Effects of Cooperative Learning and Peer Influence on English Debate Learning Experience of Novice Student Debaters: A Case Study of a University Debate Club

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Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on how cooperative learning experience and peer influence plays a role in debate learning experience of novice student debaters. Of all of the emerging themes, this paper specifically presents cooperative learning and use of peer influence Eleven participants with no prior English debate experience were selected through purposive sampling. The participants completed ten sessions of English

debate training and data were collected through the use of three instruments including three individual interviews, learning log diaries and class observations. Each of these instruments presented similar questions for the integrated analysis. Coding analysis was conducted and similar findings from each source suggested both positive and negative effects of cooperative learning and peer influence on the participants' learning experience. The positive side was represented by knowledge and mental support occurring both directly and indirectly. For the knowledge support, the direct support was represented by peer-tutoring, consultation and knowledge/idea sharing, while the indirect support included peer observation /modeling and class immersion. In terms of mental support, participants directly benefit from peer consolation and indirectly from a sense of teamwork and togetherness and peer observation. However, the negative effects were found to include peer pressure and team overreliance causing discouragement and reduced individual responsibility. Effects of peer pressure were paralleled with individual's level of self-esteem and class heterogeneity.

1. Introduction

Task-based, problem-based and project-based activities signifies an attempt to help learners collaboratively learn the language through task completion (Skehan, 1998 as cited in Darasawang, 2007). Several learning activities emphasize group processing and team cooperation such as a group discussion, a role play and a debate. In the Thai EFL context, rote learning has been a prevalent teaching method since the reign of King Rama III (Darasawang, 2007). Later in 1950, international commerce necessitated a socially constructed communicative English learning. Life-long learning and learner-centeredness were then prioritized in the 1960 Curriculum, revised in 1977, (Darasawang, 2007) and later put in the National Education Act 1999. Despite such effort, Thai students' English communicative competence has remained the biggest concern, substantively due to lack of exposure to English communication, well-trained teachers, motivation and intensive focus on grammar and pronunciation accuracy

(Wiriyachitra, 2001, Noom-Ura, 2013). Also, an effective application of cooperative English learning only has not been in use in every school or university.

The researcher chose an English debate because of its cooperative learning characteristics as proposed by Kagan (1994). However, despite myriad advantages, this activity is still new to most Thai students and consists of language anxiety provoking characteristics and certain drawbacks were reported such as discouraging emotional impacts (Lirola, 2016). Thus, such two-sided effects necessitate an investigation into the matter guided by the following question.

- How does cooperative learning and peer influence affect the learning experience of novice student debaters in the case study of a debate club?

2. Literature review

2.1 Cooperative learning and its role in EFL

Cooperative learning is related to learner-centeredness (Johnson at al, 1998). Gillies (2007) associated it with individual accountability, social skills, face to face interaction,

positive interdependence and group process, while Kagan (1995) additionally emphasized equal participation and spontaneous communication. These desirable characteristics are embedded in several English learning and teaching methods such as Constructive Controversy (Johnson & Johnson, 1979, Student-Team-Achievement Division (Slavin, 1995, Think-Pair-Share (Lyman, 1981) and Cooperative Learning Structure (Kagan, 1980).

In the EFL context, the cooperative learning process enhances both cognitive and affective strengths. First, constant spontaneous interaction within a team promotes oral communication skills (Akerman & Neale, 2011) through an enlarged vocabulary size necessitated by verbal expression complexity. A pair/team context allows discussion and consultation (Cohen, 1994) even among equally able learners. Swain and Lapkin (1998) corroborated this benefit in their study in which two learners of French completed a French structure task through a discussion. Each simply filled other's knowledge gaps. Between more and less advanced learners, a peer-tutoring relationship occurs, whether the tutoring is deliberately arranged or not. This was found in the

studies by Chavangklang and Suppaseseree (2018) demonstrating 220 1st year students' reading comprehension ability resulting from using a Flipped Class Cooperative Learning Method. Likewise, Leowenstein and Shi (2017) and Wahyakti (2017) claimed that while the tutors benefit from subject content reinforcement, the tutees get to observe and adopt learning strategies.

