

Research Article

USING TWO - WAY INFORMATION – GAP TASKS TO ENCOURAGE EQUAL PARTICIPATION FROM THE STUDENTS IN GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES IN AN EFL CLASS AT THE UNETI HA NOI

* Nguyen Thuy Ngoc, MA, Do Thi Hong Ha, MA, Le Thi Thanh Tam, MA.

University of Economics - Technology for Industries (UNETI), Hanoi - Vietnam

Received 20th September 2020; Accepted 28th October 2020; Published online 23rd November 2020

ABSTRACT

English is taught throughout the world, by all sorts of teachers to all sorts of learners. Schools and classrooms differ greatly in their wealth, size and their provision of equipment. But whatever the conditions in which they are working, how to teach English the most communicatively and effectively seems to have been a vital issue for many English language teachers to settle. Thus, there has currently been a high emphasis on the practice of Communicative Approach in Language Teaching the world over in general and particularly in Vietnam where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). This teaching approach highlights the importance of Learner – Centered classrooms where teachers' talking time is minimized and students' talking time is increased to the utmost. The ideal class size for this is ten to fifteen students per each, "more or less homogeneous in terms of proficiency" (Richards and Renandya, 2002, p.49). Disappointingly, the majority of real life EFL classes are large – sized and mixed ability ones, with over thirty, forty or even fifty students. The high number of students in each class and the differences in their levels make it difficult for every student to have a chance to practice English. Teachers, as a result, have recourse to pair and group work for the situation remedy. However, they are not always successful in conducting effective group work which, according to Penny Ur (1991, p.120), means "the discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants: all get a chance to speak, and contributions are fairly evenly distributed." Quite a few teachers claim that they fail to generate even levels of participation among students in group work activities. This kind of failure is also experienced by the researcher herself and her colleagues, the English teachers the UNETI. All of the teachers have excitedly used group work activities in their speaking classes in the hope of increasing students' talking time and giving everyone of them equal chance to talk and participate. Much to the teachers' disappointment, though the total talking time of all the students in the class is increased, the level of contribution of each group member is uneven. As indicated in the findings of the researcher's previous study, "A Research On Students' Participation In Group Work Activities In Efl Classes at the UNETI" (see Appendix 1), during group work activities, some students were too talkative while some others were too inactive; they said nothing. The main reasons for the uneven level of students' participation were found to be the following factors: students' language ability, students' personalities and learning styles, students' interest in the task and topic, ways of grouping, and most important, the absence of information – gap tasks in group work activities. Although there have been suggestions about the effect of two – way information – gap tasks on the even levels of participation of students in group work, there seem to be very few direct studies into the issue. And not many teachers are fully aware of the importance and usefulness of information – gap tasks so the successful implementation of group work is still hard to achieve. Therefore, this research was to examine the possibility that two – way information – gap tasks would encourage equal participation from the students in group work activities in an EFL class. It was also hoped that the result of this study would help to confirm teachers' belief in the value of Group work and Communicative Language Teaching and more and more teachers would use Group work with Two – way information – gap tasks to facilitate students' learning. For the above – mentioned reasons, the aim of this bottom – up research was to answer the following question: "Will two – way information gap tasks encourage equal participation from the students in group work activities in an EFL class?"

A few key terms should be clarified prior to the research. These definitions were applied within the context of this research only:

1. *Group work activities: oral / speaking activities done in small groups, normally group discussion.*
2. *Two – way information gap tasks: the group work tasks in which each member of the group keeps only one piece of information and the tasks can not be accomplished without everyone's participation.*
3. *Equal participation: equal talking times and time, no dominant students, no inactive students in the groups.*

This research took place at the UNETI with the researcher acting as the Change Agent, the Adopter and the Implementer. The Clients were thirty students (9 males and 21 females) of the English Class DHCĐ13A3HN, where the researcher is also the speaking teacher. The research lasted for 10 weeks, from the beginning of August 2020 till the middle of October 2020.

Keywords: Group work activities; Two – way information gap tasks; Equal participation.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative Learning in CLT and the role of two – way information – gap tasks

It is recognized by many language teaching experts that *Cooperative Learning* (students working together in groups or *Group work* in short) is one of the popular aspects of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) currently. Jacobs and Hall (1994, in Richards and Renandya, 2002, p. 52) point out that "in the last decade there has been a

growing interest among ESL / EFL teachers in using cooperative learning activities." And according to them, "Cooperative Learning is more than just putting students in groups and giving them something to do. Cooperative learning principles and techniques are tools which teachers use to encourage mutual helpfulness in the group and the active participation of all members." Brown (2001, p. 47) completely agrees with Jacobs and Hall (1994) when he recommends that "As students work together in pairs and groups, they share information and come to each others' aid. They are a "team" whose players must work together in order to achieve goals successfully." Richards and Platt (1992, p.87), in the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching And Applied Linguistics*, suggest even more advantages of

*Corresponding Author: Nguyen Thuy Ngoc,
University of Economics - Technology for Industries (UNETI), Hanoi – Vietnam.

