

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON GROUP WORK AND USE OF L1: ACADEMIC WRITING IN A UNIVERSITY EFL COURSE IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Learning a second language in a communicative environment involves a variety of pair or group work. Depending on the learning situation, group work could be useful or challenging for a teacher to implement (McDonough, 2004). To understand the students' perspectives on collaborative writing and peer feedback, I conducted classroom action research in a Writing and Presentation Skills class at a mid-sized university in Thailand. The students completed one writing assignment and gave a related presentation for each project. To complete three projects in eight weeks, they worked on a variety of tasks in groups. I examined the students' perspectives on the collaborative writing tasks they were engaged in, the (mis)match between their perception and written performance, and their use of L1 with the goal of completing the writing tasks.

Multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative data were collected for this action research. Pre- and post-questionnaires, student reflective journal entries, and post interviews provided me with the insights into their perspectives on collaborative writing, peer response, and their use of L1. Using inductive coding following the nature of action research, I selected themes and focal students. Student interviews were also partially transcribed focusing on content. Finally, I analyzed focal students' pre- and post-writing tests through complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures to observe how their perspectives and their actual learning coincide with each other.

Findings show that although most students perceived group work positively, they faced some challenges, including differing proficiency levels within groups, difficulty in decision-making processes, and relationships with their peers. This study suggests that teachers need to listen to the student's voice and address their concerns when implementing and adapting collaborative writing and peer response.

INTRODUCTION

I conducted classroom action research, taking the role of both teacher and researcher, at a Thai university for two months in the summer of 2014. The focus of my research was students' perspectives on group work and their improvement in writing in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. As a teacher researcher, I created a project-based curriculum and planned class activities with emphasis on collaborative writing, peer response, group presentation, and small group discussion to complete the class projects. In the middle of the course, my research interest changed slightly as some critical incidents took place. I added the students' use of the first language (L1) during small group discussion to one of my research interests as the students used Thai much more than I expected. The cyclical process of action research (Burns, 2010) allowed me this flexibility as I planned, taught, observed, and reflected on what happened, and then re-planned to identify and address the problematic areas of my class. During the eight weeks of teaching and data analysis sessions thereafter, I narrowed down my research interests to three questions.

In this paper, I argue that students' differing perspectives towards group work in second language classrooms, including the use of L1 during small group discussion, should be carefully considered when teachers implement group work in their curriculum. I first review the literature on sociocultural theory with a focus on student group work and the use of L1 in second language classrooms. Then, I describe how the action research method fits into my study followed by the specific context where I conducted my research and how I collected and analyzed my data. After I report and discuss the findings, I finally conclude this paper with some pedagogical implications and reflections on my entire research study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Group Work in Second Language Learning

Group work in second language classrooms involves frequent learner-learner interaction, providing the learners opportunities to learn from one another. Group work is consistent with the sociocultural approach, which views learning as a social process occurring through interaction among learners in situated contexts (Ortega, 2009). To complete a variety of tasks, learners must

work collaboratively, and this highly cognitive process allows them to learn from one another. Vygotsky's theory posits that learning can happen through interaction between two people, one being the expert and the other being the novice (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Learners involved in group work can change the role of expert and novice as they all have different strengths and weaknesses. In this light, Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind serves as the theoretical foundation for the group work I focus on in this study: collaborative writing and peer response.

Collaborative Writing

Although writing involves less interaction among second language learners than does speaking and listening, some researchers have studied the potential benefits of writing in pairs or groups, also known as collaborative writing, which involves learner-learner interaction (Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Fernández Dobao, 2012; Fernández Dobao & Blum, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). These research studies mainly paid attention to students' perspectives on collaborative writing and/or the effectiveness of writing in pairs or groups. The attitudes were positive in general, and grammatical accuracy was most frequently measured, although some studies also delved into content, structure, and other parts of writing, to examine the effectiveness of collaborative writing.

Student perspectives on collaborative writing. A few studies in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Foreign Language (EFL) contexts show how students perceive collaborative writing. Storch's (2005) study, investigating how 23 intermediate ESL students viewed collaborative writing, showed that although the students' attitudes were mostly positive, a few students expressed concerns about writing in pairs. While the majority believed that collaborative writing offered them opportunities to share ideas, learn from each other, improve accuracy, and learn new vocabulary, some also revealed reservations about their low linguistic competency, which resulted in lack of confidence to provide feedback. In addition, not wanting to upset their peers' feelings, students reported that they were reluctant to provide feedback. In an EFL context, Shehadeh's (2011) findings supported the findings of Storch's (2005) study, with 16 out of 18 students expressing positive perspectives towards collaborative writing.

However, studies investigating student attitudes towards collaborative writing were not limited to ESL/EFL contexts. A recent study conducted by Fernández Dobao and Blum (2013)

looked into the attitudes and perceptions of collaborative writing of American students enrolled in Spanish as a foreign language class (SFL). The overall attitudes towards collaborative writing coincided with previous studies as most of the students perceived working both in pairs and groups positively. The only concern about pair work was the risk of having a partner who does not actively participate, whereas the reservation about group work was the possibility of some students contributing less. Unlike previous studies, this study also surveyed students' perceived effects of writing in pairs and groups. The results of the survey did not correspond to the students' attitudes towards group work, since only one third of them believed they benefited regarding content and organization and only about half of them reported that collaborative writing helped with the use of vocabulary and grammatical accuracy.

However, one wiki-based study with eight advanced Spanish learners from a mid-sized university in the US had a contrasting finding from the previous studies (Elola & Oskoz, 2010). The students preferred individual writing due to the freedom they were given to employ their personal styles, although they acknowledged that writing together could improve the accuracy, organization, and structure of their essays. This study is noteworthy because all the other studies reported that collaborative writing was positively perceived by most of the students. Students' different learning styles have to be acknowledged and the drawbacks have to be carefully considered when planning to implement collaborative writing into a language class. The other main focus of these studies on collaborative writing is how effective writing in pairs or groups can be.

Effectiveness of collaborative writing. Along with the students' attitudes towards collaborative writing, some studies also measured the effectiveness of writing in pairs and/or groups, especially improvement of grammatical accuracy. Storch's (2005) findings suggest that pairs wrote shorter but more complex and accurate sentences compared to the individual writers. With a much larger sample size at a large research university in Australia, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) investigated the differential effectiveness of pair writing and individual writing on fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Here, 48 pairs and 48 individual writers (144 in total), all of whom met the university's language requirement and the majority of whom were enrolled in postgraduate programs, completed one writing task. The results showed that although there was no significant effect on fluency and complexity, the pairs produced much more accurate texts than the individual writers. On the other hand, the findings of Shehadeh's (2011) study with EFL

students reported that collaborative writing did not improve the linguistic accuracy, although there was some improvement in content, organization, and vocabulary.

However, the research participants were not limited to the learners of English. In a SFL context, Fernández Dobao (2011) studied 111 intermediate American students. Unlike most of the previous studies, which focused on pair vs. individual work, this study also included groups of four. Similar to other studies, collaborative writing produced shorter but more accurate texts. Especially, the small groups produced grammatically much more accurate texts than not only the individual writers, but also the pairs. Language related episodes (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) were used throughout the interaction to improve the students' accuracy, although the texts they produced were shorter as they spent some time on discussing language. The conflicting findings in the research on collaborative writing suggest a need for more research into the approach, to which my study contributes. Along with collaborative writing, peer response is similar in its emphasis on students' having the competence to support each other's writing development.

