

The Influence of Group Dynamics on Students' Participation in English Class Discussion

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Abstract

This paper describes the influence of group dynamics on students' engagement in conversations about learning English. While previous research has often focused on cultural or individual factors like personality and self-confidence, this study focuses on group characteristics including leadership roles, group reinforcement, and group cohesion. The goal is to find out how these internal interactions affect students' propensity to engage in learning activities. As part of a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students during a collaborative drama project in an Intro to Literature course. The primary subjects of data collection were group behavior patterns, leadership, and the individual experiences of students during group discussions. The findings of the study provide credence to the idea that group dynamics significantly affect students' participation and engagement in class discussions in English. Important elements like inclusive norms, peer support, and collaborative leadership provide a supportive environment for active learning.

Keywords: group dynamics, student's participation, class discussion, studying English

INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of teacher-centered learning is giving way to student-centered learning in the twenty-first century. This change results from the realization that students are active participants who build their own understanding via engagement and worthwhile experiences rather than passive consumers of knowledge. An strategy that emphasizes student autonomy, teamwork, and problem-solving skills is known as student-centered learning. It centers the educational process around the student (Bell, 2015). This strategy

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is in line with contemporary interpretations of constructivist theory, which stress that knowledge is actively created via social interaction and participation rather than being passed down directly from instructor to pupil (Hammond et al., 2020). Student-centered approaches foster deeper engagement and academic growth by positioning learners as active agents in their education” (Kaput, 2018).

Many classrooms today are still based on old teacher-centered methods, where teachers manage the classroom, direct the conversation, and act as the only source of information, in spite of these educational objectives. Students are frequently deterred from freely expressing their opinions or taking part in insightful debates in such settings. Instead of being active learners, they turn into passive observers. This lack of engagement can impede language development, especially in English classes where confidence, interaction, and communication are essential.

Teachers are increasingly using group dynamics as a tactic to create more inclusive, participative classrooms in an effort to close this gap. Group dynamics are the psychological and behavioral processes that take place in a social group, particularly when students work together to accomplish a shared objective (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1999). Students who collaborate in groups not only improve their communication abilities but also gain empathy, leadership, self-assurance, and respect for others (Heslop & Eng, 2021). Group dynamics in English class discussions can foster a positive atmosphere where students feel more at ease expressing their ideas and using the language. (Dörnyei, 1997). The purpose of this study is to look into how group dynamics impact students' involvement in class discussions in English. Teachers can create more effective learning environments that genuinely reflect the objectives of 21st-century education enabling students to be critical, cooperative, and active participants in their own learning process by having a better understanding of how students interact, cooperate, and contribute in group settings.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how group dynamics affect student participation in English class discussion. The choice of a qualitative approach was appropriate given the complex, context dependent nature of

classroom interactions and the subjective experiences of students within group settings. A case study was particularly suitable because it allowed for an in depth, multifaceted investigation into a single bounded system a drama project in an undergraduate English course.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were students enrolled in an Intro to Literature class at a university level English Education Program. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who were actively involved in group based class activities. This approach ensured that the data gathered would be rich and relevant to the study's objectives. The sample size, though limited, was adequate for qualitative exploration, emphasizing depth over breadth.

Data Collection Instruments

Two primary methods of data collection were used:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

These allowed for flexible yet focused probing into students' personal experiences, perceptions of group dynamics, and emotional responses during discussion. Open ended questions were used to elicit detailed narratives and capture nuanced understanding.

2. Classroom Observations

Observations were conducted during group discussions and project-based learning activities. A structured observation sheet was used to document behaviors related to leadership emergence, peer interaction, and participation equity. The observer took on a non-participant role to minimize disruption and observer bias.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The following main themes emerged from a combination of student surveys and in-class observations. This discussion section aims to expand on these findings based on the research questions posed as well as the body of literature already available on group dynamics and cooperative learning.