Cooperative Learning: "Such an approach to learning is said to increase students' learning since a) it is less threatening for many students, b) it reduces the need for competitiveness, c) it reduces the teacher's dominance in the classroom, and d) it increases the amount of student participation in the classroom." Lewis and Hill (1985, p. 46) also determine that "Many, if not most, activities in the language classroom can be performed by the students working in groups. Working in this way means more students are directly involved; more students are talking, while the teacher talks less." Agreeing on the advantages of Cooperative Learning, David Cross (1995, p. 58) states: "teachers can multiply the opportunities for practice and for creative language use by introducing pair and *group work*." Sharing this agreement, Baker and Westrup (2000, p. 131) strongly confirm that "pair and *group work* is a very good way to manage large classes with mixed abilities and it can improve motivation and students' use of English. Pair and group work allows all students to practise language and to actively participate." Le Thi Anh Phuong, in an article entitled *Problems and Solutions for General English Classes at Junior Colleges* printed in *Teacher's Edition* (2002, p. 20) once again further elaborates: "the use of pair and group work can help teachers in dealing not only with large classes but also with mixed ability classes. By using pair and *group work* a teacher can increase student talking time and decrease teacher talking time. This helps to change classes from being more teacher – centered to being more student – centered." However, things are not so simple and "implementing Cooperative Learning is not like waving a magic wand: just say a few magic words, and *whoosh!* everything is working great." (Jacobs and Hall, 1994 in Richards and Renandya, 2002, p.53) In fact, the success or failure of the implementation of Cooperative Learning (*group work*) depends on "teachers' decisions on how much choice to give students in such matters as how, about what, and with whom they will collaborate, and how tightly to structure activities to help encourage effective cooperation." (Jacobs and Hall, 1994 in Richards and Renandya, 2002, p.53) Concerning the types of tasks suitable for use in group work activities, Le (2002, p. 20) suggests: "teachers must select appropriate group activities and monitor them carefully. For example, they can choose or create activities that have *information gaps* and interesting topics." As pointed out by Richards and Platt (1992, p. 179), "in order to promote real communication between students, there must be an information gap between them, or between them and their teacher. Without such a gap the classroom activities and exercises will be mechanical and artificial." And according to Christine C. M. Goh (2003, p. 21), "Information – gap tasks are based on the principle that people communicate when there is a need to share information. In an information - gap activity, one person has certain information that must be shared with others in order to solve a problem, gather information or make decisions." Furthering this idea, Neu & Reeser (1997) encourage that teachers should use information- gap tasks in which each participant plays an important role and the task cannot be accomplished without everyone's participation. Here, the importance shifts to the use of a special type of tasks, that is "two – way information – gap" ones. As recorded by David Nunan (1999, p. 52), "In a study reported in 1981, Long found that two – way tasks (in which all students in a group discussion had unique information to contribute) *stimulated significantly more modified interactions* than one – way tasks (that is, in which one student possessed all the relevant information)." Thus, it can be believed that information – gap tasks and especially *two- way information gap* will encourage *equal participation* from the students in *group work activities*

The innovation and its rationale

Innovation in itself is a new concept and there have been a number of different definitions of innovation. About this issue, White (1988) writes:

"Miles (1964: 13), for instance, has emphasized *organizational behavior*, while the definitions offered by Rogers and Schoemaker (1971: 19) and Rogers (1983: 11) highlight the *personal perception and interpretation of innovation*. This phenomenological view characterises much of the most insightful work on educational innovation (Hurst 1983: 52-3; Fullan 1982).

Drawing on these earlier definitions, Nicholls (1983:4) defines an innovation as 'an idea, object or practice perceived as new by an individual or individuals, which is intended to bring about improvement in relation to desired objectives, which is fundamental in nature and which is planned and deliberate'." (White, 1988, p.114)

Holding the same view as Nicholls', White himself also emphasizes the difference between *Innovation* and *Change*: "What is innovation and how does it differ from change? *Change* is considered to be any alteration in something between time 1 and time 2. Change can occur spontaneously and does not involve conscious planning or intention. *Innovation*, by contrast, is defined as involving *deliberate* alteration – intention is a crucial element." (White, 1988, p.114) Therefore, it may be concluded that an innovation, on one hand, can be perceived as an attempt to change things for the better, but on the other hand, it can also be viewed as an *intentional try- out* to find whether a new idea works well or not in a particular social and cultural context. Accordingly, innovations are not necessarily always successful. On the contrary, the success or failure of an innovation, in most cases, is unpredictable and depends so much on the ways in which it is implemented and on the suitability of the models that it takes to the organizational culture and the sociocultural features of all the people involved. This innovation is a good example of the above – mentioned principle. It was successful because it was initiated by the need for improvement and it was firmly grounded on the real *teaching context* and the *classroom culture* of the institution where it took place.

