

## **Cooperative Learning in a Required Reading Class in College: How group activities impact on students' motivation and confidence in their English communications**

### **Context**

Subject: Elementary English Reading

Target Class: First-year university students, non-English majors (mostly from Economics department)

Level: high beginner - low intermediate level

Time: 90 min class, 1/week

Class size: 39 students

Textbook: Reading Explorer 1 (Cengage Learning)

Goals and objectives:

The general goal of this course, as one of the required English courses, is to have students ready to read academically with useful reading skills and critical thinking training. Moreover, this class also aims to improve students' vocabulary and overall English proficiency which could allow them to pass the grade Pre-2 to 2 level at EIKEN test. In addition to these common goals, I would like to increase students' motivation and confidence of using English by providing opportunities to interact with each other.

### **Introduction (Problems I face)**

What role should English classes in universities play for students' language learning? This is the biggest question I have had for long since I started teaching in universities. Especially through teaching a lot of required classes for non-English majors, I have been struggling a lot to get students actively participate in class because most students are not very motivated to learn English after they went through the term of "studying for entrance exams." Besides, college students are not always familiar with their classmates, which has been creating a big barrier for them when working on tasks that involve communication. Moreover, because their language abilities and learning experiences vary greatly, disparities between groups or individuals could be easily created. Having these challenges, I started to see my job with a

different perspective. One of the biggest objectives for me now as a college English instructor is to motivate students to use the language, rather than focusing on teaching them linguistic elements. We could help those demotivated students to have a positive view towards learning English; language learning is not just to memorize words or to pass a test anymore, rather, it could enrich their lives as a tool to communicate. With this teaching principle, I have been working on the research on students' learning motivation, and trying to develop the tasks to grow students' interests and confidence using English for communication.

One of the main goals of this Action Research is to investigate more about the students' interactions and attitudes toward cooperative work so that I would be able to offer more effective group activities which can motivate students to use English at their best under the circumstance. This is also an attempt to examine how the group interactions affect the learners' motivation, and to discover a beneficial way of managing cooperative tasks in required college language courses.

## **Literature review**

### ***Learner Motivation and Willingness to Communicate***

The growing necessity of international communication in the past couple of decades has increased the number of Japanese people who study English, leading the government to start promoting more "communicative approach" to English education at an early age. However, because of the lack of frequent language exposure to other language communities and of immediate communication needs in English, the main focus for their English learning still is to pass a test, and learners are only using it in the classroom setting. Furthermore, due to the overly valued systems of "entrance exams", which normally lack the element of "output", producing the language for communication purposes has been very challenging for a lot of Japanese learners of English. This is further contributed by the limited opportunities for using the language, improvement in the learners' communicative competence often depends on their willingness to seek out or take advantage of the chances to communicate with real means.

In fact, there is much research on investigating the variables which may affect one's language acquisition level, and the learners' motivation seems to be one of the important factors. Motivation can make a considerable difference in the language learning processes of a learner and its outcome. "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC) is one of the relatively new aspects of language learning motivation, which MacIntyre et al. (1998) define as "a readiness

to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2 (p.547).” In their heuristic model of WTC, MacIntyre et al. (1998) illustrate the complex connections between variables which affect the use of a L2. WTC is placed just under the L2 use in the pyramid shaped model, which indicates that WTC is required as the final step before an utterance occurs. In other words, WTC can be a predictor of frequency of communication in a L2 (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Yashima et al., 2004). Yashima et al. (2004; 2018) claim that this motivational aspect is particularly important to Japanese learners and potentially creates a great impact on developing their practical communication skills. Initiating a conversation is a crucial skill in communication that Japanese learners need to be competent in. The idea of WTC goes beyond reaching the basic communicative competence. Therefore, under the current educational settings in Japan, improving learners’ WTC can be an important objective when thinking about the L2 use as a goal.

Indeed, some researchers have tried to explore the ways to enhance students’ WTC in EFL contexts. Matsubara (2007)’s research with Japanese college students suggests that the student-centered approach may increase their WTC, while Yashima et al. (2018) discovered, in their qualitative investigations of learners’ WTC, that learners found strategies to initiate turn-taking through repeated discussion sessions in pairs and groups. Further, this research indicates that learners tend to become less nervous and take up the challenge of keeping the conversation going by lifting teacher control. That is to say, in order to maximize learners’ WTC, teachers need to provide enough opportunities for students to interact with each other, while leaving some responsibility for them to take control.

