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Thai EFL Students' Perceptions of Collaborative Tasks in a Presentation Course

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Introduction

English has been utilized for communication purposes around the globe (British Council, 2013). Several countries worldwide, including Thailand, have placed English as a mandatory subject in educational institutions (Draper, 2019). Phothongsunan (2019) states that English is crucial for business, education, science, and technological headway in Thailand. Therefore, Thai students generally spend approximately ten years studying English from kindergarten to high school (Phothongsunan, 2019) and take the compulsory 12 credits of the language at the tertiary level (Draper, 2019). Nonetheless, English communication skills remain a national issue in Thailand (Klommek & Saelee, 2019).

According to Draper (2019), Thailand has not put enough emphasis on English productive skills, including speaking. Brown and Yule (1983) argue that speaking is the skill that the students will be mostly judged upon in real-life situations. Rao (2019) claims that speaking skills are useful for professionals to develop their careers. Therefore, Thailand should put more emphasis on speaking skills. However, Putri and Hariyati (2017) found that numerous Thai students consider speaking the hardest to master. Thai students would commonly feel anxious when they are asked to speak English (Charoensukmongkol, 2019). Hence, more engaging and speaking-focused activities are needed to solve such concerns.

Among others, collaborative learning has been conducted to solve issues in the English language teaching context in recent years (Liao, 2014; Mykhyda et al., 2019; Novitasari, 2019; Pereira et al., 2019; Rao, 2019). Also, collaboration has been included as a part of 21st-century learners' characteristics (Churches, 2008). Therefore, at Walailak University Thailand, the concept of collaborative learning has been adapted in an English presentation course. The course is designed to accommodate Thai students from different majors and CEFR proficiency levels. This research aims to reveal the students' perceptions of English collaborative presentation based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels.



Literature Review

Collaborative Learning and 21st Century Learners

Blair (2012) suggests that 21st-century learners must own 4 Cs, comprising critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Additionally, UNESCO (2011) provides a specifically designed framework for teachers' application of ICT globally. UNESCO Framework recommends that teachers should not only have ICT competencies but also encourage collaborative, problem-solving, creative activities through ICT in order for them to be useful citizens and members of the workforce (UNESCO, 2011). Hence, collaboration is conceived as a significant factor of success for 21st-century learners. Therefore, it is necessary to utilize collaborative learning in today's education.

Bower and Richard (2006) claim that collaborative learning can inspire deep learning. It is an essential key in problem and experience-based learning. Laal and Laal (2011, p. 491) defined collaborative learning as "an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product." Johnson and Johnson (1994, as cited in McLaren, 2014) argue that students of the same age, grade, or level of understanding usually work together in collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is a learning model that is carried out in the form of large or small groups.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Collaborative Learning

Collaboration improves problem-solving skills when learners formulate their ideas, discuss the ideas with their learning partner, receive valuable feedback, and respond to questions and comments (Peterson & Swing, 1985, as cited in Laal & Laal, 2011). McLaren (2014) states that students benefit from their interaction and collaboration. Moreover, students who collaborate with others to do a particular task experience the most effective interaction (Laal & Laal, 2011).

While some studies have proven that collaborative learning has several advantages, it also has shortcomings. Liao (2014) mentions that although most students reported that they enjoyed the input they received for group preparation or collaborative learning, some students stated that they did not have enough time to practice and do it themselves at their own pace, compared to individual preparation. Those who feel inferior when working with smarter or higher-achieving members do not fully participate by their own choice in collaborative work (Cohen & Lota, 1995, as cited in McLaren, 2014). Another study from Storch (2002) on patterns of interaction in L2 pair work found that when students were assigned a language task in pairs, not all worked collaboratively. Moreover, those who worked together in a group recalled information fewer than those working individually. Although collaborative recall is not considered to accumulate individual recall, it is still an individual recall product (Weldon & Bellinger, 1997). Aside from that, individual conflicts due to differences of opinion can also occur. According to McLaren (2014), when there is too much disagreement between team members, they may not develop good ideas for both parties because they use all their time arguing ineffectively.

Collaborative Learning in English Language Teaching

Collaborative learning has been utilized in the context of English language teaching for years. A finding of a study on peer scaffolding in making a collaborative oral presentation conducted by Nguyen (2013) indicated that collaborative pair work in collaborative presentation task provided conditions for learning in which peers support one another in workload sharing, pooling ideas and resources, technology support, peer feedback, audience support, and affective support. However, researchers found only a few collaborative learning-related studies on English presentation skills. The previous studies were limited to the impact of collaborative learning and public speaking or English-speaking skill in general. For instance, Rao (2019) studied the use of collaborative learning in English classrooms; Pereira et al. (2019) utilized

collaborative learning to teach passive voice; Mykhyda et al. (2019) incorporated collaborative learning in English academic classroom; Novitasari (2019) studied collaborative learning in English for Special Purposes context.

