ADULT EAST ASIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES EMPLOYED
IN ADULT ESOL COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

by

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

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This study examined the perceptions, expectations, and preferences held by adult East Asian ESOL students regarding the use of classroom cooperative learning activities (CLAs) in community college classrooms. The findings of this study indicate that adult East Asian learners have preferences regarding the types of communicative and group activities that occur in their classrooms. Student perceptions on the effectiveness of CLAs in learning English were mixed between affirmative, ambivalent and negative, and affected their participation responses during these activities. Participant preferences were found to be both individually and contextually based and suggest that the interactions which occurred were influenced by the students' cultural perspectives on acceptable social interaction.

Chapter I: Research Study

Introduction

As a Community College Continuing Education teacher of adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students, I have found helping them to adapt to U.S. educational practices to be challenging. My students, whose ages may range from 18-48 years, have a variety of previous educational experiences as well as varying purposes for learning English. The ethnicity of students in my classes has changed over time and each semester an increasing number of students have been added to my classes. These students have come from Eastern Asia (45%), Europe (40%) and Latin/South America (15%) respectively. Frequently, there were students in my classes who appeared unprepared to participate in the interactive methods of cooperative learning that I employed to promote optimum language acquisition and facilitate natural conversations which enhance the language learning process. East Asian (i.e., mainland Chinese, Hong Konger, Indonesian, South Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese and Macanese) students in my classes often appeared to be more reticent about speaking during these discussion periods, and I was curious to know what factors may have been influencing these students to speak less in group activities. As a researcher and practitioner of adult ESOL coursework, the lack of information on possible reasons that East Asian students might be reticent to speak during classroom discussion activities was an aspect of language learning which intrigued

me. Drawing upon my years of teaching ESOL, my knowledge of curriculum development and my academic background in international education as well as my personal experiences as an international student studying abroad, this study was conducted to gain a better understanding of what factors might be influencing student performance during classroom cooperative learning activities (CLA). In addition, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the perceptions that adult East Asian students might have of CLAs, which were designed and employed to maximize their language learners opportunities to acquire English language skills through group interactions.

The number of foreign students applying to colleges and universities across the United States over the past 4 years has dramatically increased and highlights the impact that globalization is having on higher education. A recent online survey conducted by the Institute of International Education of 700 of colleges and universities in the United States examined new international student enrollments for 2005-06 (IIE Survey, 2007). The results reveal that the largest gains in enrollment were made by Chinese students, growing by 53% followed by Korean students with an increase of 35% which appears to reflect the growing popularity of the U.S. as a destination for higher education by Asian students. A survey of 1,000 prospective foreign college/university level students conducted by one of the leading marketing companies, Education Dynamics on Study Abroad programs, noted that many students viewed the "United States as offering the best possible education" especially if they intended establishing a career in the U.S. after graduation (Study Abroad, 2008, p. 1).

2

The rise in demand for English language instruction to meet the increased needs of students choosing to study in the United States is challenging educators to consider ways in which instruction can be most effective for the varying needs of students comprising their classrooms. The challenges of studying abroad for students often begins with adjusting to a new language, new culture, and new experiences in the classrooms of the college/university they have chosen to attend. The diversity of cultures now seen in classrooms is also beginning to motivate educators to learn more about the prior educational experiences of their international students to inform how they can best meet their students' educational needs.