Peer Response in L2 Writing

The effects of peer response, also known as "peer review," have been a topic of interest for numerous L2 writing teachers and researchers. Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) synthesized the research on peer response, listing different perspectives towards students engaging in peer review and its effects. They suggest that the theoretical underpinnings of peer response are threefold: it works well in "multi-draft composing process," it provides the learners with collaborative learning environment, which aligns with the social constructionist view, and it includes "the importance of interaction" in L2 development (p. 254).

Some of the practical benefits listed were the reviewers building revising skills for their own writing (Lundstrom & Baker 2009) and writers having opportunities for more feedback from different perspectives (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Lundstrom and Baker studied beginner and high intermediate students. Half of the students from each level were assigned to the receiver group, which only practiced revising sample student essays, and the other half were the givers, who practiced giving feedback. The results show that in the beginner group, the givers gained more than the receivers, indicating that peer review develops the reviewers' own revising skills, from which they can benefit when writing their own essays. However, there was no significant difference among the intermediate students, suggesting that students' proficiency levels need to

be considered when implementing peer feedback. Another advantage of peer feedback discussed by Ferris and Hedgcock was the additional feedback students can receive. The authors provided a list of suggestions to successfully implement peer response in L2 composition class, which may result in extra valuable feedback from different perspectives (e.g., peers). They argue though that without careful planning, peer response might not yield favorable results.

Peer response, however, is not without drawbacks. Some of the concerns addressed by Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) are that the feedback may not exceed the surface level, peers might provide incorrect feedback “either grammatically or rhetorically” (p. 255), and students might consider the teacher as the only reliable source. These concerns should be carefully considered and dealt with to make peer response more productive and effective, leading to improvement of students’ writing skills. Because of the intense negotiation required in both collaborative writing and peer response activities, students’ oral communication practices, particularly their language choices, are also a factor in researching group interaction.

Students’ Use of L1 in an L2 English Classroom

Numerous research studies looked into the teachers’ use of the L1 and L2 in language classrooms, but only a few have focused on the students’ use of the L1. Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) worked with 24 university students to understand the students’ use of L1 while working on different activities in an L2 class. The students in this study believed L1 could be helpful in meaning-focused activities, leading to more in-depth discussion and task completion. However, when engaged in grammar-focused activities, they believed that L1 might not be that helpful. The findings suggest that teachers should reconsider their students’ use of L1 during pair or small group activities since using L1 might enable the students to use higher-level cognitive skills to accomplish pair and group tasks.

Positive attitudes towards the use of L1 were also observed in contexts other than ESL. Antón and DiCamilla (1998) studied the learning strategies of five dyads of English speakers learning Spanish at a beginner level. The results suggest that for meaning-based tasks, the use of L1 can be positive, serving three functions when learning a language: “construction of scaffolded help, establishment of intersubjectivity, and use of private speech” (p. 337). In a French immersion context, 22 grade eight students used their L1 English to complete the tasks more effectively, although the teachers believed it hindered their learning (Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

Swain and Lapkin further argue that the use of L1 in an immersion program should rather be encouraged since it involves cognitive and social functions that can facilitate their learning.

The Present Study

Although group work is not new in second language classrooms, few researchers have studied students' attitudes towards the combination of collaborative writing and peer feedback. Only peer response has been studied extensively and intensively, whereas collaborative writing has emerged to be a research interest more recently. However, it is highly likely that teachers who believe in the effects of group work might implement both of them in their curriculum. Thus, it is worth investigating students' attitudes towards different group work activities including collaborative writing and peer response, and how their written work (dis)accord with their perception. Finally, we need to understand why students use their L1 in an English-medium classroom as teachers and researchers' interest in translanguaging is rapidly growing in second language teaching and learning. In that respect, I examined the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive group work including collaborative writing and peer response?
2. How much improvement do students show in their academic writing regarding complexity, accuracy, and fluency?
3. Why do students use their L1 during small group discussion and how does it facilitate their learning?

METHODOLOGY

Action Research

Conducting classroom action research was a critical part of teaching this class. Since the needs analysis I conducted did not involve one of the most important stakeholders, the students (Brown, 1995), I planned a class in which I could flexibly address the students' ongoing needs and reflect on my teaching practice as a teacher-researcher. According to Burns (2010), action research allows the teacher to identify the problem areas, including both the teacher and the students, and improve them. This can be done by reflective practice conducted by the teacher and based on solid information collected systematically while teaching. The cyclical model of action research allowed me to plan, take an action, observe and identify the problem areas, and reflect

on my teaching, leading to another cycle starting from re-planning (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998, as cited in Burns 2010). Burns (2010), however, points out that this cycle does not always occur in the same sequence.

My initial curriculum for this class underwent a huge change on the first day of the program. After reading the students' pretest essays and conducting a short interview with them, I decided to change my initial plan of four projects to three: making a travel guide (collaborative writing), a four-paragraph essay about global warming (partially collaborative writing), and a four-paragraph essay about critical thinking (partially collaborative writing). This change was due to a discrepancy between the students' proficiency level and my original plan. I was ready to be flexible, and adopting a project-based curriculum helped me to simply reduce the number of projects the students would engage in instead of altering the entire curriculum.

Another critical change I had to make was changing the groups after the first project. Since some students from one group showed concerns about how their group members were silent and not participating enough during the small group discussion, I changed the groups based on their linguistic competency, strategically balancing each group with more and less proficient students. One last significant change I made was regarding the use of Thai and English during small group discussion. My original plan was to encourage the students to use English only. In that respect, I always asked the students to speak in English when their group discussions were audio recorded. Later, I learned that speaking only in English as well as being audio recorded was quite stressful for them, and so I decided to not audio record their discussions for the remainder of the course. Instead, I started to ask the students in their reflective journals and final interviews why they used Thai dominantly during small group discussion. The cyclical model of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting aided me not only with changing the curriculum, but also with my research interest and possibilities.

The cyclical nature of action research also let me refine my broader research interest and questions. I first jotted down all possible research questions relevant to my research interest, student group work, and as the semester progressed, my research questions changed and evolved. As Burns (2010) suggested, I was able to see what questions were answerable and researchable in a limited time. Moreover, the change of the syllabus due to the students' needs and competency contributed to some changes to the research questions. Thus, I shifted my initial plan of looking into both the effectiveness of and students' perspectives about group work to

investigating how the students interact during small group discussion and their attitudes towards collaborative work. Although I still analyzed the focal students' pre- and post-writing tests regarding fluency, complexity, and accuracy, this analysis was to supplement the qualitative data I collected and analyzed. Instead of investigating their overall improvement, I used the quantitative data to observe how the students' actual performance matched with their perspectives. Finally, the students' use of their L1 was added to my list of research questions, which was not an initial area of inquiry in the planning stage of the curriculum.