On the affective ground, cooperative learning lessens language anxiety (Slavin, 1995;Foss & Reitzel, 1988 ; Cutrone, 2002) through a small group's comfort promoting willingness to perform in a foreign language (Dörnyei, 1997) through open communication allowed by lower social barriers (Jolliffe, 2007).Learners also develop responsibility toward team success through effort to contribute to the team as one equal player. Through continued success, self-esteem, confidence and motivation grow (Slavin, 1995). In a Thai EFL class using Achievement Division (STAD) for grammar and reading improvement, the T-Test results verified that both proficiency improvement and better attitude as well as self-esteem were found (Chavangklang & Suppasetseree, 2018; Malelohit, 2016; Malelohit, 2010 and Wichadee,

2007. Feeling respected and valued was the driving force to achieve a team's shared goal, increasing one's participation (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 2008; Slavin, 2008). Nevertheless, negative peer pressure been revealed as a normal drawback. In general, witnessing others' higher advancement instinctively causes self-evaluation bridging a gap for uniformity (Festinger, 1954; Zajonc, 1965). Although Falk and Knell (2004) argued that an upward comparison can increase enthusiasm and the downward one gives self-enhancement, comparing one's self with overly competent peers can hinder learning outcomes (Buchs & Butera, 2009). In a team scenario, being a stakeholder of the team's success provokes fear of being the team's failure (Lirola, 2016). Thus, major constructs of a cooperative learning activity such as management of mixed-proficiency class and teamwork procedures needs an instructor's attention (Lirola, 2016; Song, Loewenstein, George & Shi, 2018).

2.2 Use of Cooperative learning activities in Thai EFL teaching and learning

In the Thai EFL context, the cooperative learning concept is ingrained in several intertwined English teaching principles such as a Project-Based learning, Task-Based learning, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Student-Team-Achievement Division (STAD) to enhance holistic English proficiencies. However, emerging learning outcomes indicate not only improved language competency but also mental strengths and soft skills as having been corroborated by a number of previous studies. In a STAD – applied class entailing presentation teamwork and quizzes, Malelohit (2016) reported the students' T-Test verified improved grammar and the soft skills of team collaboration and peer assistance. Likewise, using the same method with 40 1st year students for reading comprehension, Wichadee (2007) reflected the same results, as in the study by Malelohit (2010) conducted with 47 2nd year students. For oral communication, CLT activities emphasizing the use of discussions, debates, prepared talks and oral presentations are highly characteristic (Natthawut & Suwannarak, 2018). Polsombat

(2006), for instance, suggested improved speaking and listening and interpersonal skills. Nevertheless, implementing the cooperative learning approaches comes with Thai EFL contextual challenges. The first challenge concerns ongoing wrestling between the conventional teacher-centered method aimed for one's individual mastery and the learner-centered ones (Seangboon, 2002) due to limited well-trained teachers (Wanchai, 2012), Thai students' familiarity with content memorization and lack of cooperative learning experiences Kettunen (2015) problematizing group work. Due to lack of teamwork experiences, they are susceptible to anxieties mainly caused by low confidence, like learners in other EFL countries such as Pakistan (Ahmed, Pathan, & Khan, 2012) and Kazakhstan (Suleimenova, 2013).

2.3 Debate and its role in EFL education

A debate has long been known to improve multiple skills, e.g. critical thinking, language proficiency, argumentative and teamwork skills (Akerman & Neale, 2011; Alasmari & Ahmed, 2013; Somjai & Janssem, 2015). Freely and Steinberg (2005) described it as the process of exploring varying viewpoints to achieve rational judgment through

thorough research, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In debates, off-script spontaneous interactional competence is stimulated (Sun, 2014; Kenedy, 2009) and simultaneously used with other English skills (Alasmari & Ahmed, 2013). Burek and Losos (2014), for example, emphasized debaters' need to listen and take note attentively, called *flowing* in debating. Debating was proved to advance argumentation and speaking skills in the study by Zare and Othman (2015), investigating critical thinking and oral communication skills of sixteen undergraduate students after nine sessions of in-class debates. Similar results were obtained in the study by Somjai and Jansem (2015). In their study, 46 tenth grade students completed 18 debate sessions for the purpose of speaking improvement. English speaking assessment and evaluation criteria suggested both academic and social skill improvement.

In terms of cooperative learning, a debate has been widely applied to promote cooperative learning in class (Lirola, 2016, Wahyukti, 2017) by virtue of its cooperative learning characteristics. To achieve a meaningful debate, debaters need research, writing, speaking and, unavoidably teamwork skills. On a debate team, each

member is obliged to contribute to the team through assigned positions including PM, DPM and Whip. This responsibility compels team members to prepare in advance (Charangklang & Suppusetseree, 2018). Furthermore, besides listening comprehension, the processes involved in debates set a condition for extroverted learners to listen and introverted counterparts to speak, enabling the former to learn to be open-minded and the latter to articulate ideas respectively, as affirmed by Burek and Losos (2014) who organized the middle school class and Garden State Debate League (a competitive interschool debate program in Monmounth County, New Jersey). The debate entails cooperative learning characteristics compelling debaters to navigate under cooperative perspectives (Goodwin, 2003; Kenedy, 2007; Lirola, 2016) along the debate's procedures. Being an equal part of the team consolidates learners' learning responsibility and learner autonomy (Brown, 2001; Wahyukti, 2017; Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006 as cited in Watts, 2011). Everyone needs to equally contribute to the team through their roles involving extensive communication. Having one's

opinion valued forms a sense of belonging leading to higher motivation (Frijters et al.,2006; Oros, 2007).