The teaching context

Teaching context is said to be one of the key factors influencing the implementation of an educational innovation. This claim proves to be true in the case of this research. However, the teaching methodology practiced here is the *Weak version* of CLT, in the sense that much emphasis is "placed on oral work" (Holliday, 1994, p. 71). Also according to Holliday (1994, p.71), "although the *Weak version* produces much of the classroom methodology in current use and has been successful in many ways, some of its elements are restricted in application to classrooms of a relatively specific type within BANA English language education. It works admirably in classes of *up to fifteen students*, with the right acoustics and furnishings, where the students are mainly adults who come to class with the specific purpose of learning English and are prepared to conform to the learning group ideal." Considering these features, PPU is not an ideal environment for CLT *Weak version* to be applied because the school still lacks the required conditions like small – sized classes and right acoustics and furnishings. Therefore, as a situation remedy, and especially after attending the Teachers' In – Service Training Courses on Communicative Language Teaching conducted by the Vietnam – Australia Training Programme by The AFP-Australia in RMIT HCMC and by The US Embassy at The People's Police *Academy* in Hanoi, all the English teachers in the university have excitedly used group work activities in their speaking classes with the hope of increasing students' talking time. Then, pair and group work becomes one important focus in classroom observation and teaching evaluation due to the teaching belief that in CLT *Weak version*, "student oral participation is at a premium; and student talking time is an important measurement of a 'good lesson'." (Holliday, 1994, p. 71). From this particular reality, a research on how to enhance students'

participation in group work activities has its practical values and is encouraged by the PPU Authority, the Dean of Department and other teachers as well.

The school and classroom culture

Culture is very important to innovation because “cultures are not rooted in absolutes. They are products of human activity and thinking and, as such, are people-made.” (Murphy 1986 quoted in Holliday 1994, p. 260). Since innovation affects people, it has to be related and respondent to culture. Concerning this issue, Holliday (1994) has explored the role of national and local culture in the success and failure of curricular innovations. He states: “I have developed the notion that there is a deep element to what happens between people in the classroom, consisting of psycho-social, informal and micro-political factors influenced by the wider social environment, and that *only by attending to these can appropriate methodologies be devised.*” (p.161) From the definitions by Nicholls (1983, p.4) and White (1988, p.114), innovation can be understood as an attempt to *seek for appropriate methodologies.* And according to Holliday (1994, p. 162), “achieving appropriate methodology depends on learning about what happens between people in the classroom.” He argues that TESEP institutions have a different purpose socially from BANA institutions and that therefore innovations in TESEP institutions using methodology from BANA countries will not work unless local classroom cultures are taken into account. (Holliday, 1994).

Once again, he asserts that “an appropriate methodology must by nature be culture-sensitive. (Holliday 1994, p.162) Based on the above-mentioned arguments, it can be said that the school and classroom culture in UNETI is a favorable condition and an impetus for this innovation to take place. The UNETI culture is a rather decentralized one with a little more autonomy for the teachers. It means that, although there are syllabus guidelines from the MOET, the Dean of the department, after consulting all the teachers’ opinions, makes decisions of the textbooks used. Moreover, as described in page 8, the college is open to new things. It is becoming more low-structured now and allows teachers with more freedom to be as innovative as they can. During the process of teaching, teachers can make any adaptation or change to the techniques or materials that they think will best suit their students and help them to improve their knowledge and skills. In this case, the innovation that the researcher wants to implement is really for the benefit of students. In UNETI, students have different linguistic backgrounds (some of them have 7 years’ experience of learning English, some others have studied English for only 3 years and the others has never learned English, they learned French at High school) and different social backgrounds.

They come from different parts of The Middle to the south of Vietnam, even come from where there is almost no chance for learners to practice English outside classrooms. Besides, they belong to the collectivist culture, as described by Hofstede (1986 cited in Holliday, 1994, p. 192), in that they “only speak up in small group.” Therefore, group work is necessary for them to practice using the target language and the attempt to create equal chance for them to participate in group work by using two-way information-gap tasks is worth taking.

The type of social change

This innovation indicates an *Immanent Change* because according to Markee (1997, p.48), “*Immanent change* (or self-motivated change) occurs when the persons who recognize a need for change and those who propose solutions to a perceived problem are all part of the same

social system.” In the case of this innovation, the researcher herself realized the need for change and she also thought of the solution. Though the notion of two-way information-gap tasks has already been addressed by language teaching methodologists, there seemed to be no direct suggestions of using this kind of tasks to generate even levels of students’ participation in group work activities. Besides, since the innovation took place out of the teacher’s own willingness, she held the part of an “internal change agent” and had full sense of “ownership”, which according to Markee (1997) is more likely to lead to success.