### ***Learners’ Silence and Interactions in Classroom***

In traditional teacher-centered classrooms in Japan, students are accustomed to being silent. Language classes are no exception; they offer few opportunities for students to have conversations or discussions, so some learners may feel uncomfortable when they are given a chance to actively participate in a communicative task. Japanese learners’ silence often stems from their anxiety; yet, in some cultures, silence could be misinterpreted as a lack of initiative or a refusal to participate (Harumi, 2016). In their research on Japanese English learners, Mahar and King (2020) investigated silence in the language classrooms and observed that “anxious learners may limit social exchanges in the target language for image protection purposes” (p.116). However, as Swain (1985) famously claimed, “output” is a necessary part of language learning. “Output”, especially conversational exchanges in class, plays a significant role in the learning process because “problems that arise while producing the second language (L2) can trigger cognitive exercises that are involved in second language

learning” (Swain & Lapkin, 1995, p.371). Nevertheless, due to a lack of confidence and the strong focus on the preparation for written entrance exams, learners struggle producing the language orally even though they may be competent in reading and listening to English at a certain level. Considering the situation, learner-learner interactions in classroom are very essential and valuable for students to practice “talking” which could make a major contributor to the development of their communicative competence. Long and Porter (1985) state several advantages of group work not only from pedagogical, but also psycholinguistic perspectives. Working together could lead to greater motivation and less anxiety regarding to learners’ L2 learning, while also serving as source of L2 input (Long & Porter, 1985). In addition, Pica et al. (1996) show in their research that although learners’ interaction provided less quantitatively rich data for L2 learning than interaction with native speakers, it offered data of considerable quality, particularly in the area of feedback. Moreover, having learners work together seem to provide them opportunities for expression, interpretation, and negotiation (Lee & VanPatten, 2003); in other words, learner-learner interaction in class adds a lot of benefits and is a necessary part of classroom L2 learning, especially under the current situation in the Japan education.

### ***Cooperative Learning and Group Cohesion***

Regarding learners’ output, Kagan (1995) expresses the significance of learner-learner interactions in terms of the frequency, redundancy, and identity congruency. Compared to the traditional classroom, students have a lot more time and opportunities to speak in a cooperative setting; they talk about a topic multiple times in less formal, peer-oriented contexts (Kagan, 1995). While cooperative learning has a significantly positive impact on critical variables related to language acquisition, Johnson et al. (2013) also report that college students who learn cooperatively seek more social support which can result in higher satisfaction socially and academically in their school lives. Cooperative learning is a powerful classroom approach especially in a higher educational environment in Japan where students meet less often and have a wide range of backgrounds.

However, working with others in class is not equivalent to cooperative learning. Considering the importance of cooperation, tasks should be carefully planned and examined to ensure they require cooperation in real means. Working in a “cooperative” group, learners not only work together to accomplish a shared goal, but also that they seek outcomes that are beneficial to all the members. They share materials, help each other, and contribute to the learning so the result is more than a sum of each individual’s part (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). To obtain the best outcome from cooperative learning, Dörnyei (1997) argues that “group

cohesiveness” is one of the most important elements for the learners’ success. Research by Clement et al. (1994) and Matsubara (2007) also indicate that “group cohesion” could positively influence learners’ classroom behaviors. In college classrooms, however, teachers have faced some difficulties managing effective group work, because of the differences in group dynamics. Group dynamics has been an area of focus in the field of social psychology which concerns the scientific analysis of groups, including group formation, development, interaction patterns and group cohesion (Clement et al., 1994; Dörnyei, 1997; Forsyth, 2014; Matsubara, 2007). According to Forsyth (2014), “group cohesion” refers to “the solidarity or unity of a group resulting from the development of strong and mutual interpersonal bonds among members” (p.10). In Japan, most colleges offer one class meeting per week for a language course with relatively large number of individuals. Unlike junior high or high schools, each learner might have a different language learning goal and their motivation towards class participation may vary greatly from person to person. Because of these conditions, building a good relationship between learners and creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere are crucial, though they can be very challenging. In fact, Evens and Dion (2012) reported that cohesive groups are more productive than non-cohesive group, while Cao and Philp (2006)’s study suggests that “the more distant the relationship of the individual to the receiver(s), the less willing the individual is to communicate” (p. 488). These possible impacts of group dynamics, especially group cohesion, have to be considered when implementing a cooperative activity. Giving learners enough opportunities to get to know each other and helping them build strong rapport should be put as one of the highest priorities in college language classes for the learners’ successful language learning. In fact, Dörnyei (1997) states that learners develop stronger ties gradually while fostering cohesiveness by sharing genuine personal information. Encouraging learners to ask questions about each other could allow them develop “cohesiveness”, and also, learning each other’s names and sharing some positive personal experiences could be a great help to build rapport between the learners (Helgesen, 2019). By providing opportunities like these, we must first remember to prioritize building “cohesion” among learners so that they could perform at their best, leading to the successful language learning.

## **Method (What I did)**

### **Purposes of the Study**

This Action Research aims to investigate the students' attitudes toward group work, their self-rated English skills, and their motivation toward English learning and English use, through providing series of opportunities to work with others in a classroom. Also, this experimental study is to explore the connections between the elements above, while focusing on creating effective activities which could develop the students' group cohesion.