Context and Participants

I taught two sections of Writing and Presentation Skills class for eight weeks last summer in a mid-sized university in northeastern Thailand. All students were from the Faculty of Science, mostly majoring in Chemistry and a few students were in Rubber Science. Most of them were second and fourth year students, but there were also six graduate students. Out of 38 students who I taught, I chose four motivated students for this case study. These students were mainly selected because their written texts and responses in the questionnaires and journal entries clearly represented the attitudes of the entire class, whereas most of the other students' journals and interviews covered superficial perspectives with little detail. Cindy and Mary were in the same group for the first project, and Cindy and Jinny were in the same group for the second and third projects. Tony worked with Jinny for the first project. They were all in the Chemistry department except for Jinny, who majored in Rubber Science. They were all Thai students speaking Thai as their first language and had no experience studying abroad. Except for Cindy, they were fellowship students funded by the Science Achievement Scholarship of Thailand for their entire tertiary education from BA to PhD. Although we did not have a placement test due to the nature of the program, after teaching them for eight weeks, my estimate of their proficiency level was around high beginner to high intermediate. Except for Mary, they spoke Isan, the regional dialect of northeastern Thailand, which was also similar to Lao for its geographical proximity. The classes were conducted during the university's summer vacation, and Mary and Tony were responsible for conducting lab research as partial fulfillment of their fellowship program. Other than that, they were not committed to taking any other classes and only took one English class with me, which met for 90 minutes a day, Monday to Thursday, for eight weeks. Tony and Cindy were absent a few times for family matters, but otherwise, the four students were always present

and prepared for the class and met with me inside the classroom, at my office, and outside of school as we built our rapport and extended our site of learning to our everyday lives. Table 1 shows a summary of student background information.

Table 1

Student Background Information

Name ¹	Cindy	Mary	Jinny	Tony
Gender (Age)	Female (22)	Female (20)	Female (21)	Male (21)
Major	2nd year Chemistry	2nd year Chemistry	2nd year Rubber Science	2nd year Chemistry
English Proficiency level	High intermediate	High intermediate	High beginner	Intermediate

Data Collection

A variety of different forms of data were collected to enhance the reliability of the students' self-reported comments. I was able to triangulate the data by asking the students their attitudes towards group work and small group interaction through different channels. On the first day of instruction, the students answered the pre-course questionnaire (see Appendix A and B), which consisted of 19 six-point Likert scale items and three open-ended questions with three follow-up questions each asking their perspectives on writing and speaking in English, giving presentations in English, and group work when learning English. At the end of the program, the students finished their post-questionnaire, which consisted of the same 19 Likert scale items as the pre-questionnaire, and in the open-ended questions, they were mainly asked about their perceptions of collaborative writing, peer response, group presentation in comparison to individual work (see Appendix C).

Student reflective journals (see Appendix D for journal prompts) were collected after each project. I changed the prompts after each project as my interest and the degree of their familiarity with group work changed. The final reflective writing had no specific question prompts, asking the students to write about anything about the program and what they wanted to tell me. Then, in the last week of the program, the students were interviewed for 7-15 minutes about their attitudes

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

towards collaborative writing, peer response, group presentation, and the program in general (see Appendix E for the semi-structured interview questions).

I collected pre- and post-writing tests administered on the first and last day of instruction, respectively. The students were given two prompts with 80 minutes for both the pretest and posttest (see Appendix F for writing prompts). They were encouraged to write at least one page for the first prompt, and if they had time, they would move on to the next prompt. However, no single student was able to complete writing the second essay, so I am only using the first essay from each student for the analysis.

Data Analysis

Attitudes towards group work. To understand the focal students' attitudes towards group work, I analyzed the six-point Likert scale questionnaires to compare how their perceptions of group work changed from the beginning to the end. The items that asked about group writing vs. individual writing, peer feedback vs. no feedback, and group presentation vs. individual presentation especially helped me triangulate the data collected. I partially transcribed the audio recording of the interviews. I focused on the parts where the students talked about their perspectives on group work during the interview. I simply transcribed what was said without putting emphasis on pronunciation, intonation, and grammatical accuracy because I was only interested in the general meaning.

I used inductive coding to analyze the open-ended questions from the pre- and post-questionnaire, three student reflective journals, the transcripts of the interview and small group discussion, and teacher reflective journal to find patterns. All of the data were coded inductively following the nature of action research, which allows the research questions to alter and evolve over time.

Complexity, accuracy, and fluency. I also analyzed the focal students' pretest and posttest to see whether there was any improvement in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Measuring students' improvement in oral and written English is commonly carried out through complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) measures, as these constructs complement one another to provide a deeper understanding of the complex nature of linguistic proficiency (Housen, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2012). However, there are still arguments over the appropriateness of CAF to measure L2 students' proficiency. For instance, it has been argued that syntactic complexity is

not an appropriate measurement for academic writing since linguistically complex sentences are more often witnessed in spoken English, whereas academic English has more lengthy and complex phrases than clauses (Biber, Gray, & Poonpon, 2011). Skehan (2009) also argues that complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures have to be supplemented by analyzing the use of lexis.

Although more research has focused on the oral performance of second language learners through CAF (see Foster & Skehan, 1996; Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000; Yuan & Ellis, 2003), CAF has potential to measure students' learning in L2 writing development. Ellis and Yuan (2004), for instance, studied how "pretask planning" and "on-line planning" before the main writing task influenced students' written narratives using CAF measures. Ortega (2003) exclusively used syntactic complexity to study students' L2 writing development, while Polio (1997) looked at linguistic accuracy only. For this study, I analyzed fluency (word and syllable count), complexity (syntactic and lexical complexity), and accuracy (error free clauses and based on my own rubric) to measure the four Thai EFL students' improvement in writing.

Complexity measure. T-Units were used to measure the syntactic complexity of the essays. T-Units, first coined by Hunt (1965), consist of one main/independent clause and one or more subordinate/dependent clauses. Since a complex sentence is comprised of at least two clauses, the T-Unit/Clause ratio can illustrate the syntactic complexity of the student essays. There are some different ways to measure T-Units, but in this paper, I decided that a T-unit must have at least "one main clause with all the subordinate clauses attached to it" (Hunt, 1965, p. 20). That is, sentence fragments without a subject and a verb will be included in the fluency measure, but will be counted neither as a T-Unit nor a clause in the complexity measure. Another sentence fragment type was a subordinate clause without a main clause. This type was not considered as a T-Unit since it does not have a main clause, a critical element of a T-Unit, but it was counted as a clause. For run-on sentences, the sentences with two independent clauses not connected with a conjunction, I counted them as two T-Units with one clause each.

To measure the lexical complexity, I used the *Index of Guiraud*, an analytical approach that takes text length into account and calculates the type-token ratio; type being the number of different types of words and token being the total number of words used in the essay. I used AntConc, a concordance software, to calculate types and tokens of student essays. Then, the

Index of Guiraud formula (*type* divided by *square root of tokens*) was used to calculate the lexical richness of student essays. Higher Guiraud values represent greater lexical complexity.

Accuracy measure. First, I calculated the percentage of error free clauses out of the total number of T-Units. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and any other non-morphosyntactic features were not counted as errors. However, as the students' English proficiency level ranged between high beginner and high intermediate and based on what the students practiced over the eight weeks, I also decided to create my own rubric to measure their linguistic accuracy. I calculated the correct usage of verbs (subject-verb agreement, tense and aspect, more than one verb, null verb, and wrong voice) out of the obligatory occasions, number of run-on sentences, and number of sentence fragments. These categories were created to reflect what the class focused on. Since many students lacked the understanding of basic sentence structures and the usage of verbs, these categories became the primary interest of the analysis. To measure their accuracy, I simply counted error-free T-Units regarding each category in the rubric, instead of using a scoring system.

Fluency measure. I counted the number of words the students used for each essay. As both pretests and posttests were timed essays, the number of words showed how much they could write in given time. The tests were handwritten, so I typed their texts later for analysis. Including spelling and other errors, I did not change anything from the original texts. In addition, I counted the number of syllables per minute because this reflects the students' use of lengthy words. That is, students with more word counts could have used short simple words than lengthy words and vice versa. I used howmanysyllables.com to double-check the words with which I was not sure. All Thai words (including regions and names), acronyms, and Arabic numerals are counted as one-syllable words to focus on their use of English.