Several previous studies conducted in Thai and foreign contexts were mainly aimed to explore skill improvement and attitude toward cooperative learning. However, very few emphasized the role of cooperative learning and peer influence in learners' learning experience in a team-oriented and anxiety-provoking debate. The researcher is interested in investigating to what extent it might affect one's learning experience either positively or negatively, especially among tertiary level students with extremely limited communicative lesson and cooperative learning experience.

3.Research methodology

3.1Research design

This qualitative study was conducted using a participatory action research (PAR) model to allow research flexibility and simultaneous data collection and analysis. The researcher aims to develop a practical a contextualized activity plan constantly adjusted to the students' experience. For example, if the pre-planned "brainstorming in English"

proved to be more of a hindrance rather than scaffolding for learning, the researcher and team would consider replacing it with "brainstorming in Thai". This design enables iterative plan adjustment. Additionally, compared to other models, PAR provides room for the participants' opinions. They were informed and reasonably allowed to make suggestion for the activity's directions.

3.2 Research setting

This study was conducted in a debate club supervised by two qualified English lecturers with extensive experience both as a debate trainer and debate competition adjudicator. The club had initially commenced with a small group of English proficient English-major students, given the original goal of forming a university team for debate competitions. Currently, the principal goal is to serve as a platform for English practice for students across disciplines so that more opportunities to spontaneously communicate ideas in English are granted. In this training, the training is scheduled for Wednesday for two hours.

3.3 Research participants

Eleven participants consented to be part of the study. Purposive sampling criteria for recruitment were used to

select participants with zero active experience either in English debate training or competitions. Levels of English proficiency were not part of the criteria. As required by the Human Research Ethic Committee of the university, the researcher proceeded through the procedure to be issued an official approval from the board. Research participants were informed of a request for cooperation concerning purpose of the study, period of the training, conditions of the training (e.g. a non-credit, extracurricular activity) and overall procedure before being asked for consent. The eleven participants consist of English major undergraduate students from School of Liberal Arts and two graduate Food Technology major students from School of Science. Participants were assigned specific pseudonyms as part of the protocol for identity confidentiality.

3.4 Research instruments

Three major instruments were applied to elicit data, namely an individual semi-structured interview, learning long diary and participatory class observation. The purpose of using these three instruments was to triangulate data from three sources in order to ensure the in-depth and most reflective data. Also, each of the instruments was constructed

based on similar questions so that the data from each instrument could contribute to and compensate for one another.

3.4.1. Individual semi-structured interview

The researcher conducted three rounds of individual interviews (preliminary interview, mid-training interview and post- training interview). The interviews were arranged before the 1st training, after the 5th and the 10th debate training. Each session took 20- 30 minutes through the use of a semi-structured interview (Merriam, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Cresswell, 2007). The interview questions mainly addressed problems or challenges encountered, facilitative and debilitative factors, problem-solving processes or learning approaches constructed to tackle the problems. Questions were divided into two sets. The first set was used for a preliminary interview and the second was for the second and the third interview.

3.4.2 Learning log diary

A learning log diary served as an instrument retrieving saturated thoughts which could be missing in an interview. Secondly, with questions similar to the interview, the use of a learning log could compensate for potential limitations of the oral interview. As suggested by Charmaz

(2006), during the interview, research participants might prefer sharing only ideal truths that make them appear intelligent and able. The researcher also needed to create and maintain a good rapport with the research participants (Dey, 1999) to gain trust and ensure an in-depth information gain. Questions in the learning log diary were aligned with those in the interview and points of observation in the class observation form.

3.4.3 Class observation

The class observation of ten training sessions was intended to draw similar data mainly through the researcher's perspective. The observation template was used to ensure data relevance with observation points investigating feelings and causes, challenges/problems, solutions or attempts made to solve problems, teamwork/cooperation and overall atmosphere. Data were documented in a parallel fashion of descriptive and reflective narratives. To access reflective and complex data, the researcher assumed the role of a participatory observer who simultaneously participated and observed the class through the role of a coach assistant.