## Materials and Procedures

### *Questionnaires*

The target class was a required English course in a college for non-English majors focusing on “reading” skills. About 40 first-year students enrolled and the stated level for the class is lower-intermediate. In order to explore the students' attitude toward group work, their self-ranked skills, confidence and motivation, questionnaires are administered three times during the semester; at pre-term, mid-term, and post-term, with about 2 months intervals. Each questionnaire was conducted through online forms, so the participants filled them out by their own within the time-frame I assigned. The detailed information of the participants and contents of each questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

	<b>Pre-term</b>	<b>Mid-term</b>	<b>Post-term</b>
<b>Month</b>	September	November	January
<b>Week</b>	1	9-10	15
<b>No. of participants</b>	28	27	18
<b>Questionnaire focuses</b>	-background info -attitudes towards group work -self-rated English skills -confidence in using English	-opinions about class styles -attitudes towards group work -self-rated English skills -confidence in using English	-attitudes towards group work -changes in self-rated English skills -changes in motivation (See Appendix 3)

### *Lesson contents*

The class was offered once a week, but due to the current situation of COVID-19 pandemic, all the classes were held online, in both on-demand and real-time styles. For this particular course, students met real-time using Zoom once in three weeks, so the majority of the class time was managed as on-demand, self-study. In the first two weeks of a three-week chapter

cycle, they work on vocabulary and reading skills, and read passages to prepare for the discussions and group work conducted in the third week. All the assignments were offered through the online system the university offers, and they had to work on most of the assignment, such as small quizzes and online discussions, during the class time or within a week. During the real-time meetings, they had several activities to work on with others, while a worksheet was offered through Zoom chat for the participants to fill in. The real-time class consisted mostly of 1) Review lecture, 2) Pair work (Information exchange tasks), and 3) Group work (Cooperative activities). Also, after every class meeting, they had to write a report based on the instructions given in class. (For the semester schedule and a sample lesson plan, see Appendix 1 and 2). Also, as it is mentioned above, they needed to participate in an 4) Online discussion as an assignment when they were in the weeks of on-demand lessons. Here are the major things I tried in every real-time meeting to aim to improve the students' group cohesion:

### 1) Review lecture (5-10 minutes)

Because students studied by themselves during the previous on-demand weeks, I often took some time in the beginning to share some students' work; such as some short reports or comments from an online discussion submitted by the time we met in real-time meetings. This was not only to motivate students to make some effort on their assignments, but also to make students feel like they are on the same page. Moreover, I believe that they could learn from each other's ideas and mistakes, too. Considering the situation where the learners had limited time to interact, I was hoping that this review lecture would work as a way to build a cohesion between students. (See Table 2 for the pages from a review slide show for sharing students' writings.)

**Table 2**

<p><b>Students' sentences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My hobby is <b>collecting</b> <b>scary</b> novels.</li> <li>• Doraemon <b>collects</b> various things in a <b>magical</b> 4D pocket.</li> <li>• The children <b>collected</b> costumes to become <b>magical</b> girls.</li> <li>• Harry Potter has a <b>magical</b> and <b>scary</b> creatures.</li> <li>• <b>Although</b> the movie is <b>scary</b>, he saw <del>the movie</del> <b>it</b>.</li> <li>• He <b>published</b> a <b>magical</b> book.</li> <li>• I was <b>scared</b> of the movie <b>published</b> yesterday. <b>released</b></li> <li>• <b>Magical</b> is scary. <b>Magic</b></li> <li>• <b>Although</b> I like <b>scary</b> situations, _____. <b>Although</b> は接続詞！</li> <li>• Some of the Grimm fairy tales have <b>magical</b> powers that make us feel <b>scary</b>. <b>scared</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Students' sentences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel <b>badly</b>. 私は気分が悪い→ (<b>I feel bad.</b>)</li> <li>• The flowers in the garden are <b>beautifully</b>. 庭の花が美しく咲いています。 → <b>blooming beautifully</b></li> <li>• She is so beautiful. 彼女はとてもきれいだ。 <b>No adverb!</b></li> <li>• He <b>went to</b> his school <b>nervously</b> because he forgot to do homework. 彼は宿題をするのを忘れたのでびくびくしながら学校に行った。</li> <li>• Her mother drives <b>dangerously</b>. 彼女の母は危険な運転をします。</li> <li>• The day was <b>beautifully</b> clear. その日はよく晴れた日だった。</li> <li>• I was <b>badly</b> hurt. 私は、ひどく傷ついた。</li> <li>• He <b>kindly</b> told me the location of the station. 彼は親切に駅の場所を教えてくださいました。</li> <li>• I prepared his birthday party <b>secretly</b>. 私は彼の誕生日パーティーをひそかに準備しました。</li> </ul>
<p><b>Review for vocabulary (Unit 8A)</b></p>	<p><b>Review for the focused Grammar (Unit 8B)</b></p>

## *2) Pair work (10-15 minutes)*

### *a) Activities involving name learning*

As Helgesen (2017) implies, learning names of students is one of the most important factors for teachers to build a good relationship with them. This is not only for teacher-learner associations, but also very significant among students themselves. Every time when I assign some pair tasks, I told students to ask each other's names and make sure that they report who their partner was. Especially in a college class with very few chances to meet each other, I believe that knowing each other's faces and names could help them greatly to build a connection even in the online situation.