The Institute of International Education Survey results of Asian students seeking to immigrate to the United States for educational purposes reflect similar data found on immigration trends of Asians seeking to live, work, and study in the general area of this research study. The 2006 U.S. Census Bureau revealed that the largest ethnic groups for the geographic area where this study was conducted were: Asian (36.5%) followed by Hispanic (33.1%). Economic factors, career opportunities in this area, and K-16 schools being rated in the top 25% of the nation, may account for some of the rise in Asian immigrant families choosing to live in this region (Forbes, 2007). The individuals comprising the population numbers for this geographic area were part of an overall national trend being noted in K-12, higher education and adult education programs for second language learners. In 2003-04 the National Center for Educational Statistics reported providing 3.8 million English language learners (ELLs) educational services in classrooms across the country (NCES, 2004). The largest allocations of adult ESOL education programs noted

at the time were located in California, Florida, New York, Illinois, and Texas, respectively (NCIIP, 2007).   One of the states in the mid-Atlantic region revealed that between 1997 and 2007 they experienced a 350% increase in the number of ELLs accessing services at all levels of education i.e. K-12, adult education, community college, university (Commonwealth, 2009). This dramatic increase in ELLs has highlighted the challenges teachers currently face in providing effective instruction for students within their classrooms.

Teachers working with adult community college ESOL students are seeing a range of ages and a variety of educational experiences of learners enrolling in their classrooms. My experiences as a teacher (K-12, community college and graduate school) have also presented me with students from a variety of cultures and a wide range of ages. Having lived outside the United States and been an international student myself I am sensitive to learning situations that may be unclear, confusing or stressful for students. My student/teacher lens has allowed me to see both sides of the foreign language learning students' classroom experiences and informs my practice when designing lesson plans. Consequently, I was curious about the perceptions and perspectives ESOL students might have of the language learning activities in my classes.

Each semester the percentage of Eastern Asian students in my adult community college ESOL classes has been around 45-50%, with approximately 25% of those students stating they had some previous higher education or college level courses in their native countries and they have a strong desire to improve their English language skills. Through conversations with these students, I have discovered many of these students live

in family units, often with three generations at the same location, and appear to have gained some measure of economic stability through employment and housing opportunities available in the local community. These encounters left me intrigued and interested in learning more about the ways in which international and immigrant students preferred to learn a second language, their possible motivations for learning the language and their perceptions of the learning experiences they found in my classrooms. A central assumption of my approach to teaching is a constructivist perspective, which is to say that I create and provide learning experiences for my students which will allow them to draw on their previous knowledge to solve problems (Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, I usually employ a number of experiential and cooperative learning strategies in my classrooms however this practice has not appeared to engage some of my East Asian adult students actively in their language learning. Consequently, I wanted to discover whether East Asian students' perceived learning English through cooperative learning activities (CLAs) as effective and whether they felt these activities served to motivate or inhibit their language learning process. To provide clarity on the various terms that are referenced in this study a list of terminology has been provided in Appendix A.

Research studies of Asian students' experiences of cooperative language learning activities in the United States have examined the classroom interactions of students with their teachers (Pashby, 2002), student-to-student interactions during classroom activities (Knight-Giuliani, 2002; Liu, J. 2001), and comparisons of communication-style preferences in a learning context between U.S. university students and South Korean university students in in-class and in on-line discussion activities by Asian university students at a

5

Midwestern university (Merkin, 2009). However, an examination of learner perceptions of adult Asian students of cooperative learning as an effective means of acquiring proficiency in spoken English has not been adequately explored in the literature. International studies on student attitudes and/or perceptions of group work have been done in Australia (Cantwell, 2002; Wright, 2003), Taiwan (Savignon, 2003), Singapore (Tan, 2006), Hong Kong (Littlewood, 2001; Peacock, 2001), and Canada (Liang, 2004), but information about adult Asian student perceptions of cooperative working group activities as an effective means of learning English at the U.S. community college level was not located in a search of the literature.