3.5 Data collection process

Participatory Action Research model (PAR) serves as a backbone of the training design in order to allow flexibility and reasonable adjustment at each step. The entire training was divided into two cycles, namely Cycle 1 (Activity 1-5) and Cycle 2 (Activity 6-10) so that any flaws emerging during Cycle 1 would be taken into consideration for the Cycle 2's activity adjustment. The three interviews were conducted before and mid training as a preliminary interview, mid interview after the 5th session and post interview after the 10th session. In each session, the class observation was carried out. After the 1st, 5th and 10th sessions, the learning log diary forms, highlighting overall atmosphere, problems and solutions, were distributed.

3.5.1 Debate sessions

To enable equal participation, five to six members were put on one team. After two orientation sessions, aimed to familiarize participants with basic essentials in Asian Parliamentary debate such as a format, responsibilities of each member, ground rules and argument forming, ten debate sessions centered on various motions ranging

from simple to complex motions were provided. Below is the training's fixed procedure in each session.

a. Motion release: The motion was released in advance Via WU Debate Line Group

b. Ice – Breaking activity: Motion-related vocabulary games

c. On-site side picking and role appointment

d. Brainstorming: Arguments for and against the motion are shared in Thai with the researcher being a moderator encouraging everyone's involvement.

e. Preparation: Each team gathers for preparation.

f. Debate: Each participant is given seven minutes for a speech.

g. Feedback: Adjudicators (the coaches), facilitators and invited guests are up for feedback giving.

h. The winning team and the best speaker award were announced.

3. 6 Data analysis

Qualitative analysis consisting of 1st Cycle Coding and 2nd Cycle Coding (Saldana, 2009) was used to analyze the data. First, the researcher transcribed the interviews and also typed up the data from the class observations and learning log diaries. A Computer Assisted Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQAS) called NVivo Plus was used to facilitate the coding process. In the 1st cycle coding, open coding was performed to quickly assign codes to words or sentences possessing interesting, unexpected, surprising and literature review-linked information. In the 2nd cycle coding, the researcher employed Pattern Coding to group, regroup and categorize open codes based on the emerging common patterns (Saldana, 2013). Data from each source were separately analyzed and then data from three sources all together were analyzed. To ensure validity, the researcher constantly consulted an adviser facilitating as an inter-rater for code revision to prevent potential bias. The code revision was done by presenting a list of dominating, confusing, and ambiguous codes to the adviser which led to recoding or eliminating. How the researcher categorized and grouped the codes

was the most important step which was done by giving an oral presentation to the committee.

4. Findings

Data from the three sources were then triangulated and synthesized based on 1st and 2nd Cycle coding analysis methods. Because of the large amount of data, the researcher henceforth summarized the data from each source and as a whole as described below.

4.1 Data analysis summary from each source

This session featured separate descriptive data analysis summaries from the individual interviews, learning log diary and class observation.

4.1.1 Semi-structured interview's data analysis summary

Preliminary interviews demonstrated participants' prior English learning experiences, feelings toward it, experience in English debates, attitude toward English debates, motivation to join the club, and expectations from the participation. For the prior English learning experience, nine participants reported rote learning as a dominant approach. Only two participants asserted their

engagement in communicative English learning. While rote learning, the familiar method, was mainly associated with negative feelings, e.g. boredom, difficulty and lack of practicality, communicative lessons, the occasional method were associated with diverse feelings, e.g. fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, challenges, and excitement. Participants mostly perceived debates as "idea battle" in English so they were motivated to practice and expected to sharpen English proficiency and stage fright management skills.

Participants described the training as a relaxing and informal gathering for speaking practice with friends throughout the training which indicated a good atmosphere. For challenges, in the mid interview, lack of teamwork mainly caused by an intensive focus on individual performances and neglected pre-training preparation was reflected. Fear of negative judgments started to occur. In the post interview, the challenges remained similar, however, with importance of preparation being acknowledged. Peer consultation and observation were mainly reported as solutions both in the mid and post interviews. Significance of preparation was recognized specially in

the post interview where the code "more cooperation with the team needed" consistently appeared. However, learning strategies did not yet reflect anything related to cooperative learning or peers. Participants mostly used online data search for preparation. Negative peer pressure and fear of being judged were reported in the mid interview while the positive effects concerned spontaneous English interaction. Surprisingly, in the post interview, development of interpersonal skills and use of self-comparison as an assessment were found. Participants first relied more on individual script preparation and later had a casual motion discussion with friends before class. Another sign indicative of the participants' favor in cooperative learning was their mutual impressiveness with the ice-breaking game and brainstorming. Extra after-class grammar sessions were strongly suggested. Carrying the same goal pushed participants to prepare. Even though peers functioned as a source of knowledge, encouragement, and a standard for self-assessment, self-comparison also led to either discouragement or motivation for self-improvement. Despite some negative pressure, the positive clearly outweighed the negative.