The models of innovation

Problem-solving model

Markee (1997, p.67) also asserts that the problem-solving model “coupled with a normative-reductive strategy of change is theoretically the most popular approach to promoting change in education.” And according to White (1988, p. 123-124), “a problem-solving approach is also at the basis of action research, whose aim is to make use of research in modifying and improving curriculum practice, thus having a direct relationship to innovation and reform. Indeed, the term “action” research embodies the aims of this approach – the commitment to action, to the elimination of problems and to the growth of practical understanding and the improvement of practice...” This innovation took the model of problem-solving or, more specifically, the form of an action research with the problem being articulated by the “insider” (the researcher and also the class teacher). It followed the bottom-up process which means more teacher’s sense of ownership and responsibility, and thus more likelihood to be successful.

Social interaction model

Another aspect of the social interaction model lies in how the ideas of innovations are socially diffused. As stated by Rogers (1993 quoted in Markee 1997, p.62) and Cooper (1982, 1989, quoted in Markee 1997, p.62), “the most important insight that this model offers change agents is the claim that diffusion is nothing less than a form of communication. ... Languages spread through the establishment of communication networks.” Once this innovation is found to be successful, its result will be spread to other teachers in the college through social communication or informally reported by the researcher in the Department monthly meeting. Hopefully, there will also be a possibility that the innovation would spread even beyond the college, by means of social interaction when the researcher’s colleagues enter other social networks.

The roles of stakeholders

According to Fullan (1982a quoted in Markee, 1997, p.43), “teachers are key players in all language teaching innovations; however, many other individuals also have a stake in the innovation process”. In much the same way, White (1988) defines stakeholders as all the people who are involved in an innovation. Since this innovation takes the form of a problem-solving model, the researcher plays the roles of an adopter (the person who makes the decision to change), an implementer (who has to implement the innovation) and the change agent (the person who is responsible for managing the innovation). The students in the class are the clients who receive the innovation. From the beginning till the end of the research, the researcher always received assistance from her colleagues, active participation from the students and there were no intervention from the Management Authority or anyone else. So it may hopefully be said that there are no Resisters to this innovation.

METHODOLOGY

The participants

The innovation was implemented at the English Class DHCE13A1 of UNETI with the participation of 30 second – year students who are training to become investigators in the future. In this sample class, there are 9 male and 21 female students with ages ranging from 19 to 22 (one 22, four 21, three 20 and the rest 19). Among them, 17 students have 7 years' experience of learning English at Secondary schools, 11 students have learned English for 3 years at High school and especially there are 2 students who did not learn English at Secondary and High schools (they studied French instead of English) but they got an Elementary –level certificate of English from a Language Center. Now the students are in the first term of the 2015 – 2016 academic year and the result of their first year's second - term scores of Speaking is as follow :

1/ 2.0 – < 5.0 marks : 10 students 3/ 7.0 - < 9.0 marks : 6 students
2/ 5.0 - < 7.0 marks : 12 students 4/ 9.0 marks : 2 students

(* Note: The total score is 10 marks in which 40 % (4 marks) was given in the end - of - term Speaking examination, 60 % (6 marks) was given for the participation of students in class oral activities during the term (on-going assessment)

This sample class was chosen because it is quite a good representative of large and mixed ability classes in the college so that it would be more probable to ensure the generalisability of the innovation's results. Besides, it was convenient to conduct the study because the researcher is also the speaking teacher of the class in this school year. To serve the purpose of the research, the students were *deliberately* put into 6 groups of five. Each group must consist of 5 students of different levels according to the term scores and especially, the marks of *on-going assessment*: 1, 2, 3, 4 as previously listed. (Only two groups have one student of 9 marks per each). And the students kept to the same groups from the beginning till the end of the study.

Phases of the innovation

This innovation research was carried out from the beginning of July to Mid September 2006 . The schedule was as follow :

From July 1 st to September 15 th	
Week 1, 2	Selecting speaking materials and two – way information – gap tasks Piloting Questionnaire and revising Structured interview questions (consultation with senior colleagues)
Week 3	Revising the Observation Scheme Training the assisting teachers and students on how to use the Observation Scheme to observe students' interaction in group work
Week 4, 5	Observation stage 1: Sessions 1, 2, 3 (Group work <i>without</i> using Two- way information-gap tasks) Questionnaire: at the end of session 3
Week 6, 7, 8	Observation stage 2 : Sessions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 (Group work <i>using</i> Two- way information-gap tasks) Structured interview : at the end of session 9
Week 9, 10	Analyzing the collected data and Interpreting the results of the innovation Writing the report

Evaluation instruments

In order to record and evaluate the results of this innovation, the following instruments were used:

Live observations with observation scheme: Three fellow teachers from the English Department and three students from 3rd and 4th year classes came and helped to observe the class in group work activities. Each person was in charge of 1 group. They closely followed the interaction of students in the group in order to mark and count their turns and turn – taking (their talking times and time). Whenever the students said something in English to perform the task, they had to note down in the Observation Scheme (see Appendix 2). Attention was also given to the way the teacher introduced and managed group work activities and the tasks she used (to make sure that the teacher strictly followed the try – out plan)

* Notes: The 3rd and 4th year students were called for help because other teachers were very busy teaching their own classes . Besides, the observation task was not so difficult and the research subjects are less psychologically embarrassed at their presence than the teachers' and this might result in more objective observation outcome.