### *b) Information exchange tasks*

Usually, as the first activity of a Zoom session, I put students in pairs to exchange their personal information, related to the contents they had read in the passages in the target chapter. Sharing genuine personal information about each other could help us foster the cohesiveness (Dörnyei, 1997), so I always try to have students tell each other about their experiences and issues that they are familiar with. Also, because redundancy is a very important element to help boost learners' fluency (Kagan, 1995), I usually make students switch partners and do the same thing again, and sometimes ask them to repeat what the partner said to check if what they understood is a correct information. Also, I always ask students to write a report about one of the partners, or a summary of their talk with others, with one extra information besides the required elements. In this way, students had to have a longer conversation and create questions to obtain certain details. Also, students could repeat the same information several times in spoken and written forms, which could possibly grow their confidence, in addition to the fact that writing a report works as an important purpose of an information exchange activity (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

Here are some of the students' reports. They had to know about the partner's name here as well, and ask some personal, follow-up questions to get an extra information (in the meeting this week, they had to use "adverbs" to talk about the partner's actions; See the lesson plan [Appendix 2]);

*S1: My partner was Aya. She can swim easily. She was learning to swim for 11 years from the age of 3 to 14.*

*S2: My partner was Ryosuke. He can play game easily. He often play "winning eleven".*

*S3: My partner was Shu. He rarely walks around. But if he does that, he does it in the park near his house.*



*S4: My partner was Ishii. He rarely study English. He likes math.*

### *3) Group work (15-20 minutes)*

After they practiced speaking English in pairs, I would give students some group tasks related more to the contents or grammar points they learned from the previous self-study weeks. This time, also, they had to know everyone's names, and each person was responsible to share the idea of the group in class for a presentation or in a written report. During these group activities, students were allowed to use Japanese so that they can help each other and work together efficiently. I consider this part of the class as a good chance to build strong rapport between students through a purposeful communication. Also, they could internalize what they had input during the cycle, with the support from peers.

### *4) Online discussions*

Because they have few opportunities to see each other, I would assign online discussion tasks about the contents they read when they were working individually in on-demand weeks. Sometimes the discussion was held in the form of a group chat, but often it was operated as a forum where students responded to certain comments that specific classmate made. These tasks aimed to have the students feel connected and interact even though the learners were not in class together. During the class time, a specially-made instruction video was uploaded every week, so students would learn some useful phrases and examples for discussions. Then they posted their own opinions/experiences and several replies to classmates' comments by the deadline. In addition to the general tasks, I always made this one rule clear; they had to mention the name of the writer when they reply to certain student; For example,

*S5: "Kouki, I agree with you. From this story, I felt the horror of the power of words and the foolishness of leaving it to the emotions of the moment.*

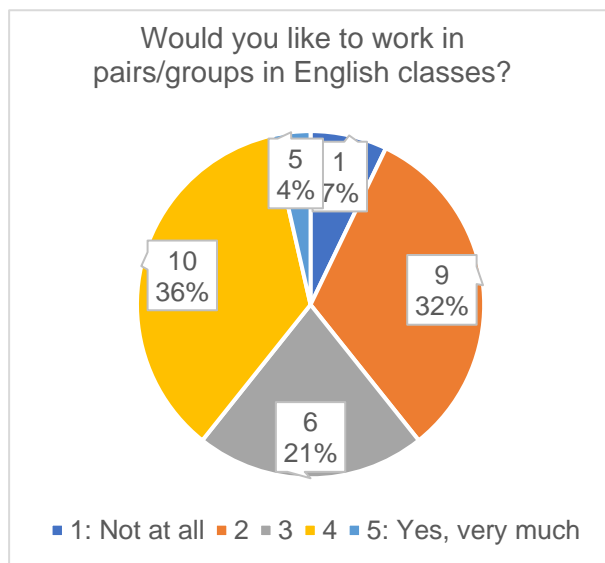
*S6: Naruse, I think so too. I think there is message that if you don't give up, you will be reward.*

As it was said above, learning names is crucial when building a good relationship. I believe that having students being aware of the peers and their names could help improve their cohesion. Also, Baker et. al. (2013) showed the positive effect in using an asynchronous online discussion forum, which could help low level learners to improve speaking ability as well as discussion skills. Due to the lack of time to meet each other, online discussions were one of the important tools I included to keep the students connected.

