/complex factor showed no significant inclination towards either. In other words, the students could not be categorized as either analytic or holistic.

Furthermore, the perceptions of the students and parents were compared in this phase (Table 5). As the results indicated, students and parents had different inclinations in cases of stability seeking/uncertainty avoidance ($U = 1914, p = .013 < .05$) and clock-focus/event-focus ($U = 1822, p = .004 < .05$): parents were more accepting of uncertainty and more event-focused than students.

Table 4
Chi-Square test of independence; the significance of the observed over expected results

	Equality/ Authority	Individualism/ Collectivism	Nurture/ Challenge	Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance	Logical/ reasonable	Causality/ Complex	Clock/ Event	Linear/ Cyclical
Chi-Square	80.789	44.662	60.817	47.930	61.761	30.732	58.310	63.775
Df	21	28	29	30	22	23	25	29
Asymp. Sig.	0.000	0.024	0.000	0.020	0.000	0.130	0.000	0.000

Table 5
Mann-Whitney U-Test; the difference between the perceptions of students and parents at the outset

	Equality/ Author- ity	Individ- ualism/ Collec- tivism	Nurture/ Challenge	Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance	Log- ical/ reason- able	Cau- sality/ Com- plex	Clock/ Event	Linear/ Cycli- cal
Mann- Whitney U	2186.0	2125.500	2172.0	1914.0	2173.5	2267.0	1822.0	2225.5
Wilcoxon W	4742.0	4681.500	4728.0	4470.0	4729.5	4823.0	4378.0	4781.5
Z	-1.369	-1.614	-1.424	-2.477	-1.419	-1.036	-2.855	-1.205
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.171	0.107	0.154	0.013	0.156	0.300	0.004	0.228

The next administration of the questionnaire was done after the treatment ended. Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics of the results for pretest and posttest.

Table 6
Descriptive statistics of the students' answers to CDLF questionnaire prior and after treatment

		Test				
		N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Equality/Authority	Pretest	71	4.98	1.00	9.33	2.20
	Posttest	71	4.78	1.00	8.33	1.93
Individualism/Collectivism	Pretest	71	5.91	2.00	9.50	1.97
	Posttest	71	6.01	3.00	9.50	1.85
Nurture/Challenge	Pretest	71	4.88	1.60	10.00	1.85
	Posttest	71	4.76	1.60	8.60	1.69
Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance	Pretest	71	5.57	2.83	8.00	1.47
	Posttest	71	5.40	2.83	7.83	1.35
Logical argumentation/ Being reasonable	Pretest	71	5.38	1.67	10.00	2.07
	Posttest	71	5.54	2.33	10.00	1.95
Causality/Complex system	Pretest	71	4.88	2.75	8.00	1.57
	Posttest	71	4.90	2.75	8.00	1.54
Clock time/Event time	Pretest	71	5.65	1.00	8.75	1.64
	Posttest	71	5.63	1.25	8.75	1.61
Linear time/Cyclical time	Pretest	71	5.75	2.50	8.50	1.37
	Posttest	71	5.73	2.50	8.50	1.34

Looking into the difference in mean scores of pretest and posttest in Table 6, the changes are evident in some cases, namely, Equality/Authority; Individualism/Collectivism; Nurture/Challenge; Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance; and Logical argumentation/Being reasonable.

In order to test the significance of the difference between the two administrations of CDLF, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was run (Table 7).

As is evident from the results, cooperative learning had a significant effect on students' cultural dimensions of

the perceptions towards learning; it caused inclinations towards equality ($Z = 3.106$, $p = .002 < .05$), collectivism ($Z = 3.624$, $p = .000 < .05$), nurturing ($Z = 3.335$, $p = .001 < .05$), uncertainty acceptance ($Z = 4.025$, $p = .000 < .05$), and being reasonable ($Z = 3.86$, $p = .000 < .05$).

Furthermore, in order to further dig into the participants' perceptions after the treatment, six open-ended questions were asked to both students and parents. A brief presentation of the answers is provided in Table 8.