There were 9 sessions of observation scheduled evenly in 5 weeks, deliberately divided into 2 stages:

- Stage 1 (Sessions 1- 3) : Group work without using Two- way information-gap tasks
- Stage 2 (Sessions 4 – 9) : Group work using Two – way information – gap tasks

In stage 1, only the data of Observation session 3 were collected and analyzed in order to obtain valid and reliable results because it took students some times to get used to the presence of observers. In stage 2, the data of Observation sessions 8 and 9 were all collected and analyzed for comparison. By doing this way, the researcher hoped to avoid the Instability of the measurement of results. During the study, the subjects were not informed about the use or not use of two – way information – gap tasks because it was thought to be unnecessary and the researcher wanted that the study would not be affected by Hawthorne effect and Subject expectancy.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was developed in the form of closed and open questions (see Appendix 3) and were delivered to the students by the observers at the end of the 3rd observation session. The aim of the questionnaire was to double check the results of the observation and to find out more about the factors affecting students' participation in group work activities.

Structured Interview: Individual interviews (Appendix 4) were carried out with 14 deliberately selected students who showed the greatest changes in the levels of participation in group work before and after the treatment (these students used to be the group dominants and the most inactive members). The interview were done after observation session 9 by the teacher observers and were tape recorded to assure the objectivity of the research. It then served as a source of cross- reference to double check the result of the observation analysis. (The reason for using interview instead of questionnaire was to avoid Practice effect).

RESULTS

Findings

From Live Observation: The data collected from Live Observation were analyzed and the following results were found:

- In the Observation session 3 (the Pre- treatment stage: group work without two – way information – gap tasks), 4 out of 6 groups (66.6%) showed the uneven level of students' participation (See tables 1- 4 below). There were both group dominants and too inactive students in the groups.

Table 1: Level of participation of students in Group 1, Pre – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	13	30	43.33	5 mins	9 mins	55.55
B	1	30	3.3	5"	9 mins	0.92
C	3	30	10	40"	9 mins	7.40
D	6	30	20	75"	9 mins	13.88
E	7	30	23.33	2 mins	9 mins	22.22

Table 2: Level of participation of students in Group 3 , Pre – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	3	30	10	40"	9 mins	7.40
B	2	30	6.6	5"	9 mins	0.92
C	3	30	10	15"	9 mins	2.77
D	16	30	53.33	6 mins	9 mins	66.66
E	6	30	20	2 mins	9 mins	22.22

Table 3: Level of participation of students in Group 4 , Pre – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	3	35	8.57	1min	10 mins	10
B	2	35	5.71	45"	10 mins	7.50
C	15	35	42.8	5 mins	10 mins	50
D	8	35	22.85	2 mins	10 mins	20
E	7	35	20	75"	10 mins	12.5

Table 4: Level of participation of students in Group 5 , Pre – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	3	30	10	40"	9 mins	7.40
B	2	30	6.6	5"	9 mins	0.92
C	12	30	40	5 mins	9 mins	55.55
D	6	30	20	75"	9 mins	13.88
E	7	30	23.33	2 mins	9 mins	22.22

In the Observation sessions 8 and 9 (the Post- treatment stage: group work *with two – way information – gap tasks*), all the 6 groups (100%) showed the significantly more even levels of students' participation. There were neither group dominants nor inactive students in the groups. (See tables 5 – 10 below)

Table 5. Level of participation of students in Group 1 , Post – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	12	45	26.66	4 mins 10"	15 mins	27.77
B	6	45	13.33	1 mins 50"	15 mins	12.22
C	7	45	15.55	2 mins 20"	15 mins	15.55
D	9	45	20	2 mins 40"	15 mins	17.77
E	11	45	24.44	4 mins	15 mins	26.66

Table 6. Level of participation of students in Group 2 , Post – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	10	43	23.25	3 mins 10"	15 mins	21.11
B	11	43	25.58	4 mins	15 mins	26.66
C	6	43	13.95	2 mins 20"	15 mins	15.55
D	7	43	16.27	2.5 mins	15 mins	16.66
E	9	43	20.93	3 mins	15 mins	20

Table 7: Level of participation of students in Group 3 , Post – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	8	40	20	2 mins 50"	15 mins	18.88
B	6	40	15	1 mins 50"	15 mins	12.22
C	7	40	17.50	2 mins 20"	15 mins	15.55
D	10	40	25	4 mins	15 mins	26.66
E	9	40	22.50	3.5 mins	15 mins	23.33