FINDINGS

This study attempts to investigate how students perceive group work and how their perceptions (dis)align with the analysis of their written texts. In this section, I present the findings following the order of my research questions, starting with the students' perspectives on group work, addressing their attitudes towards collaborative writing and peer response. I then analyze their improvement regarding fluency, complexity, and accuracy to see if there are (mis)matches between their perspectives and performance. Finally, I examine their motives of using their L1 during group work.

Student Perspectives of Collaborative Writing and Peer Response

Collaborative writing: Sharing ideas and feedback, improving accuracy, and having fun.

One of the commonly perceived benefits of collaborative writing was that the students were able to share their thoughts in a pleasurable, collaborative environment. The main goal was to write the travel guide and some paragraphs from their essays together, but to accomplish this goal they naturally engaged in collaborative dialogues and discussion. They all agreed that it was new and intriguing to make the travel guide (project 1) together. Although writing essays (projects 2 and 3) in a collaborative manner was a little more challenging, they still reported that sharing ideas and different perspectives aided them with the brainstorming process. While working together, they also took advantage of the opportunities to give and receive feedback with their peers. Peer feedback was a natural and organic process within collaborative writing as they were writing together to produce more accurate and well-constructed texts. They thus reported that collaborative writing helped them improve their accuracy in writing. This positive stance towards collaborative work is well represented in the following excerpts from all four students.

Excerpt 1 (from Mary's post-questionnaire)

I like collaborative writing because I can exchange my ideas with friends and make our writing more complete and interesting.

Excerpt 2 (from Cindy's post-questionnaire)

I can get some new information from my member group and get peer feedback when we write in group.

Excerpt 3 (from Jinny's reflective journal)

I love to working group because my partner can help me to study to speak and teach me something I don't know.

Excerpt 4 (from Tony's reflective journal)

I can improve my writing skill. I think that working in group reduce the hard work to be easy work.

These excerpts show how the students considered group work valuable and enjoyed working in groups to co-construct the travel guide and essays. Mary and Cindy commented on the benefits of exchanging ideas. Jinny, being the least proficient student out of the four, reported that it was a good chance for her to learn from her peers. Tony stated that collaborative writing aided him with improving his writing skill as well as making potentially hard work easier. Although all students showed positive attitudes, they were not shy to report their perceived problems.

Collaborative writing: Difficulty in making decisions, slow work, and neglected ideas.

Although collaborative writing provided the students with some benefits, they were not without reservations. Sharing and discussing with other students apparently provided them with more ideas and perspectives, but this also led to some difficulties in reaching a consensus on further directions for their essays. Having too many different opinions, they spent more time on the decision-making process, which eventually slowed down their work progress as shown in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5 (Mary's reflective journal)

I think group work doesn't work for writing because each person comes up with new ideas all the time and it's hard to tell or exchange all the ideas with other members. It's not easy to writing in one direction.

Another drawback reported by the students is that the work efficiency depended on their interlocutor. For instance, in his post interview, Tony reported that unlike his close friends from the first group, all three peers from his second group were older than he was, and one was even a graduate student, making him feel more distanced with them. Likewise, Mary in her post interview carefully noted that having two graduate students in

the group made it more difficult for them to argue their points. This may have come from Thai culture, valuing the virtue of modesty and respecting those who are older; this challenge was a common reservation shared by many students.

Finally, the students' differing proficiency level was an issue regarding both group work and collaborative writing. Although the classes were set up based on the students' GPAs by their department, this did not accurately reflect their English competency. Presumably, their chemistry knowledge and linguistic proficiency did not entirely agree. The varying degrees of their linguistic ability sometimes played a negative role when the students were engaged in group work. Being more advanced students, Cindy and Tony thought the other students could have contributed more. Tony, for example, reported that he was not satisfied with the feedback he received from his peers in the post interview (Excerpt 6).

Excerpt 6 (Tony's post interview)

Member in my group just check three connection, three reasons thesis statement, don't check about grammar... so it's make me I don't know what is I wrong... My friends don't sure about English grammar and someone don't know about English grammar.

On the other hand, Jinny found it difficult when her peers did not always accept her opinions. The main reason for her reservations about collaborative writing was that her ideas and feedback were not always accepted during the discussion and writing process while working on the second and third projects with different peers (Excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7 (Jinny's post questionnaire)

Sometimes some ideas were not acceptance by my group.

Being a relatively less proficient member, Jinny's contribution to the group did not seem that appealing to the other members. This was never a problem for students with higher English proficiency. It was interesting to see how students with different proficiency levels viewed the downsides of collaborative writing differently.

Peer Response: Reservations outweigh benefits. As with collaborative writing, the students noted that peer response aided them with improving (the accuracy of) their essays. They all had opportunities to give and receive feedback with some of their peers. As their utmost interest in writing essays was to improve their accuracy, they viewed peer feedback as another chance to

achieve this goal. Although they valued teacher feedback the most, they acknowledged their peers' roles throughout the writing process.

Excerpt 8 (Mary's post questionnaire)

Advices from peer will help me to improving my writing.

Excerpt 9 (Cindy's post questionnaire)

It make me know the thing that I make wrong and I can improve it.

The fundamental problem that accounted for the students' perceived reservations concerning peer response was the wide range of student proficiency levels. As I believed more peer scaffolding would take place with the groups composed of students with mixed levels, I balanced the groups with more proficient and less proficient students. However, the concerns the students articulated regarding peer response in the post questionnaire illustrate the drawbacks of working with peers with differing linguistic levels. Being one of the most expert students in class, Tony reported that the feedback he received was not always reliable.

Excerpt 10 (Tony's post questionnaire)

I can improve my writing skill but sometime, my friends do not sure about some grammar. Their solutions about my work are wrong.

On the other hand, Jinny's grievance was that her ideas were being considered as trivial. As the mutual trust was lost after having felt that her opinion was considered inconsequential, peer feedback was another area she felt uncomfortable with. The negative experience from collaborative writing made her reluctant to take advantage of benefiting from the peer interaction. She lost confidence in offering feedback and did not welcome feedback from peers as well. Only teacher feedback was considered positive, resulting in using me as the only reliable resource to improve the grammatical accuracy as well as the content and structure of her essay. In the post-questionnaire Likert scale, her attitude towards individual writing drastically changed as she reported that she did not like writing alone in the beginning, but she preferred writing alone in the end (see Appendix A, item 5). In addition, in the open-ended questions, she commented that she preferred to write individually with the help of the teacher as shown in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 11 (Jinny's post questionnaire)

I like to writing alone and teacher feedback because when I writing alone I'm can have many idea and don't concern about anyone.

Cindy was the only one who viewed peer response from an entirely different perspective. Being one of the most proficient students, she was often in the position of giving feedback to her peers. This, however, did not make her feel at ease, as she often had to correct her peers' errors. In her reflective journal, she stated that she did not want to hurt her peers' feelings as shown in excerpt 12. This was somewhat similar to Mary's concern, prioritizing Thai cultural values when the students had to be engaged in possible face-threatening exchanges, making decisions and accepting or rejecting other peers' contributions.

Excerpt 12 (Cindy's reflective journal)

Giving peer feedback always makes me feel afraid because I do not like to make people be upset or mad.