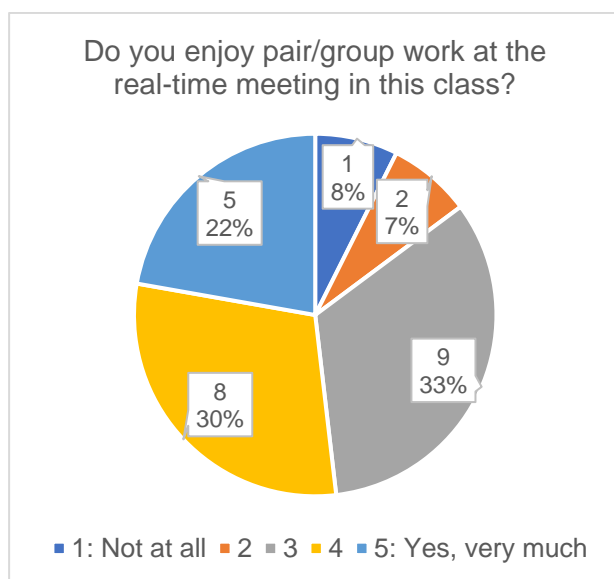
## Results

### *Attitudes towards group work*

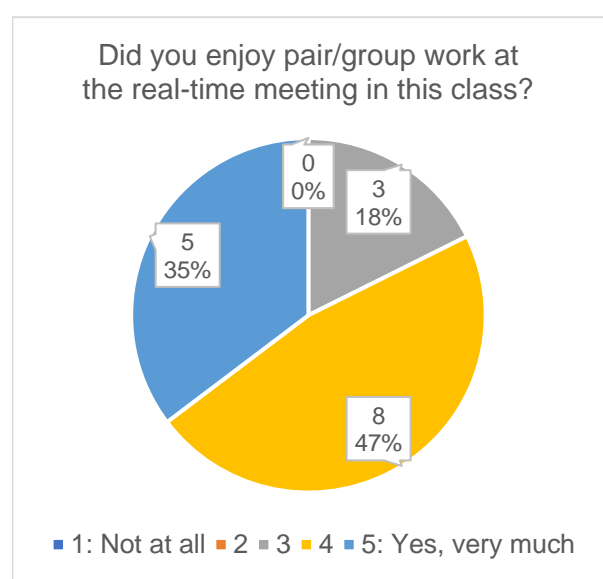
At the pre-term, I asked the participants if they would like to work in pairs/groups in class. About 40 % of the participants expressed their negative feelings toward group work (Figure 1). However, in the mid-term and the post-term surveys, their answers indicated their attitudes towards group work gradually became positive (Figure 2 & 3). Especially at the post-term survey, over 80 % of the participants showed that they enjoyed the group work.



**Figure 1: Pre-term, Preference of group work**



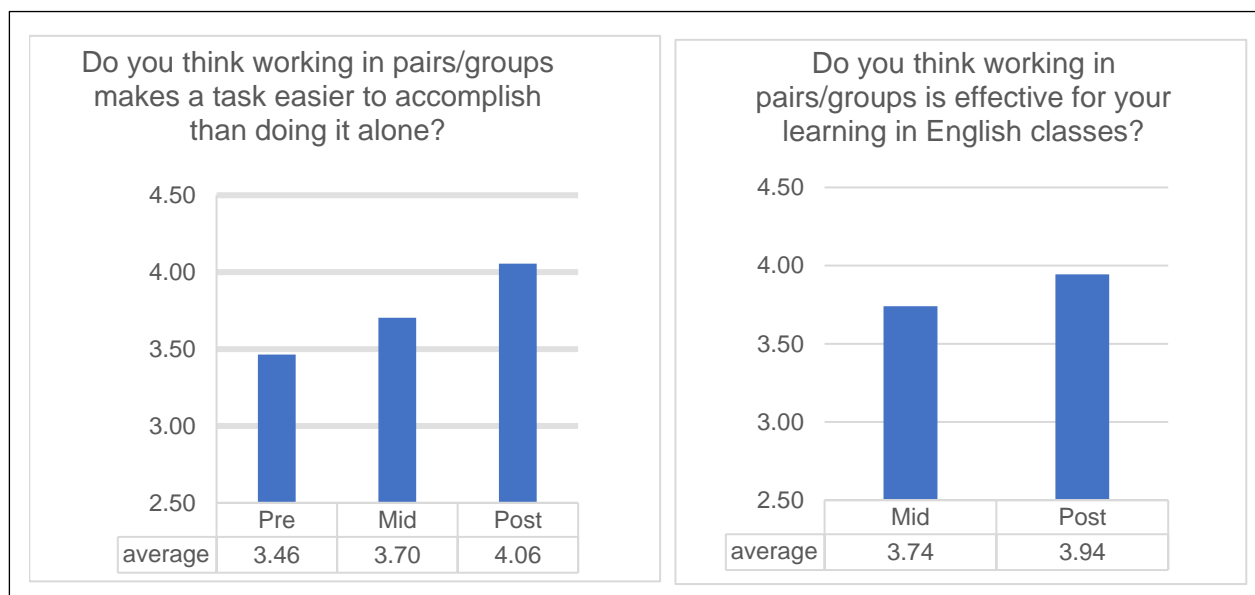
**Figure 2: Mid-term, Group work attitudes**



**Figure 3: Post-term, Group work attitudes**

Also, students generally understand the benefits of group work as it could help them

accomplish some tasks (Figure 4). This gradual growth could indicate that they started to perceive group work as a helpful and important element in the class through experiencing the series of cooperative tasks.



**Figure 4: Changes in attitudes towards Group work (1: Not at all – 5: Yes, very much)**

### *Self-ranked abilities*

In the post-term questionnaire, participants were asked to review and evaluate their English abilities both at the beginning of the semester and the present. They answered the questions of their self-ranked reading, listening, and speaking abilities with the 5-point Likert scale (See Appendix 3 for the questionnaire). The average scores for each skill are presented in Table 3. For the reading, they tend to consider that they already had a certain level of ability at the beginning, but in the end, their self-rated listening skills became higher than their reading skills. As for speaking, they still feel a little less confident compared to other skills, but there is an improvement in their average scores both for general speaking and the amount of English use in group work. For this English use element, I asked them about how much of the cooperative tasks they could carry on only in English. Most of them answered that they can now work on a task in English over 50 % of the time in groups. In fact, in their free comment section, in which I asked the participants to write about the changes of their abilities and motivation, 6 participants (out of 18) mentioned their improvement of speaking skills, while 3 participants wrote about their reading skills. Particularly, some students commented about some positive changes in having conversations in English, as expressed by three of the participants below;