Table 8: Level of participation of students in Group 4 , Post – treatment stage

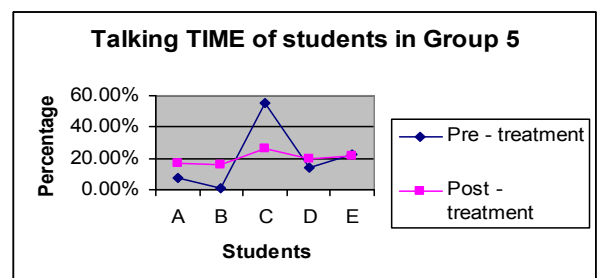
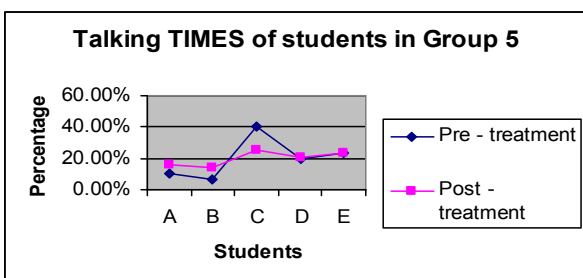
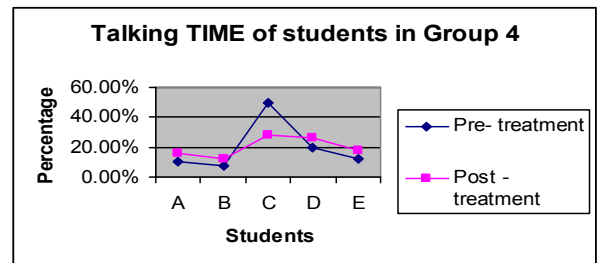
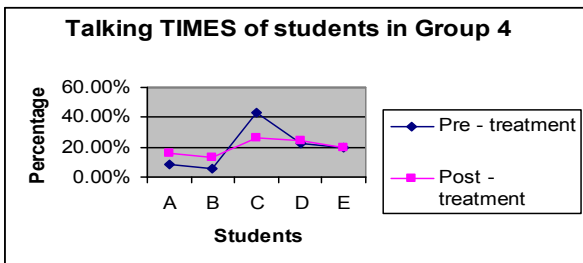
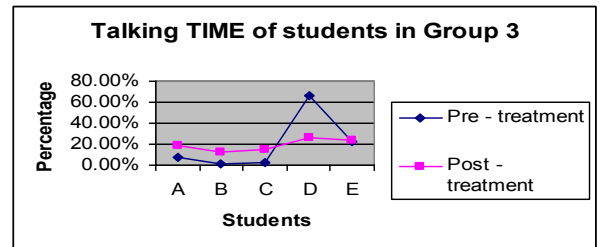
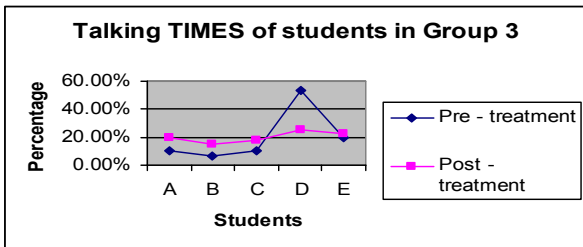
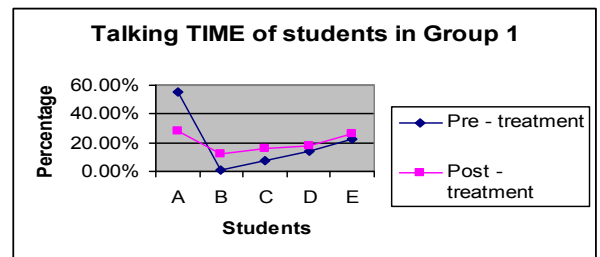
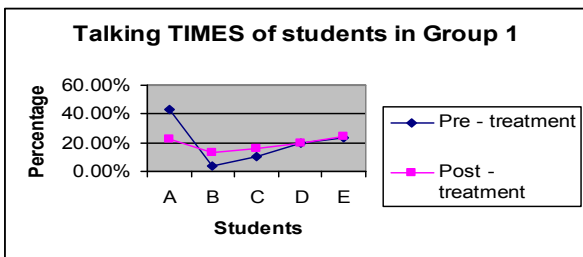
Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	7	45	15.55	2 mins 20"	15 mins	15.55
B	6	45	13.33	1 mins 50"	15 mins	12.22
C	12	45	26.66	4 mins 10"	15 mins	27.77
D	11	45	24.44	4 mins	15 mins	26.66
E	9	45	20	2 mins 40"	15 mins	17.77