4.2.2 Learning log diary's data analysis summary

This session similarly illustrated feelings, challenges and their causes, factors behind positive and negative feelings, and solutions. Profound similarities between the interview and learning diary-derived data were found. For feelings, a sense of novelty provided exciting experiences but appreciation of support from peers and facilitators was first exhibited in the second and last learning diaries. However, on-site unpredictable role assignment caused worry, especially for weak participants. For challenges, participants consistently feared being negatively judged and were intimidated by better friends. Peer pressure and fear of being a team's burden caused challenges. Meanwhile, entertaining class atmosphere, supportiveness and assistance also mainly originated from peers, as reported till the training's conclusion. Learning with peers grew confidence for verbal expression and willingness to listen, as progressively reported from the first to last diaries.

4.2.3 Class observation's data analysis summary

The observation's merging themes included feelings and their causes, team work, problems, solutions, and overall atmosphere. First, the most noticeable feeling was anxiety caused by skills deficiency. In relation to team collaboration, some negative feelings originated from the collective learning experience such as self-perception of being a team's burden or causing the team's loss. Lacking punctuality of some participants also reduced collective enthusiasm as claimed by punctual participants. Second, collaboration within the team was not noticeable until the third mock debate. It was mostly because attention was intensively directed to individual performances. Observing that the highly extroverted participants could dramatically improve team collaboration and enthusiasm, the researcher assigned the participants with such character to be the team's Prime-Minister, leading to more frequent team discussions. Next, lack of preparation consistently remained the substantial issue throughout the training, as well as lack of teamwork caused by the intense focus on an individual performance.

Surprisingly, the new issue related to teamwork about certain members' dominance during the brainstorming was raised halfway through the end of the training. The coaching team solved this problem by calling upon quiet participants to take part and constantly stimulate team collaboration and discussion. Finally, In terms of the overall atmosphere, it was obvious that active engagement in the process within the team constituted team collaboration. Even though lack of preparation having been both commonly reported and observed to be the principal cause of decreased team communication and excessive focus on an individual's performance, having a suitable and active team leader could effectively improve the situations. This aspect of improvement was clearly observed toward the end of the training in the 6th and 7th mock debate sessions.

Table 1

Coding data analysis summary of three data sources combined

Theme	Category	Code
Cooperative/ collaboration /community learning	Assistance from teachers/coaches/facilitator	- Learn or receive help from the coaching team - Asking facilitators (พี่ๆ) - Help being constantly offered - Encouragement from facilitators (verbal and non-verbal)
	Team collaboration in the process	- Work with the team - Delegating points to members - Suitable leaders - Active leader - Valuing teamwork - Teamwork/ team brainstorming - Teamwork brings confidence - A sense of unity - Less pressure when working as a team - Positively pressured
	Peer support (thinking/ feeling/learning)	- Receive help from friends and build upon ideas

Theme	Category	Code
		- Peer consultation/ tutoring
		- Discussing possibilities with peers
		- Observing better peers
		- Asking for help from friend
	Negative peer influence	- Feeling intimidated by better peers
		- Being a loser in a game
		- Self-comparison with peers
		- Afraid of being judged by the better
		- Team's burden/ Team's flaw
	Lack of teamwork and drawbacks	Preparing/searching for data in class
		- No group meeting
		- Worried about personal performance/ lack of teamwork
		- Repeated /same argument

Coding analysis revealed positive and negative effects of team cooperation and peer influences. The positive effects involved direct/indirect knowledge and mental support while the negative effects stemmed from peer/team pressure and team overreliance. The direct knowledge support entailed peer-tutoring. For peer-tutoring, participants consulted peers about grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, points of argument, and debate procedural knowledge during the preparation time. The coaching team, especially facilitators, was also consulted but less frequently than peers. Among the participants, of all strategies, "Vocabulary shouting" effectively served as a tool reducing anxieties and a source of vocabulary. For an exchange of knowledge/ideas, participants engaged in such processes formally and casually, two of whom reported their casual motion discussion during lunch at a canteen. Even though the participants did not recognize it as their learning technique, it did help them think and discuss the topic with friends. The meaningful discussion tightened friendship resulting in more open communication. For the indirect knowledge support, participants benefited from their immersion in an English-rich context. New

vocabulary and expressions were learned through hearing them repeatedly spoken in various contexts. Repeatedly observing peers' performance enabled new technique adoption, established better understanding and reduced confusion of the debate procedures.