A review of the research on cooperative learning revealed a complex picture of performance and attitudes which resulted in a variety of opinions on its effectiveness in increasing academic achievement based on cooperative group activities (Slavin, 1996). In an effort to understand the ways students' approach cooperative learning and CLAs a meta-analysis of 14 studies was conducted on the effects that cooperative learning had on the academic achievement of Asian K-12 and college age students in Asia (Thanh, Gillies & Renshaw, 2008). This review on the effects of cooperative learning for academic achievement of Asian students found mismatches between the principles employed in cooperative learning and the more traditional approaches to learning practiced in Asian cultures (Thanh, et al., 2008). Thanh found negative responses in seven of the studies due to students' preferences for traditional Asian passive learning through teacher lecture formats. Students were also found to have difficulties with investigative methods employed in CLAs which required students to acquire information either independently or

6

with peer group members. Students' preferences for learning were note-taking in teach-er-focused lecture formats which would result in tests or examinations rather than the more complex, time consuming collaborative interactions needed for problem-solving activities in cooperative learning (Thanh, et al., 2008). These findings were similar to studies on the challenges facing international students and adult ESOL students in Aus-tralia, Hong Kong, and U.S. classrooms (Cantwell, 2002; Wright, 2003; Li, 1998; Knight-Giuliani, 2002).

The attitudes and perceptions of teachers on the effectiveness of cooperative learning for academic achievement has also had mixed results. Teachers' stated percep-tions of increased work to prepare and conduct CLAs for their students (Thanh, et al., 2008) included similar findings in U.S. studies on the attitudes of teachers regarding the methodological challenges of student-centered learning as well as the effectiveness of student-to-student interactions in classrooms with diverse cultural student populations (Knight-Giuliani, 2002; Park, 1999; Pashby, 1999). Some studies suggested that it is the competitive and individualistic student educational culture in Asia and the subsequent cultural discomfort of conflicts within cooperative learning group settings that led to inef-fective group discussions and resulted in their failure to accomplish the tasks assigned (Chen, 2001; Cheng, 2000; Li, 1998; Xiao, 2006).

The reticence of some students to establish a working relationship with other stu-dents within their designated group may be perceived to be inhibiting and to stall the ac-quisition of benefits that were meant to be derived from participating in classrooms with diverse ethnicities. Consequently, a variety of influences in communication styles may

be present in ESOL classes which may be influencing student participation levels in CLAs. It has been suggested that the ways in which individuals choose to communicate reflects the cultures in which they were raised or have lived, and may provide insight into an overall cultural perspective the nation may have of communicative norms (Gudykunst, 2001). The impact of their lack of participation in the discussion may result in the activity failing to achieve the goal of increased English-speaking interactions among the other members of the group. Discerning the student's perspectives on this aspect of language learning in ESOL community college classrooms may help teachers in developing effective strategies for teaching students at this level. The information gathered in this study sought to provide teachers with a better understanding of the communicative interactions they may see unfolding in their ESOL CLAs and provide possible options for improving their instructional delivery in a manner which will be appealing to the Asian students in their classrooms.

<div align="center">**Statement of the Problem**</div>

One aspect of the activities employed in English language working groups is that they are designed to actively support students' English language competence in the oral domain and provide students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of the language they are learning. An important element of CLAs is the learner's ability to successfully produce a content-based product in collaboration with other group members. Consequently, one of the main objectives ESOL teachers have in designing CLAs for their students is the improvement of speaking skills through conversations with others. However, the lack of participation by adult East Asian students in CLAs, has presented

teachers with stalled or failed activities which led to frustration and tension among the other members of the group. In order for teachers to design effective CLAs for their students it would be helpful to determine why East Asian students appear to prefer not to interact with other group members during CLAs. This research will seek to discover how best to present CLAs in order to engage this important population of students.

Significance of the Problem

A national survey of the popularity of cooperative learning in U.S. classrooms by teachers revealed that 79% of elementary teachers and 62% of middle school teachers use this teaching method regularly (Slavin, 1996).   A research study of instructional methods employed by college instructors showed humanities courses, which include language learning classrooms, used cooperative learning activities approximately 40-60% time (Lammers & Murphy, 2002).   When you compare the appeal of this method for language teaching with The Center for Education Report (2004) which stated that 25% of the U.S. population is Asian (includes West, Central, South and East Asian countries) and that18% of those age five and older have a language other than English as their main means of communication, the desire to understand what influences may be guiding Asian students' language learning is important.