1. Positive engagement through peer interaction

The students were actively involved in the planning and presentation of the theatre, according to the observation made in class. Each group of students worked together to practice their scripts, refine their presentations, and encourage each other to gain confidence, accurate pronunciation, and expressive skills. Students criticized each other, offered helpful criticism on how to improve, and spoke almost exclusively in English throughout the workouts. This is consistent with Gillies (2016), who states that co-op projects help students improve their academic performance as well as their interpersonal skills, including empathy, patience, and support. Students reported that group learning enabled them to exchange ideas and assist those with less solid English backgrounds. As college student said:

"Studying in focus groups really helped me learn English, as we were able to exchange opinions with each other and support each other."

The students' linguistic apprehension was reduced by this cooperative framework, which increased their willingness to speak. Peer learning reinforced the idea that group activities foster inclusive learning environments by providing scaffolding for students who lacked confidence (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

2. The Role of Leadership and Shared Responsibility

One significant topic that has come up is the role of official leadership in groups. According to the children's responses, at least one member of each group accepted a leadership position during the improv. These individuals were in charge of tasks like organizing repetitions, assigning roles, and motivating their pairings, and they were frequently better at speaking English. However, these student leaders did not act in a tyrannical manner. Instead, they demonstrated collaborative leadership qualities by encouraging communication, freely exchanging ideas, and ensuring that all participants were involved. The college student explained:

"Someone who dominates in a group is quite influential in my opinion, they enjoy sharing ideas, deliberating, and working together."

Slavin (2020) asserts that the "distributed leadership," which encourages active engagement by making others feel valued, is consistent with this leadership style. In this instance, good leadership has enhanced the group's performance rather than criticizing

others. The encouragement of more reserved children to express themselves and participate in class activities has been greatly aided by these pair leaders.

3. Norms and group cohesion

Two crucial factors in determining students' engagement were the group's cohesiveness and the classroom norms. According to student testimonies and observational data, each group has established a distinct microculture of accountability, mutual respect, and shared purpose. Members of the group are obligated to include all students and divide the tasks fairly, even if there are differences in the students' English proficiency. One student claimed that the organization was a place where people went to disentangle themselves:

"In a group, we learn how to communicate something well to other members."

This suggests the existence of what Forsyth (2019) refers to as "group cohesion," or the degree to which group members are drawn to and motivated to serve their comrades. The psychological security that cohesiveness provides has allowed students to use the language more freely without fear of criticism. The fact that students have reported using WhatsApp groups to coordinate their assignments, even outside of class, is another proof of a meaningful connection. This finding supports Edmondson's (1999) theory that psychological security is a prerequisite for creativity and performance, particularly when working in a group. When students trust their pairs, they are more inclined to voice their thoughts, ask questions, and receive feedback—all of which are critical for the development of a second language.

4. Individual variations and inclusion challenges

Although the group dynamic was generally pleasant, the students have indicated certain challenges. Each group had members who were more passive, more composed, and more domineering. Despite the fact that most of the group's leaders were inclusive, several participants have noted that not all of the group's members have contributed in the same way. A college student said:

"So far, the obstacle in a group is that there are students who are mainly active and others who are passive."

This is consistent with research by Dörnyei and Murphey (1999), which suggests

that participation may become unequal in small group settings, especially when more dominant personalities are present. Nevertheless, the results also showed that the students were aware of this challenge and made a concerted attempt to "merangkul," or include passive members. The goal of inclusion rather than exclusion is one of the most effective indicators of inclusive group standards. This implies that group work calls for social and emotional intelligence in addition to task coordination. Teachers may need to suggest group negotiation strategies, such as role rotation and organized tours, in order to ensure equitable participation.

5. Emotional impact and confidence building

Students have frequently stated that they felt more comfortable speaking English when they were a part of a support group. Group interactions have enabled the less experienced students to be exposed to more experienced classroom comrades. They were able to analyze the corporeal language, pronunciation, and intonation, which they then attempted to mimic. According to one respondent:

"I prefer to be in a group, because I myself am still confused sometimes, and I have to learn more for English."

According to Krashen's (1982) emotional filter hypothesis, language acquisition is more successful when learners are motivated, confident, and anxiety-free. These requirements have been met by the cooperative theater project. The performance anxiety has decreased because the repetitions were done in familiar pair groups before presenting to the entire class. Thanks to this methodical explanation, the students were able to adjust both linguistically and mentally. Also, the use of theater, which is a very expressive and interactive medium, has strengthened linguistic trust.