The students did not always perceive group work positively. Collaborative writing was a completely new learning style for most of them, providing them with fun chances to share their ideas, additional opportunities to give and receive feedback, and improve the accuracy of their writing. However, it was also accompanied by some negative responses. Students reported that the decision making process was time-consuming, resulting in slow work progress. They also realized that working with students from different majors, ages, and linguistic competencies made collaboration challenging. Moreover, not everyone contributed equally and not everyone's contribution was considered trustworthy. The other type of collaborative work the students were engaged in was peer response. Their perceptions of peer response mainly revolved around accuracy, rather than the content or structure of their essays. They expressed both benefits and concerns of peer response in terms of grammatical accuracy. Depending on the students' proficiency, peer response was uncomfortable for some students. One of the most proficient students feared hurting her peers' feelings, whereas the less proficient students did not feel confident enough to give feedback. The students' perceptions of collaborative writing revealed both positive and negative impressions of the processes. In order to determine whether the collaboration supported improved writing performance, I show quantitative analysis of their pre- and post-writing tests vis-à-vis complexity, accuracy, and fluency in the next section.

Improvement Regarding Fluency, Complexity, and Accuracy

Fluency. In Table 1, Cindy and Tony showed a 35% increase in word count in the posttest compared to the pretest. This led to the increase in syllable count as well, indicating that she used more lengthy words at the end of the program. Mary, on the other hand, used 59% fewer words in the posttest. With the limited data, it is difficult to draw a strong conclusion that Mary's fluency drastically decreased, for her total word count (complete first prompt essay + incomplete second prompt essay) in the pretest was 343, whereas she used 295 words in her posttest. Although there is a decrease in the total word count between the pretest and posttest, it is not as substantial as the decrease recorded in Table 3. This will be considered later in the discussion. There was no substantial difference in Jinny's pretest and posttest.

Table 2

Fluency Measure: Word and Syllable Count

Test	Cindy				Mary				Tony				Jinny			
	Pre		Post		Pre		Post		Pre		Post		Pre		Post	
word/syllable	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S
Count	364	568	491	672	324	451	191	298	220	319	296	444	330	444	319	424
Increase in %			+35	+18			-59	-66			+35	+40			-3	-4

Complexity. Two types of complexity were measured: syntactic complexity and lexical complexity using the Index of Guiraud. Every student showed increase in syntactic complexity. In the pretest, all four students' clause-T-unit ratios were close to 1.00, indicating that most of the T-Units consisted of one main clause only. This considerably changes in their posttest, ranging from about 1.5 to almost 2.00. The use of subordinate clauses augmented from almost 0 per T-Unit to 0.5 to 1 per T-Unit, signifying the increase in grammatical complexity. Lexical complexity, on the other hand, showed opposite results as the syntactic complexity. Everyone but Tony showed a decrease in the type-token ratio. Cindy's drop in number was rather unexpected, although this might be a result of the different prompts given in the pretest and posttest. Jinny's index from her pretest was interesting as I did not expect her, as a beginner, to have a similar type-token ratio to Cindy. This apparently was not a perfect representation of her lexical complexity, for approximately 30 words she used in her pretest were a list of her friends' names,

song names, and singers' names. I therefore added one more row presenting more accurate type-token ratios, as I omitted the 30 words and recalculated it. Thus, 7.51 is a more accurate representation of her lexical complexity in the pretest.

Table 3

Complexity measure: Syntactic and lexical complexity

	Syntactic complexity		Lexical complexity (Index of Guiraud)	
	pre	post	Pre	post
Cindy	1.14	1.84	9.30	8.54
Mary	1.28	1.43	8.78	6.38
Tony	1.09	1.5	8.14	8.66
Jinny	1.11	1.68	9.21	8.04
Jinny (adjusted word count)			7.51	

Accuracy. It was not substantial, but the percentage of error free T-Units slightly decreased from 47% to 43%, which means that the students made a few more errors in relation to the T-Units they produced. Cindy was still able to write two thirds of her T-Units accurately, and Jinny's error free percentage increased by 2%, although it was not particularly meaningful to measure her error free T-Units, as she was a high beginner. She merely produced three error free T-Units in her posttest. The rubric I created, therefore, serves as a more appropriate representation of the change in the students' grammatical accuracy. Cindy did not show any difference between the pretest and posttest, while the accuracy of Mary's use of verb decreased by 4%. Since she only made three errors, it is hard to conclude that her accuracy decreased. Tony showed a slight improvement by 4%. Jinny was the one with considerable improvement in the correct use of verbs. In her pretest, she had several T-Units with two verbs (am have), while she rarely made the same error in the posttest. They all improved in terms of reducing the number of run-on sentences and sentence fragments. In the following section, I share the findings of the third research question that centers on the students' use of their L1 *Thai* during small group discussion.

Table 4

Accuracy Measure: Error-Free T-Units, Run-On, Fragment, Spelling and Capitalization

Test	Cindy		Mary		Tony		Jinny	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Error-free T-units (%)	27/44 = 61%	22/37 = 59%	22/32 = 69%	8/14 = 57%	10/22 = 45%	9/22 = 41%	5/35 = 14%	3/19 = 16%
Verb Use (%)	46/50 = 92%	72/78= 92%	28/32= 90%	19/22= 86%	23/27= 85%	33/37= 89%	18/38= 47%	31/43= 72%
Run-on	3	0	1	0	3	0	18	1
Fragment	2	0	3	1	2	0	8	4

Use of L1 During Small Group Discussion

All students commented that their excessive use of their L1 was because it was easier than interacting in English. Mary, however, was the only student who reported that she wanted and tried to use only English throughout the whole program. When I asked her during the interview why she thought the students used mostly English during small group discussion, she said that all students tried to speak English. However, their limited English vocabulary, a concern that was also shared by Jinny, hindered their use of English although they made an effort to discuss in English as in the following excerpt from Mary's second reflective journal.

Excerpt 13 (Mary's reflective journal)

I think in English class, everyone including me wants to speak English but we don't know much vocab. We do try to speak in English. ☺

Cindy and Tony shared more reasons why they used their L1 during small group discussion. The main reason was the differing linguistic competency among the learners. As Mary did, they also strived to practice their English in the beginning, but in the second group comprised of students with lower English proficiency, they started to use more Thai than English. They both noted that to accommodate the linguistically less competent students' needs, they had to use Thai. Cindy and Tony in their second reflective journals both mentioned exactly the same reasons why they used L1.

Excerpt 14 (from Cindy's journal)

There are two reasons why we speak in Thai when doing small group discussion. First, we are Thai so it will be easier to speak Thai when we talk to each other. Another, some of members group cannot understand all of the meaning prompt in English and we want to continue our work so we have to speak Thai.

Excerpt 15 (from Tony's journal)

Thai is a common language for Thai people. It is easy to talk together. Some people speak English well but someone not. If they speak English together. I believe that the poor English people cannot understand what do they say.

All in all, with limited time, the students used their L1 to work more efficiently to complete their tasks. The students with higher proficiency certainly accommodated their use of language. To work collaboratively, the students needed to constantly interact and communicate, but if they only spoke English, some students believed they could not accomplish the tasks. Since most of the tasks and activities involved some kind of pair or group work, they chose to use their L1, which facilitated their ultimate goal, completing the tasks and projects.