Several studies have found that students' responses were positive when collaborative learning is used in language classes (Aguelo, 2017; Altamimi, & Attamimi, 2014; Matera, 2008; Nazira et al., 2010; Pattanpichet, 2011; Rampanniyom, & Lornklang, 2015). The study conducted by Nazira et al. (2010) indicated that the experimental group's speaking abilities were improved. They found an increase in students' speaking skills after students were exposed to certain collaborative learning activities. Students were more motivated to interact more with each other and engage actively in group discussion. Meanwhile, researchers found that the level of communicative students' apprehension did not increase dramatically after treatment. It is assumed that students will increase their communicative apprehension over a more extended period of study and increased exposure to collaborative learning activities. In line with the result finding of the previous study, Altamimi and Attamimi (2014) found that after implementing cooperative learning methods, the results showed remarkable improvement in students' speaking skills and attitudes. Students agreed that collaborative learning allowed them to develop their communication skills (Altamimi & Attamimi, 2014). This finding is supported by Aguelo (2017) and Rampaniyom and Lornklang (2015), who found that collaborative learning helped develop the speaking skills of their research participants.

Moreover, prior research has shown that students are much more actively involved and familiar with tasks and their peers by working together or working as a group (collaborative learning). Matera (2008) observed that students were engaged with their peers to share information, brainstorm, discuss and summarize their response/information, use new vocabulary and words, and build speaking tasks. Pattanpichet (2011) argued that students were more familiar with each other and with tasks assigned after they frequently collaborated with their group members. The students' feedback showed they enjoyed the class and had less tension.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

CEFR has been commonly used worldwide and has influenced the language standards, curricula, and examination reform (North, 2014). Though it was initially meant for use in Europe, this framework is accepted globally (North, 2014). The welcome given to this framework is due to its focus on what the language speakers can do instead of cannot (Van Houten, 2012). The CEFR consists of two descriptive dimensions: horizontal and vertical, which is the most prominent (Huhta, 2012). Horizontal includes descriptions of different language use contexts, and vertical comprises six proficiency levels ranging from A1 to C2 (Huhta, 2012). In recent years, this framework has been used in English-speaking related research (Berger, 2020; Huang et al., 2018; Phaisannan et al., 2019), proving its trustworthiness. The CEFR was also used by Nagai and O'Dwyer (2011) to establish learning outcomes for an EAP presentation course. The following table presents the description of each CEFR level on the global scale.

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Figure 1. CEFR in global scale (Source: Council of Europe (2001, p. 24)).

Method

Research Question

This study attempted to answer the following question.

1. How do students with different CEFR levels perceive collaboration in English presentation tasks?

Research Design

This study is a mixed-method research. Creswell (2014) states that this approach uses both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. Deployment of a mixed-method approach can improve a research's trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Qualitative and quantitative data collection enables triangulation, strengthening the results and trustworthiness (Creamer, 2018). The following adopted figure explains the flow of this research (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

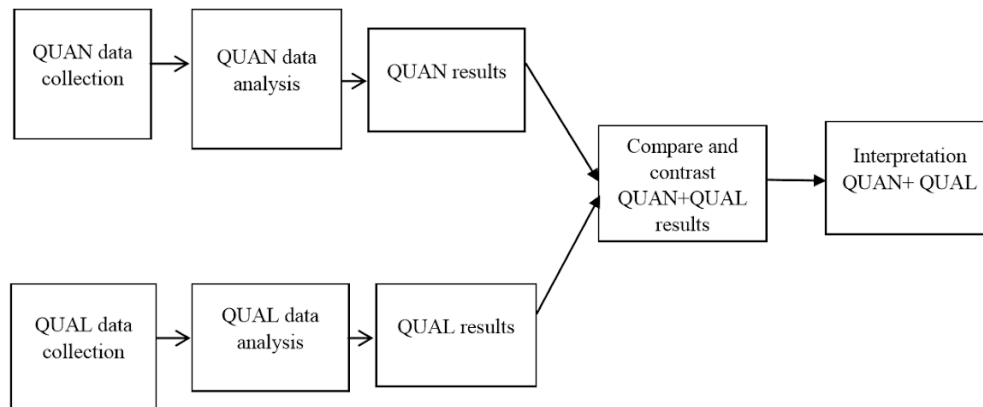


Figure 2. The Convergence Model (Source: Creswell and Clark (2007)).