The benefits of students participating in group activities in ESOL classrooms include the facilitation of English language learning during cooperative problem-solving interactions that occurred during an assignment (Jacob, 1999; Stage, 1998). Another suggested benefit of these classroom activities is to provide opportunities for learning through social interactions among students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Johnson,

1989). However, studies done on the merits of the cooperative learning method regarding academic achievement among Asian students have shown mixed results at various levels, subjects and types of schools in many countries (Thanh, et al., 2008; Slavin, 1996).

The success of the cooperative learning group dynamics is dependent upon conversation occurring, and if communications stall due to lack of member contribution to the discussion, then periods of silence may ensue which inhibit the learning process. Occasionally working groups struggle to complete the assigned task because the silences that have developed indicate that problem-solving is not being shared by all members in the group. When team members do not take the initiative to assume responsibility for a portion of the project tasks, then resentment may begin to appear in those team members who are shouldering a majority of the responsibilities. In my classroom observations of working groups, a few students were often willing to organize and present the information during the initial months of the CLAs but at some point they become discouraged by the lack of response from those students who choose not to speak and thus began to shut down their own communication responses as well. When this happens, the working groups are no longer talking, organizing, or problem solving their task. My informal classroom observations of this phenomenon have shown that the majority of the time, the students who choose not to speak during these collaborative interactions were from the East Asian countries of China, South Korea or Japan. Being sensitive to this possible event, I usually make a point of individually asking my students how they are doing in their groups and if they feel comfortable in the activities they are being asked to perform.

I have never had a student ask to be moved to another group, nor have there been any complaints about the assignment, even though I have observed prolonged silences during the conversational problem-solving stage of their activity.

My impression of "silent" East Asian students is that they are smart, creative, engaging and enthusiastic during my interactions with them. I assumed they had enrolled in my classes because they wanted to learn English so, "why" would they choose to be unresponsive in group activities? Why did they appear to prefer to not engage in group discussions with other students in group activities? I wondered if their choice to remain silent may have been influenced by cultural factors of which I was not aware, or whether previous educational experiences were influencing their choice of actions.

In an effort to answer my questions I reviewed previous research on the use of cooperative learning with adult East Asian ESOL students at the community college level but found there were no studies on this topic. Therefore, the desire to gain insight into what my students think about cooperative learning methods has guided me to conduct this study.

Research Questions

I was curious about the perceptions East Asian students had of English language learning activities when asked to participate in CLAs and their lack of interaction in culturally mixed working group activities. Students enrolled in my classes had been from the South Central Asian countries of Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam as well as the East Asian countries of China, South Korea and Japan. The previous educational experiences of these students varied with Japanese and Korean students

11

appearing to have had the most consistent educational experience because some of the other Asian students had first immigrated to the West through Europe or Canada prior to moving to the mid-Atlantic region. I was specifically interested in discovering what the previous academic experiences of my East Asian Chinese, Japanese and Korean students had been and if those experiences may have been influencing their perceptions of CLAs, which in turn were influencing their participation in classroom activities. Additionally, I wanted to have a broader understanding of student perspectives and perceptions about classroom interactions and how they preferred to learn a second language. While improving their ability to speak English was one of the stated goals many of these students, I was interested in investigating what other influences may be motivating them to speak a second language. I wondered if the ways in which these students chose to embrace language learning represented a variety of perceptions on what they expected the process to look like. These factors and the growing Asian community living in the mid-Atlantic area and enrolled in adult classes have offered a special context for research on the perceptions and perspectives adult East Asian students have of CLAs being used in ESOL classrooms. This has guided me in formulating the following research questions used for this study:

1. What are the preferences and perceptions of adult East Asian students studying at the community college level, regarding collaborative working groups and other cooperative learning activities (CLAs) that have been designed to help them to acquire oral English language skills?