Table 9: Level of participation of students in Group 5 , Post – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	7	43	16.27	2.5 mins	15 mins	16.66
B	6	43	13.95	2 mins 20"	15 mins	15.55
C	11	43	25.58	4 mins	15 mins	26.66
D	9	43	20.93	3 mins	15 mins	20
E	10	43	23.25	3 mins 10"	15 mins	21.11

Table 10: Level of participation of students in Group 6 , Post – treatment stage

Name of student	Student's times of talking (short turns + long turns)	Group's total turns	Percent (%)	Student's total talking time	Group's talking time	Percent (%)
A	10	40	25	4 mins	15 mins	26.66
B	7	40	17.50	2 mins 20"	15 mins	15.55
C	9	40	22.50	3.5 mins	15 mins	23.33
D	8	40	20	2 mins 50"	15 mins	18.88
E	6	40	15	1 mins 50"	15 mins	12.22



* Note: During all the observation sessions, the teacher (and also the researcher of this study) strictly followed the try – out plan. She had good management of group work activities. So it could be confirmed that teacher's management of group work had no influence on any changes in students' participation levels in group work activities.

From Questionnaire: All the 30 questionnaires delivered to the students were returned in completed form (100 %). The answers of students in the questionnaire corresponded with the results of the observation analysis. They all noticed that there was one or two dominant students and two inactive students in each group. About the reasons for their levels of participation, 5 out of 30 students (16.66 %) chose answers c, d, g, h (c. I liked that activity very much; d. I had a lot of ideas to say; g. No one said anything so I had to talk; h. I knew all the answers so I told my friends in order to complete the tasks quickly.) while 9 out of 30 students (30 %) ticked answers a, b, e, f (a. I had no ideas to say; b. I didn't like that activity; e. Everyone had the information so there was no need to say anything; f. The task was still completed without my contribution.) These numbers matched the number of students found to be too dominant or inactive in the group work activities through Observation data analysis.

From Interview: All the 14 students who were interviewed said that the changes in their participation levels were due to the new kind of task which the teacher used in group work activities after the time of questionnaire. The "used to be dominant students" told the interviewers that they only possessed one piece of information needed to fulfill the task so they could not talk more even though they wanted to. And "the used to be inactive students" admitted that they were forced to speak out because without their contribution, the group task could not be completed. However, all of them noticed that the group work tasks were not completed as quickly as before because it took longer time for some group members to convey their information. Two students (the previously dominant ones) said they were not very happy with this change because they talked less and they felt impatient to wait for the other members to express their idea.

DISCUSSION

The above – mentioned findings suggested that the using of two- way information – gap tasks really helped to manipulate a significantly greater equality of students' participation in the group work activities (See the Diagrams Above). As expected by the researcher from the beginning of this innovation, there were no more either group dominants or inactive members and the students shared the same responsibility for the completion of the group work tasks. Much as the main purpose of the research (that is encouraging even levels of participation of students in group work activities) was remarkably achieved; however, new problems have arisen. Through students' answers in the interview and continual conversations with her colleagues, especially the teachers who helped with the observations, the researcher found that it took longer time than before for the group work tasks to be completed, which in fact is a challenge for the timing of the lesson. Another entailed problem was that students (particularly the "used to be inactive and may be the weaker ones") started to use more Vietnamese than usual in order to get their information and ideas understood more quickly and clearly by the other group members.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Strengths: To some extent, this innovation is a success. It produced positive results as expected because it was initiated by the need for improvement and it was firmly grounded on the real teaching context and the classroom culture of the institution where it was consciously

planned and implemented. Besides, as this innovation took the model of Problem – Solving or, more specifically, the form of an Action Research with the problem being recognized and defined by the "insider" (the researcher and also the class teacher), it followed the bottom- up process which means more teacher's sense of ownership and responsibility , and thus more likelihood to be successful. In addition, the researcher received great supports from colleagues and students, which is also one favorable condition for the innovation to be successfully implemented. Taking into consideration the "Five Core Characteristics of Innovations" suggested by Rogers (1983 cited in Markee, 1997, p.59): *Relative advantage, Compatibility with previous practice, Complexity, Trialability and Observability*, this innovation is a successful one. First, it is not too similar nor too different to current practice as group work has been in used in UNETI for nearly 7 years but the usefulness of two- way information gap tasks in group work activities has not been fully aware of by all the teachers. Second, it is not too complicated but in fact is easy to observe and carry out. And finally, it may probably be adopted by other teachers because it has the advantage of encouraging students' equal participation in group work activities, one of the concerns in evaluating classroom teaching and learning. Seen from another viewpoint, this innovation can also be considered an evaluation process with clear purposes: "*Teacher self- development*" and more important "*Curriculum development and betterment*" (Rea- Dickens and Germaine, 2001, p.254). And as defined by Rea- Dickens and Germaine (2001, p.254), and Richards (2001, p.288- 291), it is "Formative evaluation", "Summative evaluation" and "Illuminative evaluation" as well. It is "Formative evaluation" because the information or data were collected from "different people over a period of time"(Rea- Dickens and Germaine , 2001, p.254) through questionnaire, interviews with students and conversations with colleagues during the process of implementing the innovation. It is "Summative evaluation" because it involved "measurement, and analyses of the statistical significance of results obtained" "(Rea- Dickens and Germaine, 2001, p.254), which was the counting of the turns and turn- takings of students in group work activities at the end of the implementation period.