Data Collection

This study took place from October 2019 to January 2020. An online survey consisting of Likert scale items and open-ended questions was designed and assessed by three experts. The final questionnaire was then given to students utilizing Google Forms. The quantitative and qualitative data were then gathered and analyzed. Semi-structured interviews and observations enhanced the qualitative data. Purposively selected individuals who volunteered were further interviewed. The semi-structured interview was conducted after the end of the term and was recorded and transcribed. In addition to the survey and interview, field notes were taken from conducted observations.

Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in a course named English Presentation in Sciences and Technology at Walailak University for 12 weeks. Four hundred seventeen students, 285 females and 132 males aged from 19 to 21, participated in the survey. Before the start of the course, students took an English proficiency test to indicate their CEFR levels. Based on the results, 29 students were in the A1 level, 264 were in the A2 level, 122 were in the B1 level, and two were in the B2 level. The participants were second-year students at Walailak University, Thailand, who took an English presentation course as part of their general education requirement. The students came from different majors under health and natural science clusters.

The course utilized a project-based approach. The students were notified about the final project to perform a full-length presentation in English in pairs. A book was developed for the presentation course. The book had three units, namely, introduction, body, and conclusion. Before the final presentation, students had already completed three in-class pair presentations. Additionally, students were given three pair presentation video tasks before each in-class presentation. The following figure illustrates the presentation tasks in the course. Week 1 was the course introduction, while the following weeks' activities are elaborated in Figure 3.

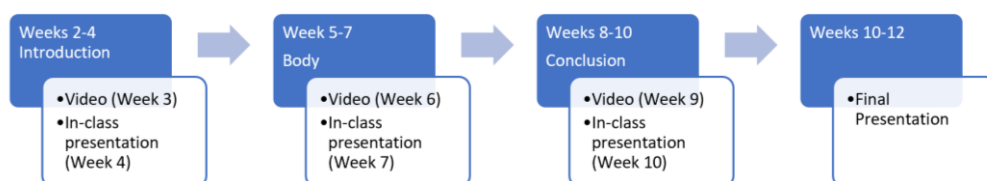


Figure 3. Timeline of the presentation tasks.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data that were collected through questionnaires, descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were performed. It is regarded that the quantitative data collection technique in mixed-method research can enhance the validity of the whole data (Gay et al., 2011). For the qualitative data collected through open-ended surveys, interviews, and observations, content analysis was undertaken. Rose et al. (2015) stated that content analysis refers to a collection of approaches for systematic, replicable text analysis. Content analysis was applied for investigating both text's substantive and form features, which refer to what is being conveyed in the message and how it is being conveyed, respectively (Schreier, 2012). In this study, the collected qualitative data from the survey, interview, and field notes were sorted. There was a reduction done to opt which data was significant. Then, data were summarized to create comprehensive descriptions. After the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data separately, their results were compared and contrasted.

Finding and Discussion

This section reveals students' perceptions in two major categories, namely satisfaction and accomplishment.

Satisfaction

Students' satisfaction was measured through the means of 8 items on the survey. The satisfaction is associated with the pair presentation tasks. The items analyzed students' satisfaction during two phases, namely preparation and performance. The following table explains descriptive data on students' satisfaction.

TABLE 1
Students' Satisfaction

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
A1	29	3.7629	.76060	.14124	3.4736	4.0522	2.13	5.00
A2	264	3.8646	.64461	.03967	3.7865	3.9427	2.00	5.00
B1	122	3.9088	.56614	.05126	3.8073	4.0103	3.00	5.00
B2	2	4.1875	.44194	.31250	.2168	8.1582	3.88	4.50
Total	417	3.8720	.63014	.03086	3.8113	3.9327	2.00	5.00

Table 1 points out similarities in means across different levels of students. Table 2 proves no significant difference in students' satisfaction across the four different levels, $F(3,413) = 0.606$, $p = .611$. Nonetheless, Table 1 also shows that the higher the level, the higher the means of students' satisfaction.

TABLE 2
Students' Satisfaction - ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	.724	3	.241	.606	.611
Within Groups	164.460	413	.398		
Total	165.184	416			

Concerning the gathered qualitative data, no significant difference was observed in students' perceptions. Most responses revealed positive perceptions of students towards the pair presentation task.

Their positive perceptions were associated with four categories: work, enjoyment, anxiety, and convenience.

Amount of work

Most mentioned that they were delighted not to remember much content. As students studied approximately 5 to 7 courses that term, they had other mandatory tasks they had to turn in. Therefore, the pair presentation assignment did not burden them. This finding is congruous with that of Nguyen (2013), in which she found that workload sharing helps effectively prepare presentations.

Enjoyment

Students highlighted that collaboration made the preparation process fun because of having a partner. Moreover, collaboration created a less stressful learning environment. This finding supports that of Storch (2002).