DISCUSSION

The students perceived collaborative writing and peer response positively, although the drawbacks outweighed the advantages. This may be the result of their differing proficiency levels and cultural tendency to avoid conflict, especially when giving feedback. Their self-reported benefits of group work regarding learning English mostly pivoted on improvement of accuracy. Unlike their perception, they mostly improved on syntactic complexity and fluency rather than accuracy. Lastly, their use of L1 during small group discussion was more beneficial than detrimental, especially if grammatical accuracy is not the only focus like in this study. This section will discuss the findings in more detail starting with students' perception of collaborative work, and how it matches or mismatches with their actual performance. Then, I will discuss their use of their L1 and its implications.

Like other studies that investigated students' perspectives on collaborative writing (Fernández Dobao & Blum, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005), students in this study also remarked that writing together in English was a fun activity, allowing them to share different ideas and perspectives while improving the accuracy of their tour guide or essays. However, adopting a case study approach allowed me to obtain more insights into the students' focal concerns about collaborative writing and peer response. Cindy's comment regarding her concerns about hurting other students' feelings resonates with the findings from Storch (2005), in which not wanting to upset their peers, students engaged in collaborative writing were hesitant to give feedback. Although I emphasized that both positive and critical feedback could help their peers to write a better draft, Cindy was careful as she, most of the time, was the giver of feedback. As many other Thai people do (Komin, 1990), she also wanted to avoid conflict, which conflicted with the situation in which she had to offer some critical and constructive feedback to her peers.

In contrast to Cindy, as one of the linguistically less fluent students, Jinny was not confident enough to give feedback to other students. This was also observed in Storch's (2005) study where the students with low language proficiency were reluctant to give feedback. In addition, Cindy in her post-questionnaire commented that she did not like "some petty idea" from her peer, which referred to Jinny. Once her peers realized Jinny was not as fluent as they were, they did not consider her feedback (grammar, content, etc.) trustworthy. When her peers did not accept her feedback, she was more reluctant to offer feedback, resulting in her dislike of receiving feedback from other students as well. This ultimately changed her attitude towards group writing, causing her change of preference towards individual writing (see Appendix A, item 5). She believed teacher feedback was the only reliable resource to improve her writing, as did the students in McDonough's study (2004). For the opposite reason, Tony preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback. Being one of the few intermediate students, he distrusted his peers' feedback, and during the interview, he commented that his peers were only able to offer him surface level feedback, a problem noted elsewhere in research on peer response (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014), although they were encouraged to provide each other with more constructive feedback. Since many students were in the beginner range, they could not engage in meaningful peer review activity, which involves higher order cognition.

Another reservation Tony shared with me, also addressed by Cindy, was that not all students contributed to the small group discussion, which coincides with the findings of Fernández Dobao and Blum's (2013) research. There are two possible explanations for some students' lack of contribution during small group discussion or collaborative writing. First, their limited L2 proficiency might have resulted in passive participation during group work. Although they often discussed in their L1, all the prompts, instruction, and my feedback were given in English. It might have been challenging for these students with limited English to actively contribute without being able to translate their ideas into English, or to offer ideas directly in English. Another reason might be their relationships with other students. Tony, for instance, pointed out that it was challenging to work with graduate students or students with whom he was not familiar. Cindy's group also had two students from rubber science whom she did not know well. Considering their cultural values, the students might have needed more time to familiarize themselves and feel close enough to be engaged in academic tasks. Since they had not always succeeded in building mutual trust, some students were more passive during small group discussion.

One more concern students shared regarding collaborative writing was the slow process due to diverse opinions. Especially during the brainstorming stage, the students had chances to share different ideas and perspectives. This diversity, which was considered a huge benefit by most of the students, impeded their decision making process as they had to narrow down their opinions to co-construct their texts. Within the limited time, the initial benefits turned out to be one of the challenges they faced. Considering the time constraints most classes have, teachers will have to carefully allocate time for each stage of collaborative writing.

To understand the (mis)match between the students' perceptions and their performances, I measured fluency, complexity, and accuracy of four focal students' pretest and posttest essays. Since the sample size is small, this paper does not represent the results from the entire class, but the findings will demonstrate how much the four focal students' perspectives on group work align with their actual performance.

The students, except for Mary, generally produced more words and syllables in their posttest. With the same time and conditions given, they were able to produce longer texts at the end of the program. The result shows that Jinny had about a 3-4% drop in word and syllable count, but in fact, if we take the fact that Jinny listed her friends' names and her favorite songs and singers'

names into account in her pretest writing and delete those 30 words, her word and syllable count increases by about 6%. This is not a big difference, yet it shows that she also had some improvement in fluency.

Mary's result was quite surprising as she produced fewer words compared to her pretest. However, when I started to reanalyze it, I realized that the data were not an accurate representation of her fluency in writing. The way I administered the pretest and posttest is partly responsible for her decrease in fluency analyzed in this paper. The students were given two prompts for each pretest and posttest. They were encouraged to complete their first essay before they moved on to the second prompt. In the pretest, most of the students merely finished the first essay, and those who started writing the second essay were not nearly as successful in completing the second essay. Knowing this, Mary might have tried to allocate equal time to address both prompts instead of spending more time on the first prompt, as she did in the pretest. In her pretest, she was only able to write 14 words for her second prompt, while she wrote down 104 words for the second prompt in her posttest, a process which requires more time and cognitive effort than simply concentrating on one essay. This accounts for the low word count for her first essay, as shown in Table 2. Another possible reason is that she needed more time to brainstorm to write two different essays. As she only wrote 14 words in the second essay of her pretest, it is safe to say that she did not really invest copious time to write it. However, planning and writing two paragraphs with 104 words indisputably requires more time than the previous one. It, therefore, is risky to conclude that Mary's fluency drastically decreased after eight weeks of learning. With some insight into their (non)improvement in fluency, I also measured their sentence complexity: syntactic complexity and lexical complexity.

First, I used T-Units, one main clause and its subordinate clause(s), to measure improvement in syntactic complexity of the students' essays. This is one of the few areas in which all students showed improvement. Although Cindy and Jinny demonstrated the most notable improvement in syntactic complexity, Mary and Tony also used around 0.5 subordinate clauses per main clause, higher usage than in the pretest. This shows that regardless of the students' proficiency level, they showed improvement on the use of subordinate clauses, appropriately producing complex sentences. The mini grammar lessons I gave based on the frequent errors students made and peer and teacher feedback seem to have enabled them to produce grammatically more complex sentences.

Another complexity category I looked into was their use of lexicon. Interestingly, Cindy's fluency was higher in the posttest, but she did not use as diverse lexicon as she did in the pretest. One assumption is that, with her limited lexicon, it could have been challenging for her to utilize more diverse words when she produced about 130 more words in the posttest. The different prompts from pretest and posttest might also account for the lexical variety. In the pretest, she wrote down her Thai name, English nickname, school names, favorite singer names, and two friends' names for her self-introduction. Since these were all calculated as different types of words, it makes sense that the type-token ratio rose, not necessarily reflecting her English lexicon. Tony was the most consistent student as both of his syntactic and lexical complexity increased. Jinny's type-token ratio was not accurate at all because of her excessive use of her friends' names, singers' names, and song names. Although they are written in English, they do not necessarily represent her English lexical knowledge. In this respect, I think the second type-token ratio with 7.51 more accurately demonstrates her vocabulary. If I use that value to compare it with her lexical usage in the posttest, she also shows slight improvement in lexical variety. It is interesting to see how all four students' syntactic complexity increased, while their lexical complexity by and large decreased. This might be the result of what our class focused on. As we worked on the morphosyntactic level with the focus on the organization and structure of essays rather than the lexical level, the students' learning happened in improvement of grammatical accuracy. It is also possible that the students used vocabulary they already knew to devote more resources to syntax rather than making attempts to use newly learned or acquired vocabulary.