Table 7
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test; students' answers to CDLF questionnaire prior and after treatment

	Equality/ Author- ity	Individual- ism/ Collec- tivism	Nurture/ Challenge	Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance	Logical/ reasona- ble	Causali- ty/ Com- plex	Clock/ Event	Linear/ Cyclical
Z	-3.106 ^a	-3.624 ^b	-3.335 ^a	-4.025 ^b	-3.860 ^b	-1.147 ^b	-1.604 ^a	-1.579 ^a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.251	0.109	0.114

a. Based on negative ranks

b. Based on positive ranks

The categories mentioned in the table are made by the researchers based on the interpretation of the participants' answers to the questions. The results in Table 8 both confirm the changes in students' perceptions, as demonstrated in Tables 6 and 7 and the possible changes of their parents' perceptions in the given categories. Comparing these results to the initial results of the questionnaire presented in Table 3, one can see that parents have

kept their inclination towards authority and being reasonable. Besides, while the parents have shown to be significantly more inclined towards uncertainty acceptance than students were prior to the treatment (see Table 5), the students grew more inclination towards acceptance of uncertainty after the treatment. The differences between the perceptions of students and parents in this phase were sought using Chi-Square Test of Independence (Table 9).

Table 8
The frequency of the participants' answers to the open-ended questions

			GROUP			
			PARENTS		STUDENTS	
			N	%	N	%
Equality/ Authority	Q1: How should the relationship between teachers-parents/ teachers-students be?	Formal	54	76.1%	36	50.7%
		Intimate	17	23.9%	35	49.3%
Individualism/ Collectivism	Q2: Which type of learning is more effective?	Cooperative learning	56	78.9%	62	87.3%
		Individual learning	10	14.1%	5	7.0%
		Others	5	7.0%	4	5.6%
	Q3: How much responsibility should a person have in CL?	High	40	56.3%	43	60.6%
		Average	27	38.0%	26	36.6%
		Low	4	5.6%	2	2.8%

Table 8 (continue)

			GROUP			
			PARENTS		STUDENTS	
			N	%	N	%
Nurture/ Challenge	Q4: Which type of study do you prefer?	Cooperation	37	52.1%	45	63.4%
		Competition	26	36.6%	24	33.8%
		Both	8	11.3%	2	2.8%
Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance	Q5: Will you contribute to the group discussions if you are not sure your answer is correct	Yes	41	57.7%	40	56.3%
		No	26	36.6%	28	39.4%
		It Depends	4	5.6%	3	4.2%
Logical/ Reasonable	Q6: How do you utter your opinion in group work when you are sure you're right?	I accept others' opinion	36	50.7%	44	62.0%
		I insist	31	43.7%	17	23.9%
		Both	4	5.6%	10	14.1%

Table 9

Chi-Square Test; the difference between students' and parents' perceptions after the treatment

			Value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Equality/ Authority	Q1	Pearson Chi-Square	9.831 ^a	1	0.002
		Likelihood Ratio	9.986	1	0.002
		Linear-by-Linear Association	9.762	1	0.002
		N of Valid Cases	142		
Individualism/ Collectivism	Q2	Pearson Chi-Square	2.083	2	0.353
		Likelihood Ratio	2.116	2	0.347
		Linear-by-Linear Association	1.123	1	0.289
		N of Valid Cases	142		
	Q3	Pearson Chi-Square	0.794	2	0.672
		Likelihood Ratio	0.807	2	0.668
		Linear-by-Linear Association	0.525	1	0.469
Nurture/ Challenge	Q4	Pearson Chi-Square	4.460	2	0.108
		Likelihood Ratio	4.717	2	0.095
		Linear-by-Linear Association	3.507	1	0.061
		N of Valid Cases	142		
Stability seeking/ Uncertainty acceptance	Q5	Pearson Chi-Square	0.229	2	0.892
		Likelihood Ratio	0.230	2	0.891
		Linear-by-Linear Association	0.000	1	1.000
		N of Valid Cases	142		
Logical/ Reasonable	Q6	Pearson Chi-Square	7.455 ^a	2	0.024
		Likelihood Ratio	7.601	2	0.022
		Linear-by-Linear Association	0.063	1	0.802
		N of Valid Cases	142		