2. What are the learning expectations of adult East Asian students regarding language-learning activities when enrolled in community college ESOL classes?

3. In what ways might the cultural perspectives of East Asian students be influencing their classroom performance and level of participation during discussion activities associated with cooperative learning methods being used in the community college classrooms?

Summary of Research Study

The expansion of global market forces has stimulated an increase in immigration of Asian foreign students to U.S. schools over the past decade. Their inclusion in university, college, and community college ESOL classrooms has highlighted the need for teachers to better understand what factors may be influencing the way in which Asian students approach learning and in particular what strategies they may employ when participating in classroom cooperative activities with other students. When there is a lack of participation by students in discussion group activities, the goals and objectives of that learning session are threatened and should be investigated to determine what factors may be bringing about these occurrences. The lack of research in the broader literature on adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and their lack of participation in CLAs guided this study seeking to understand the East Asian community college ESOL students' perceptions and perspectives of this process. This study sought to provide helpful information that educators, particularly those working with Asian English language learners at the community college level may draw upon when developing CLAs for their classrooms.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

There are three broad areas which informed this study: second language acquisition research (SLA) theory, pedagogies and methodologies supporting second language teaching and cultural influences affecting the language-learning process. First, an overview of pertinent SLA learning theory will provide a context for understanding how adult students learn a second language; second, a review of literature will include an examination of the research supporting recent methods and approaches used to promote language acquisition in ESOL classrooms. Finally, a review of traditional approaches to language learning in Asian classrooms was examined in an effort to better understand possible cultural factors which may influence the learning process of East Asian students in ESOL classrooms in the U.S.

Second Language Acquisition

The language learning process involves more than the acquisition of vocabulary and the application of grammar rules when we consider that children's L1 learning is accomplished through interactions with family and friends as well as strangers in the communities where people live and work (Krashen, 1981). This L1 process often has an informal structure of assimilation and accommodation that is constantly undergoing adaptation as language learners make sense of their surroundings and the events occurring with-

in them (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978). It involves both the spoken language and the language of individual behavior as individuals observe social interactions and react to those circumstances by modeling behavior both physical and spoken they have witnessed (Bandura, 1977). The actions that learners employ during authentic discourse include a continuous process of interactions between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977). These behaviors can be emotional attitudes as well as physical responses to stimuli gained from watching the behavior of others in various circumstances and storing in memory responses that can be used as a guide in future actions as needed. This concept coincides with Vygotsky's (1978) socialization theory for children and what he has called the Zone of Proximal Development, which states that the process of developmental learning occurs when children are engaged in social interactions with others. His theory further asserts that an individual's community aids the process of making meaning out of social interactions of learners. For Vygotsky and others, it is the physical and spoken efforts of the learner to understand what is happening, that is problem-solving, in a given social context that advances the knowledge of the learner.

While Vygotsky's research dealt with the social learning experiences of children his theory can also be seen to apply to the SLL process of adults as well. ESOL teachers often see similarities to Vygotsky's theory in the communities of their classrooms, where social interactions of students using CLAs provide students an opportunity to engage in discussing strategies for problem-solving tasks. Scholars have concluded that the role of cooperative communication found in CLAs enhances whole-group collective knowledge

for more effective learning than might have been gained individually (Krashen, 1983; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Second language learning theories have also suggest that learning occurs when speakers are concentrating on the meaning of the discourse taking place within CLAs rather than focusing specifically on grammar, vocabulary, or other structural aspects of language in a more formal exchange (Krashen, 1983).