S1: 自分の英会話の能力はまだまだだと思うが、授業内で会話する分には楽しみながら喋ることが出来た。

*(Although my speaking skill is still not very good, I enjoyed having a conversation in English in class.)*

S2: グループで英語で話すことに抵抗感はなくなりましたし、相手が言っていることも大まかに理解できるようになったと感じます。

*(I feel less uncomfortable now when I speak in English in groups, and I think I became able to understand what the interlocutors are saying better than before.)*

S3: 英語力が上がったのか自分ではあまり分からないけど、まだ言葉が出るようにはなったのかなと思います。これからも英語を学ぶ機会があればまた頑張ろうかなと思います。

*(I don't know if my English skills improved, but I think that (English) words can come out more than before. I would like to try learning English if I get a chance again.)*

Although the majority of the class time was managed on-demand as individual work, it is very compelling that many participants showed some favorable perceptions on communicative elements. It can be said that even for a limited amount of time, working cooperatively could make a fair impact on their learning experience.

**Table 3**

	Reading	Listening	Speaking	English use in group work
before	3.16	2.94	2.61	2.83
present	3.50	3.55	3.00	3.22

average scores

**\*Reading/Listening/Speaking... 1:全く(理解)できない- 5:よくできる(ほぼ理解できる)**

**\*English use...1: 0% - 5:100%**

### *Confidence*

In the questionnaires at the beginning and the middle of the term, I included questions about their nervousness and confidence speaking English in class. At the pre-term, most students showed a great amount of nervousness, but after spending some time working with others in

class, they started to feel a little less nervous and their confidence levels were slightly improved in all three situations (Table 4). Especially for “giving ideas and opinions,” the average score improved the most; only after 2 months into the term, the score had grown 0.45 points. One of the factors for this increase could be that students participated in an online discussion several times by the mid-term. They needed to learn the sentence formats for stating opinions through the self-study materials, and the fact that their classmates would read the comments may have given students a good amount of pressure. Also, because the discussions were in a written form, students could learn many phrases from each other by reading others’ comments. This supports the research on roles of online discussions for low level learners done by Baker et. al. (2013), in which the participants express the positive feelings towards using online discussions to improve their L2 use. The researchers argue that online discussion forums could provide the space and platform for the weak learners to practice their output skills because online forums can reduce their anxiety which comes from concerns for their low proficiency. Also, with less or no interruption from classmates or teachers, learners can be encouraged to have ownership of learning, which could motivate them to produce ideas and opinions in English. Under the circumstance with few opportunities for face-to-face lessons, online discussion forums could be a good way to practice expressing ideas for the real communication means.

**Table 4**

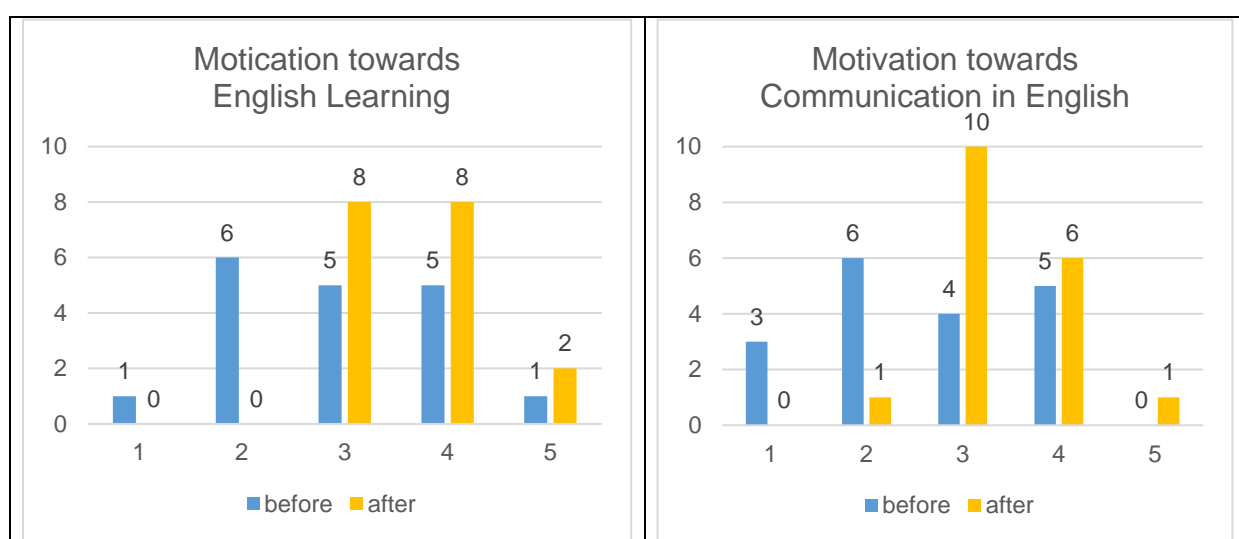
	<b>1. Do you feel nervous when you speak English in front of other students? (1: Not at all – 5: Yes, very much)</b>	<b>2. How confident are you speaking English in pairs/groups in an English class under the situations below? (1: Not confident at all - 5: Very confident)</b>		
		<b>asking questions</b>	<b>answering questions</b>	<b>giving ideas or opinions</b>
<b>Pre-term</b>	4.14	2.17	2.07	1.92
<b>Mid-term</b>	3.59	2.48	2.44	2.37