Confidence

Students revealed that collaboration decreased their anxiety. They felt comfortable and more courageous when performing the presentation collaboratively. Several students highlighted the negative stigma they previously had on doing an English presentation and how the course completely changed their perceptions and even boosted their confidence. This finding supports that of Shehadeh (2011) on the role of collaboration and peer scaffolding to improve confidence.

Convenience

Several students pointed out that working in pairs afforded the preparation process to be quicker and more convenient. Also, they could manage their time more sufficiently. According to them, collaboration improved the quality of their work. In addition to the three main reasons, several students disclosed that they could make new friends through the course.

Accomplishment

Students' perceptions of their accomplishments were measured through the means of 8 items on the survey. The following table explains descriptive data on students' accomplishments.

TABLE 3
Students' Accomplishment

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
A1	29	3.7284	.73805	.13705	3.4477	4.0092	2.25	5.00
A2	264	3.8598	.61509	.03786	3.7853	3.9344	2.00	5.00
B1	122	3.9139	.55230	.05000	3.8149	4.0129	2.25	5.00
B2	2	3.8750	.17678	.12500	2.2867	5.4633	3.75	4.00
Total	417	3.8666	.60553	.02965	3.8083	3.9249	2.00	5.00

Table 3 displays similarities in means across different levels of students. Moreover, Table 4 depicts no significant difference in students' perceptions of accomplishment across the four different levels, $F(3,413) = 0.761, p = .516$.

TABLE 4
Students' Accomplishment-ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	.839	3	.280	.761	.516
Within Groups	151.694	413	.367		
Total	152.533	416			

Concerning the qualitative data, no significant difference was observed in students' perceptions. Most respondents revealed positive perceptions of their accomplishments in the course and admitted that collaboration was vital. The perceptions on accomplishments were divided into four groups, as follows.

Peer learning

Most respondents mentioned that the pair presentation tasks afforded more learning because they collaborated with friends. They expressed that the collaborative project enabled them to learn from and give feedback to one another, which resulted in better performance in the tasks. A student mentioned that when there was a problem, she could consult her partner first, and if they could not solve it, they would ask for advice from their lecturer. Through assisting each other, they grew and improved their English skills. This finding is congruous with that of Nguyen (2013) and Peterson and Swing (as cited in Laal & Laal, 2011). Several respondents also disclosed that collaboration helped them understand the lesson more easily. They declared that it allowed them to retain information longer. This finding is in line with that of Weldon and Bellinger (1997).

Speaking skills

Respondents mentioned that collaboration gave them more motivation to practice and made the experience less stressful, resulting in better speaking skills. This finding supports that of Storch (2002), that pair work helps with language development. Students with a low English proficiency level further revealed that working in pairs was the right option as the collaboration gave them more language exposure and time for practice. Therefore, they were courageous to speak more even though they were unsure of the accuracy. This finding is congruous with that of Shehadeh (2011),

Course

Students revealed that the course was very beneficial for them as students and later at work. The course gave them a lot of English exposure and time for speaking practice. A student revealed that the course was one of the best courses she had registered for at the university.

Students' concerns

Though most respondents gave positive reviews, there were a few students who informed their concerns. One concern is clashing schedules, resulting in less time to practice and prepare for the presentations. Another is clashing interests, resulting in a difficult start for students. This finding is congruous with that of McLaren (2014). The last concern is students' personal preferences. A student with CEFR level B2 preferred to do the presentation alone and revealed that it would further improve his skills.

Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative data reveal students' positive perceptions towards collaborative tasks. This finding supports previous studies (Aguelo, 2017; Altamimi & Attamimi, 2014; Matera, 2008; Nazira et al.,

2010; Pattanpichet, 2011; Rampanniyom, & Lornklang, 2015). Concerning CEFR levels, there was no significant difference in students' perceptions related to satisfaction and accomplishment. Most respondents expressed that they were satisfied and disclosed that the strategy positively affected their accomplishment in the course. This finding is congruous with that of previous studies (Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2002). Moreover, collaboration enabled them to have less burden, more confidence, enjoyment, and convenience. It also eased with the learning process and improved their speaking skills. This finding is in line with that of Nguyen (2013). However, several students expressed their concerns, including clashing schedules and clashing interests. A student with a higher English proficiency level also preferred to do an individual presentation.

All in all, collaborative tasks can benefit students, particularly those CEFR levels A1, A2, and B1. Therefore, it is a proper technique to be adopted in English presentation courses with mixed or lower proficiency level students. Nonetheless, there are limitations to the findings. Firstly, there were only four observed CEFR levels in the samples, from A1 to B2. Moreover, A2 and B1 students dominated the samples. So, there needs to be future research to analyze the perceptions of students in higher CEFR levels.

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