Besides the knowledge support, there was the mental support originating from peer-peer consolation, advice and encouragement. In short, peers' willingness to help created a good learning atmosphere. Vocabulary shouting, for instance, dramatically replaced tension and a sense of competition with the supportive atmosphere. Second, the mental support was also derived from the nature of teamwork required in debates. Sharing the same goal created a sense of togetherness and positive interdependence reducing anxiety and increasing enthusiasm in the activity. Open communication through idea sharing among the participants constituted a "judgment-free learning community", as described by the participants .Interestingly, besides the learning techniques modeling, three participants modeled after their peers demonstrating better disciplines such as punctuality, responsibility to prepare, commitment to the team and progressive effort. As a matter of fact,

being a team player both compelled and motivated them to be responsible for their tasks to contribute to the team's performance.

Nevertheless, two principal negative effects were found including team reliance and peer pressure. For team reliance, three participants reported their lack of preparation in advance because they had learned about the motion during the 15- minute Thai brainstorming session. The noticeable patterns of peer/team reliance included scarce participation in the discussion and more attention being paid to argument writing instead. This behavior deprived the participants of debate-specific opportunities to think critically and express ideas spontaneously. Secondly, participants with low self-esteem suffered from the peer pressure resulting from peer comparison causing intimidation and hesitation to speak. Four participants, for instance, ascribed their lack of contribution during the brainstorming session to the intimidation and fear of negative judgment from peers. Those constantly experiencing this negative side had poor English proficiency and low confidence. Furthermore, it was evident that not only skill disparity but also strong

personality as well as better performance such as confidence, assertiveness and higher responsibility and enthusiasm observable in both extroverted and introverted peers can cause pressure for those not embodying such manners. Within the team, team-pressure also occurred. Some participants, especially those with low proficiency and confidence, gave an account of fear of being "a team's burden." However, peer/team pressure could also be a positive push for more effort for self-improvement. Observing that other members within the team, especially those with a similar proficiency level, were better prepared and able to perform well may cause negative feelings for some. However, some claimed that it had a reverse effect propelling them to put more effort. D10, for example, admitted to feeling embarrassed by lack of preparation while her equally competent peers performed better because of a thorough preparation. This proof of effort-generated progress motivated D10 to be more dedicated and prepared for the next sessions.

5. Discussion

Despite the similar levels of proficiency, class heterogeneity considered a common attribute of a cooperative learning setting existed as a result of other factors, especially levels of confidence to express opinions. Such disparity not only enabled but also obstructed learners' learning experiences. However, drawbacks can overlap. For example, fear of negative judgment and intimidation could be as much of a reason behind team overreliance as simple lack of responsibility to prepare. Likewise, the pressure developing from observing peers' better performances or disciplines could have demotivating effects for some but motivating effects for others.

Identifying exact patterns of these intertwined and overlapping causes and effects could be both very challenging and somehow ineffective. Owing to an such assumption, one may question what essences have been crystalized from this study about the cooperative learning experience of novice student debaters. It is to create or replace a sense of competition with a sense of support and togetherness through supportive teamwork which in fact does not automatically materialize. In this

study, it was tangible that all the cooperative learning characteristics including individual accountability, social skills, positive interdependence, group work process, spontaneous communication and face-to-face interaction (Kagan,1994; Johnson et al.,1998; Gillies, 2007) took time and effort invested by both class facilitators and learners to grow. In the next paragraphs, the researcher will discuss how the positive and negative findings play a role in participants' cooperative learning experiences and implications.

5.1 Positive sides of the cooperative learning experience found in the study.

This aspect of findings is highly consistent with that of the previous studies. Working cooperatively provides a boost in knowledge and mental support. A cooperative learning community allowed learners to learn through peer-tutoring consultation, observation and modeling of learning techniques. In relation to the previous studies, the peer-tutoring setting was defined by the assistance high achievers provided to the lower counterparts. For example, it occurred when English major participants taught the non-English majors some

basic sentence structures. However, peer-tutoring occurs in a smaller degree compared to other forms of knowledge support. The most common forms are consultation, observation and modeling. In general, equally competent participants learned through discussing, sharing and negotiating meaning.

While this seems related to Vygotsky's social interaction learning (1978), in fact, receiving "scaffolding" from experts, which is the underlying concept of Vygotsky's social interaction hypothesis, only occurred when more knowledgeable parties such as teachers and facilitators were involved. However, "peer-peer consultation" has been extremely prevalent in this study. Donato (1988) referred to this as "peer-peer cooperative dialogue." It is the process where learners with incomplete knowledge engage in a discussion allowing them to revise, refine, discredit, and correct the second language task with their peers (Donato, 1988; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Swain, 2006; Swain & Watanabe, 2012. During the training, one common scenario was three participants sitting together tried to solve language problems together such as

pinpointing the matching vocabularies or structures to express certain meanings. In the process, they simultaneously discussed word choices, possible meanings and using online resources. Suciati (2016) found different benefits achieved by students with high and low competence. While high-achievers got to sharpen their knowledge, the lower achievers got to observe how the high achiever learned (Jacobs et al, 1997). However, in this study, what really marked their differences were levels of confidence empirically derived from their English communication experiences and preparation for each debate session. Knowledge could be learned and sharpened in the negotiation process and a group of novice learners could somehow become experts by assembling incomplete pieces of their knowledge.