The results indicated the difference in the perceptions of students and parents in the cases of equality/authority ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 9.831$, $p = .002 < .05$) and logical/reasonable ($\chi^2_{(2)} = 7.455$, $p = .024 < .05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The first finding of the study was the acknowledgment of the construct validity of the questionnaire. Recently, Hunt and Tickner (2015) questioned the validity of the questionnaire, asserting that “a number of the items might not be indicators of these [(the framework’s)] dimensions” (p. 37). The results of this study, however, proved it otherwise.

Secondly, the participants showed significant inclinations towards being authority-oriented, collectivist, nurturing, accepting of uncertainty, reasonable, event-focused, and cyclical-time oriented while no significant inclination was indicated in the case of causality/complex system (being analytic/holistic). This was followed by significant differences in the case of uncertainty acceptance and being clock/event focused between the parents and students; the parents being more accepting of uncertainty and more event-focused.

The above-mentioned characteristics was followed by a course of shift by students towards being equality-oriented, collectivist, nurturing, accepting of uncertainty, and reasonable as a result of participating in cooperative learning activities. Even the parents who were not directly exposed to the activities showed the same inclinations in some aspects. Such results are indicative

of one certain rule: culture is a varying phenomenon. It was also an evidence for the consistent effect of the members of culture on each other. As Choudhury (2014, p. 2) pointed out, “[culture] is a fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and easily lost because it is only in our mind”. It is, thus, not wise to call members of a country, community, or region holding certain cultural features and assume them invariant. The shift, however, was not one-sided. The students started to be more accepting of uncertainty after the treatment as the participants did before it. The exploration of the open-ended questions revealed that this change was only partially due to the treatment and the students’ perceptions had several clues that could be related to the perception of their parents. For example, those who insisted on individual learning had parents who believed in essentiality of individual assessments of their children’s work.

Another point is that the findings of the study were supportive of the prior information (e.g., Hofstede, 1986; Noora, 2008; Omidvar et al., 2012) about Iran provided in the literature in some aspects, e.g. having low power distance, being accepting of uncertainty. In other aspects, though, there were some contradictory points, i.e., unlike the results of the present study, the above-mentioned studies had identified Iranian learners as slightly individualistic and competitive (challenging). However, as Hofstede (1986) cautiously warned us, the cultural descriptors were of extremes, and that most societies could not be

characterized in such absolute terms but fell along a continuum between the extremes. One should also be aware of the evolving nature of culture. To quote Parrish and Linder-VanBerschot (2010), “deep-rooted as culture may be, a description of any culture is merely a snapshot of a continually evolving matrix of beliefs, values, and behaviors developed through the creative interactions” (p. 4).

The main finding of the study was the effectiveness of the cooperative learning method on changing the perceptions of students towards supporting such methods. The participants were deliberately chosen from 7th grade in junior high school to have a sample which was assumed to be less-adopted to the individualistic system of scoring in Iran. It is believed (e.g., Zarei, 2012) that the problem of culture of learning/teaching EFL contexts such as Iran is the focus on grammar translation in the examination system. Consequently, the learners get accustomed to study only for the sake of passing the exam.

Such tendencies were, perhaps, one of the major reasons that the English books for junior and senior high school classes assigned by the Ministry of Education served as the learning material for more than 25 years in Iran. The books followed the principles of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and methods that enhanced the use of reading and writing skills where speaking and listening were almost ignored. These books continued to serve their purposes until just recently while there had been large amounts of researches

which suggested the use of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based teaching/learning. Finally, the Ministry of Education introduced new sets of books, i.e. *Prospect* series for junior high school and *Vision* series for senior high school, which followed the principles of CLT. Consequently, the use of cooperative learning methods was encouraged among teachers.