Finally, in addition to fluency and complexity, I also measured the accuracy of their essays to have a more comprehensive grasp of their improvement. I first calculated the percentage of error free T-Units out of the entire T-Units to roughly estimate their proficiency level. This percentage matches with their proficiency level I estimated based on my observation in class and their grades for the class. All of them produced a little more errors in the posttest, presumably due to the task type. Although I tried to create equitable writing prompts for both pretest and posttest, the students could have perceived them as having different levels of difficulty. In the pretest, all of them wrote the essay with very simple sentences with the linking verb *be* due to the prompt that asked them to introduce themselves and their family. In contrast, having been asked to write about their future, they had to use more modal verbs with different action verbs in the posttest. They also used different verbs and sentence structures since they might have wanted to use what

they had learned over the eight-week course. All of these variables might have caused the relative decrease in their overall accuracy.

To measure their correct use of verbs, I checked subject-verb agreement, tense and aspect, more than one verb, null verb, and wrong voice. Cindy, Mary, and Tony were able to use the verbs with over 80% of accuracy. Jinny was the one who showed dramatic improvement. In her pretest, she often used the *be verb* and another verb together like “is sing” or “is go”, which indicates that she did not know the correct use of the *be verb* or verbs in general. In the posttest, this instance drastically drops to three times, much better than thirteen times in the pretest. She ended up with 72% accuracy, showing the most improvement out of the four. Cindy, Mary, and Tony also produced almost no run-on sentences and sentence fragments in their posttest, showing their increased understanding of complete sentences. Jinny once again demonstrated marked improvement as she had a lot of problems with punctuation in the beginning, resulting in 18 run-on sentences and eight fragments. However, in the posttest, she only produced one run-on sentence and four fragments.

Skehan’s (1998, 2009) “Trade-off Hypothesis” suggests that it is difficult for learners to show improvement in all three constructs. According to Skehan, by paying attention to one or two of the measurement areas, the other area(s) can be negatively affected. That is, if learners focus on complexity and accuracy, for instance, they will not be able to demonstrate gains in fluency measures. Likewise, more proficient students’ attempt to use syntactically more complex sentences can result in more linguistic errors. This was observed a bit in my students’ essays. Although they produced syntactically more complex sentences in their posttests, this did not result in higher accuracy, aligning with the Trade-off Hypothesis. Even the least proficient student, Jinny, produced syntactically more complex sentences. Furthermore, if we narrow down the accuracy measures to the rubric I created, she showed huge improvement unlike the other students. Having made many errors in the pretest, there was more room for her to show improvement in the posttest. Although Skehan (2009) stated that there is negative correlation between complexity and fluency, the students in this study showed improvement in both areas. My assumption is that being exposed to English for a good amount of time in eight weeks equipped the students with confidence and fluency to write longer essays, even with more complex sentence structures.

It is difficult to tell if learning happened due to my lectures and feedback, or through collaborative writing, peer feedback, and other group activities that facilitate peer scaffolding, but these four focal students showed some improvement in their posttest. Syntactic complexity was the only category in which every student showed improvement. Their more frequent use of subordinate clauses certainly means that they understand how to form a main clause and add one or more subordinate clauses to diversify their sentence types. Tony and Jinny showed more positive progress in accuracy and complexity, which possibly can be accounted for by their relatively lower proficiency in English. Having lacked some of the fundamental English skills, they apparently had more room for improvement, which was partly or fully reflected in this fluency, complexity, and accuracy measurements.

Looking at the students' perceptions and their written performances, a slight mismatch was observed. The students reported that both collaborative writing and peer response aided them with improving the accuracy of their written work. This might be represented in the travel guide and essays they produced throughout the eight weeks, but not in their posttests, which were individual writing tasks. However, given that the students produced morphosyntactically more complex T-Units, it is unfair to conclude that their overall accuracy decreased. By producing more lengthy T-Units, there was more chance for them to produce errors in each T-Unit. Besides, the students did improve their accuracy regarding some grammatical features such as the use of verb, sentence fragments, or run-on sentences. These grammatical items were what I taught in class, and the students paid attention to them during collaborative writing and peer response sessions. Although I cannot show whether learning happened through my grammar lessons and/or the collaborative work the students were engaged in, the results indicate that the students did improve their fluency, syntactic complexity, and/or accuracy to some degree during the eight weeks.

Finally, the use of the students' L1 during small group discussion, which was rather unexpected from my initial plan, turned out to be essential and quite necessary for them. As previous studies suggest, students' use of L1 during small group discussion can be positive for meaning-focused activities and immersion programs (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Since many of the activities in my class were meaning-focused, L1 certainly played a critical role in their task completion. The use of students' L1 during the preparation stage of a group presentation was also found to be effective

(Kobayashi, 2003) and necessary due to their limited proficiency in their L2 (Yang, 2010). This coincides with my students' comments about differing linguistic proficiency, effectiveness, and limited lexicon as the reasons for their use of L1. Many teachers believe students should only use their target language in an English-medium classroom, but if grammatical accuracy is not the only focus, the students' use of L1 certainly has a significant role to play. In certain contexts, students would benefit more in achieving their own and the institutional goals by using more than one language.

CONCLUSION

This action research study investigated Thai university students' perspectives on group work, the (mis)match between their perspectives and their actual performance, and their use of L1 during small group discussion to complete meaning-focused task and activities. Conducting classroom action research allowed me the flexibility to shift my focus of inquiry during the program as critical incidents happened such as the students' use of their L1 during small group discussion. My main research interest still served as the backbone of my class and research, but there certainly was more room to adapt my class and research inquiry. I adopted a case study approach to better understand my students' positive and negative attitudes towards group work in a writing and presentation skills class. The qualitative data I collected through diverse channels along with the quantitative Likert scale pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire allowed me to look into the students' perspective in more detail. Furthermore, measuring students' pretest and posttest through the three constructs (complexity, accuracy, and fluency) revealed how their perspectives and written performances (mis)matched with each other.

This study has some important pedagogical implications for the teachers and researchers interested in action research and/or implementing group work in L2 classrooms. First, although group work has great potential for learning, the possible drawbacks need to be carefully considered and addressed during the planning stage and while teaching the class. Teachers need to consider students' differing proficiency levels within a classroom, students' relations with each other, cultural influences (different learning styles, role of age, etc.), and the individual differences of the students. Teachers need to consistently observe and reflect on their students' needs and wants regarding group work by administering surveys, using student reflective

journals, and if possible by interviewing them. Second, the students' perceived (dis)advantages and their actual performances might not always be in congruence with each other. Teachers must then find out what the discrepancies are, why there are gaps, and how to deal with them.

Listening to students' voices along with teacher assessment may be a good starting point. Having the students regularly write reflective journals will also provide teachers with insights about the students' thoughts. Lastly, students' use of their L1 is not always negative, even in an English-medium classroom. If the activities are meaning-focused and the students are not fluent enough to only discuss in their L2, there is no reason for the teacher to prevent the students from using their L1. L1 can facilitate the students' process of preparing for an in-class oral task, resulting in a satisfying grade for both the students and the teacher. This resonates with the findings of Kobayashi's (2003) study that the use of L1 is beneficial for international students for group work, although his study investigated the use of L1 outside the classroom. However, if activities are planned to improve students' grammatical accuracy, then using L2 can have more positive effects (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). Depending on the institutional goals as well as the students' needs and wants, teachers can decide using what language(s) will be more beneficial to reach the goals.