For the mental support, wading through an anxiety provoking activity as a debate, participants relied on one another as a source of mental support. Expressive acts of support, e.g. words of encouragement and vocabulary sharing, as well as non-expressive ones, the teamwork nature generating a sense of belonging and

unity, gradually emerges throughout the activity. A sense of approval and acceptance helps decrease anxiety and increase the participants· motivation. This finding is consistent with that of the previous studies. Al-Yaseen (2014) explored effectiveness of cooperative learning in an EFL class, through an application of cooperative learning activities including Jigsaw II for reading (Slavin, 1995), Round table for writing (Kagan, 1994) and Constructive Controversy (CC) (Johnson & Johnson, 1970) underlined a sense of belonging as a result of small group generating close and open communication. The same conclusion was reached by Quinn (2006), Suciati (2016) and Wahyukti (2017). Unlike an individual activity provoking a sense of competition, the debate requires each member to equally fulfill their duty to win as a team. Tension and nervousness subside when performing a speaking task as part of a team. A sense of teamwork has been confirmed by many studies to ease tension and nervousness in a speaking task (Slavin, 1987; Dornyei, 1997, Jacobs, & McCafferty, 2006). However, class facilitators need to

ensure equal participation so that everyone feels valued and included (Chamot & O᾽ Malley, 1987; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Jalilifar, 2009). Some learners tend to be easily intimidated or left behind especially when working with extroverted or advanced peers. In this study, the coaching team solved that issue by assigning a discussion moderator to ensure everyone's equal chance to speak during the brainstorming. As a result, quiet participants were stimulated to be more active. Positive responses from the class and self-pride derived from that experience led to voluntary participations later as reported by one English major participant. For the extroverted participants, the coaching team assigned them to a Prime-minister role to keep the team enthusiastic. Lastly, strongly consistent with the findings proposed by Battaglini, Benabou, & Tirole (2005) and Buechel, Mechtenberg & Petersen (2018), observation of peers' success motivated learners to succeed. In their study, the observation was limited to levels of difficulties perceived by other peers, techniques applied and success achieved and the task was the task-at-hand, not requiring any prior preparation. However,

the peer observation in this study was extended to improvement of intrapersonal skills, particularly learner autonomy and discipline. For example, some less proficient learners resolved that responsibility to individually prepare in advance could make their equally competent peers the Best Speaker of the week, so they stood a chance to achieve the same thing.

5.2 Negative sides of the cooperative learning experience found in the study

As reported in the previous studies, peers or teams caused pressure and a free riding issue. First, in terms of pressure, less proficient and/or unconfident participants perceived themselves as a burden of their team. This finding is in harmony with that of Lirola (2016) reporting nervousness, insecurity, and fear of being a team᾽s failure in her study of cooperative learning activities. Those with lower self-confidence usually due to lower English proficiency and less English speaking experience tended to feel intimidated as a result of comparing themselves with peers. Even though Falk and Knell (2004) positively associated the

upward comparison as a self-enhancement (feeling proud of one's abilities) and the downward comparison a stimulator for self-improvement (Feeling pressured to improve), in this study, there were the participants feeling consistently discouraged, those initially feeling discouraged but later motivated, and those consistently interpreting the pressure positively. More than half of the class exhibited the second pattern and only one or two were identified with the first and last.

The most impactful factor included self-esteem developed and consolidated through a sense of social acceptance both within the team and the class. In other words, those initially feeling intimidated gradually became more motivated after their performances were acknowledged and approved both in a team and class context. The acknowledgement and approval were represented by peers' willingness to listen, the teacher's constructive feedback and compliments even on a small progress such as clear pronunciation and other non-verbal positive responses from peers, e.g. a nod of approval, a smile, a look of interest and positive laughs. Therefore, what Buchs and Butera (2009) revealed about

the relationship of learners' motivation and pressure management holds true in this study. Still, the cooperative and supportive environment contributed to by both peers and instructors was the most crucial thing because levels of motivation among learners can differ and fluctuate. As suggested by Alessandri et al （2012）, positive experiences in English learning and self-esteem are somehow associated with the pressure felt.