While under the influence of traditional culture, less attention is paid to creative expression, critical thinking, and problem solving, the results of the present study indicate that such tendencies are not absolute. The change in the system of education provides the pre-requisite for shifting towards modern ways of learning and teaching. It seems that choosing the right time to start, and right material to be engaged with, is an important influence in leading the students towards the assimilation to a kind of perception which encourages the modern techniques of teaching and learning.

Investigating the participants' answers to open-ended questions was also suggestive of an important issue: they considered their experience with cooperative learning as innovative, interesting, and fruitful. As previously mentioned, the Iranian educational system has been under the influence of traditional methods. The lack of exposure to modern methods might be an important cause of the claimed predominant inclination towards the traditional culture of learning. Choosing to expose the learners to the refreshing modern methods of teaching and learning before they have got

accustomed to the old culture might be a significance impact in shifting the learning culture among them.

At present, the discourse of professional teachers and their sources of reading are heavily reliant on what is produced in major Western universities and although the methodical approaches of such authorities are quite remarkable, one wonders if the variables which they choose are always the most pertinent to the contextual and cultural realities of different environments and circumstances. The present study, however, would be a good reference for Iranian teachers to rely on. The results indicate that if the ground is paved, the students may go towards cooperation, despite what has been dominant in Iran's educational context, i.e. individual learning and competition instead of cooperation. The starting point to lead learners towards such behaviors is recommended to move further back to their early years of learning. The shift might be gradual but promising. Learners also may understand the importance of cooperation and seek to learn together instead of compete against each other. Material developers also may start to bring more cooperative tasks to the workbooks that facilitate this process.

The results of present study may shed light on a method that can help teachers and learners to overcome this shortcoming in their classroom. The findings of the present study can also have implications for theorists, teachers and learners, and syllabus designers.

It should not be left unmentioned that what one perceives might be a mixture of what one does and what s/he wants to do. In other words, the perceptions reported here are likely to be the mixture of participants' ideal as well as existing perceptions about learning. Such differences are shown in the works of Iranian researchers (Pishghadam & Naji Meidani, 2011; Pishghadam & Navari, 2010). Narrowing down the gap between the perception and actualization of such perceptions is not an easy task and needs lots of research and effort.

Finally, the present study faced some limitations. Only male students participated in the study. The results, thus, may only be generalizable to male students. Further research can be done in the future to see if gender is a determining factor. Also, while STAD was used as the operational method of modern teaching in this study, other methods also may be examined in studies within frameworks similar to the present study.

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APPENDIX

Factor Analysis Results on CDLF Questionnaire

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.609
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	184.484
	Df	28
	Sig.	.000

Factor Analysis; Item Total Variances

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.232	27.904	27.904	2.232	27.904	27.904	2.130	26.627	26.627
2	1.571	19.633	47.537	1.571	19.633	47.537	1.520	19.000	45.627
3	1.181	14.760	62.297	1.181	14.760	62.297	1.334	16.670	62.297
4	0.935	11.684	73.981						
5	0.700	8.752	82.733						
6	0.550	6.876	89.609						
7	0.434	5.420	95.029						
8	0.398	4.971	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotated Component Matrix; Varimax Rotation Method

	Component		
	1	2	3
Equality/Authority	0.773	-0.013	0.127
Individualism/Collectivism	0.790	0.160	-0.015
Nurture/Challenge	0.796	-0.024	0.085
Stability seeking/Uncertainty acceptance	0.278	-0.021	0.753
Logical argumentation/Being reasonable	0.222	-0.079	0.798
Causality/Complex system	0-.058	0.210	0.813
Clock time/Event time	0-.375	0.692	0.039
Linear time/Cyclical time	0.072	0.630	0.102

Distribution of Mean Survey of Participants' Answers to each Dimension