Research has indicated that students experience four key areas when learning a second language: comprehension (Krashen, 1981), communicative interactions (Swain, 1995), the application of higher order thinking skills (Chamot, 1987) and the learner's use of his/her first language (L1) to increase comprehension in the second language (L2) (Thomas & Collier, 1997; 2003). When teachers use meaningful curriculum content and employ vocabulary that is understood, students are able to use their current comprehension to acquire and link new concepts to their understanding of what is being introduced in the lesson (Krashen, 1983). When students have opportunities to work on projects that contain concepts that have authentic meaning for them and for which they are able to relate real-life experiences they are more likely to verbally engage or negotiate with others (Swain, 1995). When students' gain more language skills they are able to expand their existing cognitive strategies by using previously learned concepts/terms to provide comprehension for new tasks (Krashen, 1983) and are able to develop critical thinking skills needed for such subjects as math and science (Chamot, 1987). Finally, second language learners find they are able to relate skills they acquired when learning L1 to the acquisition of L2, and they show more long-term academic achievement than students who were forced to use only L2 in the learning process (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2003).

16

Methods and Approaches in English Language Learning

The methods and approaches used for teaching a second language tend to align with one of three perspectives: teacher-centered or student-centered methods or a combination of the two. While western educational practices have tended to move away from teacher-centered instruction, East Asian practices still generally follow this approach for a variety of reasons, among them teacher/student preferences for following traditional practices (Chen, 2003; Thanh, et al., 2008). Teacher-centered methods focus the attention on the teacher and what the teacher wants the student to know. The student listens to the teacher present the language and works alone on assignments except for correction by the teacher when students speak the target language. These classrooms are usually quiet and student evaluation is done by the teacher alone without input from student activities involving interactions with peers. Language learning throughout most of academic history has concentrated more on teacher–centered methods and how students behaved based on stimuli. These methods flowed from what came to be termed the Behaviorist school of thought and comprised three main approaches: the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method and the Audiolingual Method (Haley & Austin, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). While many East Asian countries are moving toward more communicative teaching methods for teaching a foreign language, research has indicated that teachers and students in many East Asian classrooms often still prefer to follow traditional teacher-centered methods. Such practices have indicated limited communicative interactions between students and teachers, and among student learners (Li, 1998; Thanh, et al., 2008).

An overview of several teacher-centered approaches will provide a context for understanding the learning models experienced by many East Asian students prior to arriving in the United States. For example, one of the oldest methods is the Grammar-Translation method, which was an approach designed to help students read foreign literature and it was hoped, at the same time enable students to learn about the grammar structure of their own native language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This method focused on teacher-led activities that students were to later emulate on individual assignments but rarely included opportunities for student discourse in the target language. When teachers realized that communication in the form of dialogue by students was not being advanced by translating grammar alone, they began to seek ways that would direct students more toward speaking the target language. The Direct Method emerged around the turn of the 20th century and was seen as a way to move students toward opportunities to speak the target language through the use of demonstrations and visual aids in classroom activities. In so doing, instructors did not use the student's native language to build upon their language-learning experience because they intended to teach the second language the way children had learned their first language. It was believed that this immersion process in the targeted language would facilitate the acquisition of grammar and pronunciation needed by the student (Haley & Austin, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The Audiolingual Method of learning was widely used in the 1960s and also focused on the teacher guiding students in the use of the spoken language. The goal was to aide students in their understanding of the structural components of the language being learned and would therefore be able to respond to questions asked by the teacher in CLAs. During these exchanges

18

between teacher and student, the teacher would correct any grammatical mistakes made in the student's responses (Haley & Austin, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Each of these methods addressed an important attribute of foreign language learning but, at the same time, each has been criticized for neglecting various aspects of the learning process. It has been noted that the Grammar-Translation Method does not encourage actual student discourse in the target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) because it is a teacher-centered grammar activity, and that the Direct Method approach often requires student to give oral responses before they feel capable, which may result in errors that may not be corrected when they occur in classroom activities and may leave students with misconceptions on the proper use of the language (Selinker, 1983). The Audiolingual Method depends on teacher stimuli and student responses in the target language to ensure correct pronunciation but may not work for students with varied learning styles. In addition, it has been noted that the constant repetition needed may bore some students while frustrating others seeking more meaning in the process (Knight-Giuliani, 2002). In the United States, English language learners are being taught in classes employing a second language approach that is more interactive with the curriculum content and that may be a pronounced shift away from the traditional instruction they received in the past. This issue highlights the need for ESOL teachers to discern how their pedagogical preferences for teaching may be perceived by their students and be prepared to offer alternative methods of teaching the material to maximize student learning needs.