average scores

### *Motivation*

The questions to investigate the changes in their levels of motivations were included in the post-term questionnaire. As they did for their self-ranked abilities, participants were asked to review and evaluate their motivations towards English learning and English use at the beginning of the semester and the present. The results are shown in graphs below (Figure 5). For their English learning in general, 7 out of 18 participants chose either “Not motivated at all” or “Not very motivated” as their state at the beginning; however, none of them selected

those negative options for the post-term. Similar to the learning motivation, their willingness for English communication has grown a lot, along with the fact that some students who were “not motivated at all” before demonstrated a much higher disposition after the term. Clearly, the students’ level of motivation as a whole has increased, while they still have a little hesitation in “communication” compared to the “learning” in general. There are still a lot of difficulties and issues in online class management for communicative lessons, but the result shows that learners can grow interest in further learning and language use through their class experience whether it is in face-to-face in a classroom or online with a computer screen.



**Figure 5: Changes in Motivation**

\*Note...The numbers of the participants are shown in the graph.

(1: Not motivated at all – 5: Very motivated)

### Discussion (What I learned)

This Action Research has given me a lot of important perspectives about students’ perceptions of group work and some ideas about improving their motivation for English learning. In a required English “reading” class, students do not usually expect to work a lot with groups or to communicate in English; in fact, a lot of students in the target class were nervous and not very confident in their English at the beginning. However, I could see that they started to enjoy working together and to try contributing more to the group tasks as time passes. Also, the survey results clearly showed that the participants have a higher motivation towards English learning and communication at the end of the term. The lessons involving a

lot of learner-learner interactions may have helped them to find a new interest in the language.

One of the things I have put a lot of consideration into is providing a lot of time and chances for students to build strong rapport and cohesion. By having students learn their names and talk about personal information regularly, I believe that they have created a good relationship with their classmates, which could be an important factor to grow their willingness to communicate and have a better productivity of the language. It was clear that students have become comfortable being in groups and working together gradually while they got to know each other well. This is one of the positive outcomes I observed through a lot of cooperative activities.

In addition, although the focus of this course was mainly “reading”, in which the majority of the assignments was managed individually, participants seemed to remember some communicative elements more than individual work. This could mean that the interactions and cooperative tasks had a bigger impact on their learning, even though they were able to meet each other only about once in three weeks. There were a lot of issues managing and taking a class online, but most of the students displayed the positive feelings towards the class activities in the end of the semester. The biggest gain from this research was to see the possibility that the students’ interactions could be a very important component to grow their confidence and motivation, which cannot be taken away even in an online “reading” class.

### **Conclusion (Future issues)**

Through this research, the importance of group cohesion became clear and it has fascinated me to investigate more about the effects of having a good relationship for their successful learning outcomes in a college classroom. At the same time, creating an appropriate and effective group activities to help learners’ build good rapport is what I should put the most effort for the future class management. As I included in every pair/group work, I am planning to continue assigning activities including “name learning” and focusing on redundancy by having students repeat the tasks and write a report, and then I would like to see the connections between the cooperative work and the learners’ motivation more in the further research.

While the results of the exploratory surveys I conducted this semester have shown some positive changes in students’ attitudes and motivations, they definitely lack a qualitative element to investigate more about the participants’ insights towards group work and group dynamics. For the study next year, some interviews should be conducted in addition to the

refined version of questionnaires. I think that interviews would be a great help for obtaining clearer descriptions of students' behaviors during group activities and genuine perceptions of learner-learner interactions. Moreover, to look more into the students' attitudes, choosing some focused participants and observing them through the semester could be one of the considerable methods I could try to see the changes comprehensively.



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## Appendix 1

### *Semester Schedule*

Week	Themes	Contents for AR
1	Orientation	
2	Unit 6: -Reading A	Real-time meeting in Zoom (practice-day)
3	Unit 6: -Reading B	
4	Unit 6: Discussion/Group Work	Real-time meeting in Zoom
5	Unit 7: -Reading A	Online Discussion
6	Unit 7: -Reading B	
7	Unit 7: Discussion/Group Work	Real-time meeting in Zoom
8	Unit 8: -Reading A	Online discussion
9	Unit 8: -Reading B	Online discussion
10	Unit 8: Discussion/Group Work	Real-time meeting in Zoom
11	Unit 9: -Reading A	Online discussion
12	Unit 9: -Reading B	
13	Unit 9: Discussion/Group Work	Real-time meeting in Zoom
14	Final project	Online discussion
15	Final Exam	

## Appendix 2

### *Lesson plan for Week 10*

Objectives:

1. To be able to understand the functions of adverbs and use them in sentences (in stories)
2. To be able to talk about themselves using certain adverbs
3. To be able to ask appropriate follow-up questions to the partner
4. To share information and ideas with others in group work related to the unit content.