Finally, it is "Illuminative evaluation" as "it seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the processes of teaching and learning that occur in the program" (Richards, 2001, p.289). That is it tried to examine how students participated in group work, whether two- way information-gap tasks could help to generate equal participation of students in group work activities or not and to which extent it could help. Furthermore, this evaluation process made use of both quantitative and qualitative measurement: observation and *counting* turns and turn – takings, questionnaire and interview. Therefore, its validity and reliability are significantly high.

Weaknesses: Though the innovation was on the whole successful, it still have some limitations. Firstly, it was not conducted on a large scale and observations only looked at one sample class so its result might not be of very high representativeness. Secondly, the study would still be affected by *Maturation* because after some time working together in the same group, the students might get closer to each other and they could feel more confident to speak in front of close friends and became proficient at collaboration. Thirdly, it has some entailed problems such as longer time being required for the completion of the tasks or the students' tendency of using more Vietnamese than before. Though it is accepted in UNETI that students can use mother tongue when necessary, it is preferable that the first language should be of as little use as possible. Finally, the time for the implementation of the innovation was quite short, only two months and a half, so it was not ideally enough for all the advantages and disadvantages of the treatment to emerge. Another thing that

should be considered an obstacle to this innovation is the limited source of two-way information-gap tasks suitable for the teaching syllabus at PPU. In most cases, teachers need to spend time adapting available tasks to suit their students' levels, interests and their teaching aims. This poses a threat to the adoptability of the innovation. As it is time-consuming and effort-demanding, it may possibly be not immediately and permanently adopted by other teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to investigate the possibility that two-way information-gap tasks would encourage equal participation from the students in group work activities in an EFL class. It produced positive results as expected by the researcher and thus helped to confirm teachers' belief in the value of two-way information-gap tasks in group work and Communicative Language Teaching. However, it also has some problems that in turn need to be carefully addressed. What is more, as any improvement requires time and effort, the innovation itself is very time-consuming and skill-demanding, especially in collecting and designing two-way information-gap tasks. Therefore, it is suggested that there should be a secondary innovation on where to find and how to adapt two-way information-gap tasks so that the innovation can hopefully be adopted by more teachers.

REFERENCES

1. Baker, J., & Westrup, H. (2000). *The English Language Teacher's Handbook*. London: Continuum.
2. Brown, H. (2001). *Communicative Language Teaching*. In *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. (pp. 42 – 51). White Plains NY: Longman.
3. Cross, D. (1995). *A Practical Handbook of Language Teaching*. Hertfordshire: Phoenix ELT.
4. Goh, C. C. M. (2003). *Teaching Listening in The Language Classroom*. Singapore : RELC.
5. Holliday, A. (1994). *A Culture – sensitive Approach*. In *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*. (pp. 161 – 194). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Jacobs, G. M., & Hall, S. (1994). *Implementing Cooperative Learning*. In J. C. Richards and W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. (pp. 52 – 58). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
7. Le, T. A. P. (2002, November). *Problems and Solutions for General English Classes at Junior Colleges*. Teacher's Edition , 10 , 18 – 22.
8. Lewis, M., & Hill, J. (1985). *Practical Techniques for Language Teaching*. London: Language Teaching Publications.
9. Markee, N. (1997). *Issues and Definitions*. In *Managing Curricular Innovation*. (pp. 42 – 70). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Neu, H., & Reeser, T. W. (1997). *Parle-moi un peu! : Information Gap Activities for Beginning French Classes*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
11. Nunan, D. (1999). *Second Language Teaching & Learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
12. Rea- Dickens, P. and Germaine, K. (2001). *Purposes for Evaluation*. In Hall, D. R. and Hewings, A., *Innovation in English Language Teaching*. New York: Routledge.
13. Richards, J. C. (2001). *Approaches to Evaluation*. In *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. (pp. 286 – 308). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14. Richards, J. C., & Platt, J. & Platt, H. (1992). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching And Applied Linguistics*. Singapore: Longman Singapore Publishers.
15. Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
16. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
17. Rooks, G. (1988). *The Non- Stop Discussion Workbook*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle
18. Ur, P. (1991). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
19. White, R. V. (1988). *Language Curriculum Design: Process and Management*. In *The ELT Curriculum: Design, Innovation and Management*. (pp.113 – 135). Oxford: Blackwell.