Although this study offers some practical implications for classroom research and practice, some limitations should be addressed in future research. First, this action research investigated a specific context with a homogenous group of Thai students sharing the same cultural values and similar types of formal English instruction prior to this study. Students with different cultural and educational background might hold different perspectives on collaborative work when learning English. Thus, it will be worth studying other homogeneous or heterogeneous classes and compare their perspectives on group work. The students' low and varying linguistic proficiency level can be another decisive factor for the specific responses the students provide. In this study, the more advanced students showed different reservations compared to the less competent students. It has to be noted that placement tests do not guarantee that all students are at the same level, and attitudes can certainly differ even if all the students are of the same level of proficiency as shown in this study. Finally, a larger sample size will yield more reliable data set whereas this case study focused on only four focal students. Case studies have the potential to provide more in-depth understanding of the students' perspectives, but they also provide limited

perspectives. To increase the depth and breadth of understanding, studies employing mixed-methods with a larger sample size will be useful in the future.

The first day in Thailand was a mixture of delight and surprise. I was excited to encounter 40 new students whom I did not know at all, but I was also worried about their low proficiency levels after testing them on speaking and writing. However, I realized this was how action research works. If I had had no problems from the beginning, I would have had a class that worked exactly as I had planned. This I guess would rarely happen to any teacher in any context. Taking into account students' individual and cultural differences and the fact that classes never go exactly as the teacher plans, the unexpected results of pretests were rather what I had to expect as a teacher. Finding out why certain activities did not work by observing the class, sharing with other teachers, interviewing the students, and reflecting on my teaching practice gave me a chance to better understand the students and plan more effective classes for them. The cyclical process of teaching and reflecting offered me great insight into the students' perspectives towards group work, and upgraded me as a teacher researcher.

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APPENDIX A

Pre-Questionnaire and Post-Questionnaire (Likert Scale) Results of Four Focal Students

	Questionnaire Statement	Cindy		Mary		Tony		Jinny	
		pre	post	Pre	post	pre	post	pre	Post
1	I like to study English by myself.*	4	4	1	4	1	5	4	4
2	Teacher's feedback is very important in learning English.	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6
3	My friends can help me learn English.	5	5	5	6	6	3	6	5
4	I like writing in English.	6	6	4	5	4	5	4	4
5	I believe learning to write in English is more efficient if I do it alone.	4	5	1	2	1	1	6	1
6	I believe peer feedback can help me write better.	6	5	5	5	5	3	5	4
7	Teacher's feedback is very important when learning how to write in English.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
8	Writing is the most challenging skill area for me.	5	6	6	4	6	5	6	6
9	I am sure I will be able to write in English comfortably if I continue studying.	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6
10	I like speaking in English.	6	6	5	6	5	5	4	6
11	I think speaking and presentation skills are different.	5	6	5	4	6	6	5	1
12	I feel comfortable when presenting with someone else.	3	3	4	5	2	4	3	3
13	I prefer giving presentation by myself.	3	6	4	3	3	5	3	3
14	Teacher's feedback can help me improve my presentation skills.	6	6	6	6	5	6	4	6
15	Peer feedback can help me improve my presentation skills.	6	6	5	6	5	5	4	6
16	Speaking is the most challenging skill area for me.	5	5	6	3	4	5	6	5
17	Presentation is the most challenging skill area for me.	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6
18	I am sure I will be able to speak in English comfortably if I continue studying.	4	6	6	6	5	6	6	6
19	I am sure I will be able to present in English comfortably if I continue studying.	4	6	6	6	4	6	6	6

* Items in bold indicate the focal items I analyzed for this study.

APPENDIX B

Pre-Questionnaire Open-Ended Questions

In this part, I would like to ask you to tell me about your opinion. Please read the questions carefully and answer the questions in the provided space below.

1. Have you ever written something in a group? How often?

1-1. **If you did**, what did you write about?

1-2. **If you did**, did you like writing something in a group? Why or why not?

1-3. **If you did**, which do you like more, writing alone or writing in a group? Why?

2. Have you ever received peer feedback? ?

2-1. **If you did**, did you like getting feedback from your peers? Why or why not?

2-2. **If you did**, which do you like more, peer feedback or teacher feedback? Why?

3. Have you ever presented something in a group? How often?

3-1. **If you did**, what did you present about?

3-2. **If you did**, did you like presenting something in a group? Why or why not?

3-3. **If you did**, which do you like more, presenting alone or presenting in a group? Why?

APPENDIX C**Post-Questionnaire Open-Ended Questions**

In this part, I would like to ask you to tell me about your opinion. Please read the questions carefully and answer the questions in the provided space below.

1. What did you like about writing in a group (collaborative writing)?
2. What did you not like about writing in a group (collaborative writing)?
3. What did you like about getting advice from other students about your writing (peer feedback)?
4. What did you not like about getting advice from other students about your writing (peer feedback)?
5. What did you like about getting advice from the teacher about your writing (teacher feedback)?
6. What did you not like about getting advice from the teacher about your writing (teacher feedback)?
7. Which style do you like the most and the least when writing in English: writing alone, peer feedback, teacher feedback, or collaborative writing? Why?
8. What did you like about presenting in groups (group presentation)?
9. What did you not like about presenting in groups (group presentation)?
10. Which do you like more, presenting alone or presenting in a group? Why?
11. Tell me what you liked about this class.
12. Tell me what you disliked about this class.

APPENDIX D

After Project 1: Travel Guide

Name: _____

1. What did you learn from the last five weeks?
2. What were some of the difficulties you faced in this class?
3. What do you think about working in groups? Did it help you learn English? Why or why not?
4. What do you want to learn in the next three weeks?

After Project 2: Global Warming

Name: _____

1. What did you learn from the last two and a half weeks?
2. What were some of the difficulties you faced in this class?
3. What do you think about working in groups when writing?
4. What do you think about working in groups when presenting?

After Project 3: Let's change the world

Name: _____

Free Write:

Please write about anything you learned from this class, anything you liked or disliked, any challenges you faced, and anything you want to say to me.

Your feedback will be valuable for my future teaching career.

APPENDIX E

Post Interview

1. What did you learn in this class?
2. What do you think about collaborative writing? What was good and what was not?
3. What do you think about peer feedback? What was good and what was not?
4. What do you think about group presentation? What was good and what was not?
5. Why do you think you used Thai during small group discussions? Why do you think other students used Thai during small group discussions?

APPENDIX F**Writing Prompts**

Pre-Writing: Part 1

In this section, you will introduce yourself. Some things you can write about are who you are, your family, your friends, your school, your hobbies, etc. Please write at least 1 page (until you see 😊).

Pre-Writing: Part 2

In this section, you will write about your opinion on global warming. Using your knowledge, write about the reasons, problems, and possible solutions for global warming. Please write at least 1 page (until you see 😊).

Post-Writing: Part 1

In this section, you will write about your future plans. Some things you can write about are academic plans (studying at university, plans for studying English, study abroad, etc.) and professional plans (what kind of job you want and why, where you want to work, what kind of company you want to work for, etc.) Please write at least 1 page (until you see 😊).

Post-Writing: Part 2

In this section, you will write about your opinion on urbanization. Urbanization means creating towns in country area. What are some problems of urbanization in big cities such as Bangkok, what causes those problems, and what are some possible solutions to those problems. Please write at least 1 page (until you see 😊).