Time		Interaction T-Ss, S-S, S	Activity & Procedure
15	14:55	S	Online self-study (on-demand) -Reading Skill Review Exercise

5	15:10	T-Ss	Zoom entrance, Greetings
10	15:15	T-Ss	Review lecture (exercise from last week, grammar [adverbs]) Share students' work
5 15	10:25	T-Ss S-S	Give out WS_ <u>Pair work</u> Explain task Break-out sessions -random pair X2 -Get specific information of the partner; "adverbs" 1. <i>Do you finish your assignment early?</i> 2. <i>Do you drive/ride a bike carefully?</i> 3. <i>What is something you can do easily?</i> 4. <i>What is something you rarely do?</i> + Follow-up questions -Write a report about their partners Back to main session
5 20  10	15:45	T-Ss S-S  S-S	<u>Group work</u> Explain task Break-out sessions -random group (3-4 Ss) -Read the story and add 5 adverbs Create bigger groups (put two groups together) -Share screen and tell other group their ideas Back to main session -choose one student to share his worksheet
5 5	15:20	T-S S	Announcement Leave Zoom (write comments in chat) Submit WS through school's Online system
		S-S	<u>Homework</u> Write comments on online discussion board (must reflect the others' comments)

S-S: 45 minutes

S: 20 minutes

T-Ss: 25 minutes

### Appendix 3

#### *Questions in Post-term Questionnaire (in Japanese)*

\*Notes...Some questions are excluded because the data was not used in the analysis for this report.

## Section 1: Experience/Activities in class

\* 当てはまるものを一つ選ぶこと

1	2	3	4	5
全くそう思わない			強くそう思う	

- リアルタイム型ミーティングの際に行うペア・グループワークの際、積極的に活動に貢献しましたか？
- リアルタイム型ミーティングの際に行うペア・グループワークを楽しいと感じましたか？
- 英語の授業でペアやグループで協同学習をすることは、学習に効果的だと思いますか？
- 協同で学習することで、課題への取り組みは易しくなると思いますか？

## Section 2: English Abilities/Motivation

[Reading]

- 今学期が始まる前、自分の読む力はどのくらいあったと思いますか？ \* 辞書などを使わない場合

1	2	3	4	5
全く理解できなかった。	10-20%程度しか理解できなかった。	50%程度理解できた。	70-80%程度は理解できた。	ほぼすべて理解できた。

- 現在、自分の読む力はどのくらいあると感じますか？ \* 辞書などを使わない場合

1	2	3	4	5
全く理解できない。	10-20%程度しか理解できない。	50%程度理解できる。	70-80%程度は理解できる。	ほぼすべて理解できる。

[Speaking]

- 今学期のはじめ、英語で会話する際どのくらい発話できたと思いますか？

1	2	3	4	5
全くできなかった。	あまりできなかった。	時々できた。	ある程度できた。	よくできた。

- 現在、英語で会話する際どのくらい発話できますか？

1	2	3	4	5
全くできない。	あまりできない。	時々できる。	ある程度できる。	よくできる。

- 今学期のはじめ、協同学習の際、どの程度英語のみでやり取りができましたか？

1	2	3	4	5
ほとんど英語ではできなかった。	10-20%程度しか英語でできなかった。	50%程度は英語でできた。	70-80%程度は英語でできた。	ほぼすべて英語でできた。

- 現在、協同学習があれば、どの程度英語のみでやり取りができますか？

1	2	3	4	5
ほとんど英語ではできない。	10-20%程度しか英語でできない。	50%程度は英語でできる。	70-80%程度は英語でできる。	ほぼすべて英語でできる。

[Listening]

1. 今学期のはじめ、講師の話す英語はどのくらい理解できたと思いますか？

1	2	3	4	5
全く理解できなかった。	あまり理解できなかった。	時々理解できた。	ある程度理解できた。	よく理解できた。

2. 現在、講師の話す英語はどのくらい理解できますか？

1	2	3	4	5
全く理解できない。	あまり理解できない。	時々理解できる。	ある程度理解できる。	よく理解できる。

[Motivation]

1. 今学期が始まる前、英語学習に対してどのくらい意欲的でしたか？

1	2	3	4	5
全く意欲的ではなかった。	あまり意欲的ではなかった。	どちらともいえない。	ある程度意欲的だった。	とても意欲的だった。

2. 現在、英語学習に対してどのくらい意欲的ですか？

1	2	3	4	5
全く意欲的ではない。	あまり意欲的ではない。	どちらともいえない。	ある程度意欲的だ。	とても意欲的だ。

3. 今学期が始まる前、英語を話し、交流することに対してどのくらい意欲的でしたか？

1	2	3	4	5
全く意欲的ではなかった。	あまり意欲的ではなかった。	どちらともいえない。	ある程度意欲的だった。	とても意欲的だった。

4. 現在、英語を話し、交流することに対してどのくらい意欲的ですか？

1	2	3	4	5
全く意欲的ではない。	あまり意欲的ではない。	どちらともいえない。	ある程度意欲的だ。	とても意欲的だ。

Comments

- 授業内容、運営方法、アクティビティなどについて
- 自分の英語力、意欲、またその変化などについて