Moving on to the free riding issue （Azizinezhad, Hashemi, & Darvishi, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 1994）, in this study it was manifested through team overreliance. Some of the participants lacked verbal engagement in the brainstorming in Thai which mostly resulted from being intimidated by peers usually dominating the session and their arguments perceived as being better thought-out or similar to their own. Thus, for them, the brainstorming session was a platform to take ideas from others to form arguments for the debate. One surprising cause was the participants' lack of systematic teamwork experience. This was exceptionally evident during the first three sessions when everyone sat in group but still focused on

an individual goal, namely delivering the seven-minute speech. This atmosphere downplayed effectiveness of the group process, caused pressure, and sparked a sense of competition. In this study, it has been proved that instructors could improve the team's dynamic by assigning the extroverted and confident participants to be a PM to activate and maintain the team's dynamic, delegate tasks, and keep members engaged, especially the less proficient students.

5.3 Participants' improvement and Implication

After two months, signs of participants' higher confidence and team cooperation were clearly observed and reported through both the interview and learning diaries. Those expressing fear of being judged at first felt more relaxed by the learning atmosphere where everyone supported one another. After the activity's progress, mistakes in pronunciation and grammar were regarded as normal parts of the process made by even those perceived as being more proficient. As a result, participants had courage to experiment with new structures and vocabulary. Succeeding in conveying their ideas, their self-esteem improved. In terms of team collaboration, consolidating

team collaboration could replace a sense of competition with support, lessening the pressure felt by the lower proficient or less confident. Putting the active participants in a leading position proved to be an effective strategy.

6. Implication of the study

The key to achieve the optimal cooperative learning experience is to create a learning environment in which everyone feels equally valued, supported, and committed to the shared goals. For EFL learning in particular, there should be the learning space where learners of different proficiency and experience can learn to actively interact in English. However, creating a totally-pressure free environment for learners may be too ideal and not as effective as training them to positively grow from the pressure. In this study, English debates proved to entail not only challenges in terms of language and anxiety provoking characteristics but also team cooperation. In this training, feeling the team's acceptance, learners felt an urge to contribute starting with thorough motion preparation and engagement in the process. Additionally, growing self-esteem is one impactful and transferable

outcome that introduces changes to not only how leaners function as team players but also how they learn in a large class. As a result, instructors should consider deliberately providing a chance to participate for those appearing less active or more intimidated. Two of the participants, for example, reported their active engagement during the discussion in a curricular English class. One participant breaking through her note-taking role to a discusser's role reported a sense of self-pride and described her effort as being worthwhile. Above all, learners should be trained, perhaps through extra activities, to work cooperatively as part of the team. However, on a debate team where each member must individually perform a foreign language task, it is imperative that the strengths of each team member is acknowledged and managed to contribute to productive cooperation. For example, those being confident and energetic could positively affect team cooperation when taking a leading role and support weaker learners to promote a supportive atmosphere and prevent a competitive one.

7.Limitations of the study

First, in terms of generalizability, in this qualitative study, in-depth data from a small number of eleven participants were collected to provide in-depth information and a deeper insight on novice student debaters' learning experience. However, given such a small number, findings might only be used as a guideline for a future study within similar contexts. Thus, adjustments will be required for different study contexts. Due to the study's qualitative nature, subjective interpretation may be used for data analysis. To minimize that, the researcher triangulated three sources of data and sought assistance from an inter-rater in order to further increase validity of data analysis.

8. Suggestions for future study

The participants consistently reflected about learning, and being motivated by peers in a cooperative learning atmosphere. A coaching team is advised to initiate and maintain a cooperative learning atmosphere allowing participants opportunities to learn from one another. In order to achieve these goals, many components matter.

First, learners should be clearly informed of the training-oriented nature of the activity that a team's performance mainly accounts for success, not an individual one. This reminder is aimed to encourage collaborative effort in executing the task. Despite applying such an approach, collaboration may not easily emerge. Second, more time or extra rules allowing learners to develop a sense of belonging may be added such as a casual discussion of the day's motion. Those outperforming others or receiving the best speaker award may be encouraged to assist their less proficient peers by approaching them to teach or share their knowledge. Given the benefit of a heterogeneous class with proficient learners, e.g. peer tutoring, instructors are advised to perhaps integrate certain activities facilitating bonding, connection or collaboration between the super-proficient and the lesser ones to promote a supportive atmosphere.

In terms of suggestions for future study, only a group of eleven students was included in this study to generate illustrative in-depth data. To bolster the data's validity, the triangulation method was applied. However, the in-depth data still reflected a few dominant dimensions of

the learning experience of a small group of learners. In the researcher's perspectives, it is still quite premature to confidently assert that only the three dimensions revealed in this study are most dominant. As a result, future interested researchers may consider recruiting a larger number of research participants up to the scale where the use of quantitative methods is theoretically applicable and justifiable.

Acknowledgement

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