Tseng (2021) asserts that theater encourages taking risks in language learning because it provides a fictional environment in which students can "play" without fear of making mistakes. Participants in the study have attested to this benefit, stating that their fluidity and confidence in public speaking had improved as a result of the training sessions and pair evaluations.

6. External collaboration and ongoing engagement

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The idea of continuing to work together outside of the classroom was a surprising yet educational topic. Some students have stated that their group continued to practice and communicate via WhatsApp, demonstrating a high level of dedication and impact on their performance. In an informal learning environment, language practice has been adapted to real-world situations and self-directed.

This is in line with Little's (2000) theory of learning autonomy, which states that students appropriate their education when they feel in control of their work. In this instance, the group evolved into a "community of learning," where English served as a tool for success rather than a straightforward subject.

Furthermore, it concurs with the findings of Suryani and Soedarso (2020), who observed that students working on group projects tend to develop better metacognitive skills, such as time management, group coordination, and strategic communication skills that go beyond language learning and are relevant to academic success in general.

The results of this study offer compelling proof that group dynamics have a big impact on how involved students are in class discussions in English. Observations in the classroom and student replies reveal a number of important features that show how and why students participate more actively in group based learning environments. High levels of student involvement while working together were observed throughout the Intro to Literature course's theater assignment. A psychologically secure space for language usage was created by the learning environment, which supported peer feedback, collective practice, and small group discussion. In addition to actively participating in rehearsal, students also supported, corrected, and encouraged one another during conversations.

These results imply that group activities improve students' readiness to communicate by lowering affective barriers like speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Social contact and peer support are needed in promoting learning. Three key elements of group dynamics leadership and peer influence, a supportive environment, and inclusivity were found to have a substantial impact on student engagement. By coming up with ideas, directing conversations, and inspiring their classmates, dominant students demonstrated positive leadership instead of controlling. Within the group, their activities promoted inclusivity and a sense of shared responsibility. This result is consistent with Ifeoma et. al (2015) framework for productive group work, which highlights

the importance of personal responsibility and constructive interdependence.

Students also frequently highlighted the academic and emotional assistance they got from their friends. They stated that group members promoted mutual learning and cooperation by providing support with performance, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Effective group functioning is influenced by cohesion, clearly defined roles, and mutual respect among members” (Kim, Panza, & Evans, 2021). Students felt free to express themselves in this encouraging setting, which fostered a strong sense of community. Additionally, the established group norms promoted fair involvement even in the face of discernible variations in engagement, where some students were more inactive. These standards, which were based on respect for one another and common objectives, enabled even less skilled pupils to make significant contributions.

Students' views of group dynamics and how they affect their readiness to speak were investigated in the third research question. Students said group work was very helpful overall. They valued the cooperative and secure environment, which increased their self assurance when speaking English. Possibilities for group idea rehearsal decreased performance anxiety and enhanced general communication skills. Cooperative learning enhances not only academic outcomes but also social skills, empathy, and student accountability” (Gillies, 2016). For many, structured engagement and the presence of encouraging peers promoted language use risk-taking. However, several difficulties were identified, such as differences in language skills and reliance on more experienced participants.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study provide credence to the idea that group dynamics significantly affect students' participation and engagement in class discussions in English. Important elements like inclusive norms, peer support, and collaborative leadership provide a supportive environment for active learning. Through group-based interactions, students not only increase their language proficiency but also cultivate interpersonal skills. These results highlight the necessity for teachers to create thoughtful group activities that encourage equitable participation, particularly in classrooms with a variety of linguistic backgrounds. Students' motivation, self-assurance, and general communication skills can all be improved by incorporating group dynamics into English language training.

Author Biography

Rike Nurvania Sagita is a student of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Kadiri. She is interested in how classroom interaction influences language acquisition. Her curiosity focuses on group dynamics, participation patterns in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. She wants to explore how students' willingness to communicate in English class might be enhanced by group cohesion, leadership, and peer support.

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