While earlier methods may have allowed students to learn the structural elements of the target language, which in this study is English, through teacher-centered activities

19

an increased competence in communication in the target language has now been recognized as an essential focus for language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Therefore, a student-centered approach that sought to provide students with an opportunity to increase communicative competencies emerged called communicative language teaching (CLT). In this approach, the students become the focal point as they learn collaboratively from the conversations they have with each other. The teacher takes on the role of the guide and facilitator for learning.

The objective of this approach, to provide opportunities for increased communication among language learners, may however face challenges from the students' perception of the learning process and their previous learning experiences. Thanh (2008) noted that students in Singapore preferred teachers to provide them with necessary academic material instead of requiring them to obtain the information through classroom interactive communication activities. A study of Chinese university students in Canada revealed their recognition of the importance of classroom discussion participation in the learning process, yet their lack of understanding of CLT methods used by the teacher meant their silence prevailed, leaving them with feelings of "anxiety, frustration, depression, isolation, inferiority, and a loss of confidence" (Zhou, 2005, p. 293). Previous educational experiences of Japanese students in Australia were found to be influencing their lack of communication while participating in classroom learning activities because the culture in Japanese classrooms expects student to be silent during instruction (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009).

Research has also shown that students may hold ambivalent perceptions of group work due to the organization of the CLAs. Xiao (2006) found that students, majoring in English at an Irish university, held mixed or seemingly contradictory views on the value of class discussions with other group members as a means of learning English; however they all held positive views on teacher-guided activities. Xiao stated that 36.2% of the students in his study preferred text-based or teacher-guided activities when learning, 34.2% favored collaborative interactive activities over whole class discussions, and 30% were neutral on what teaching methods were employed. Xiao noted that teacher-guided, text-based teaching methods were the predominant previous educational experience of the participants in his study which he suggests might account for their mixed perception of the value of CLAs.

Earlier research by Liang (2004) with 180 secondary school Asian ESOL learners in two classes which used interviews (49 of the students) and observations (120 hours over two years) of the classrooms noted they held mixed views on the value of cooperative learning methods over other options in classroom activities. Liang's study of Chinese students in Canada found that while students stated they enjoyed many aspects of cooperative learning, they also felt the same elements were problematic. Liang's study shared that participants felt group work was "non-threatening," and that the ideas gleaned from discussions were more creative than when working alone. While cooperative learning offered them more opportunities to practice English than other classroom activities some group members were seen to use their L1 too often in discussions. They also pointed out that working as a group did not allow the teacher to see their individual abili-

ties and the inability to sometimes reach a consensus because some students did not contribute to the activity was problematic (Liang, 2004).

Park's (2002) research of 857 Armenian, Chinese (Hmong), Vietnamese, Korean and Mexican ESOL learners in two California secondary schools also suggested that the mixed responses by students in her study may have stemmed from previous educational experiences prior to their recent move to the United States. Park's research found that while Hmong and Vietnamese students preferred group learning; Korean students felt that individual and teacher-guided activities were best.

A variety of factors may be influencing classroom participation by East Asian students and shaping their perceptions of the value of CLAs as a method that will facilitate learning. Many East Asian ESOL students' previous experiences learning English were in foreign language classrooms that did not employ cooperative learning methods. Their schools' foreign language learning methods may have more closely resembled the Direct or Audiolingual Methods, which would have left students unsure of how to respond to CLAs. This study therefore sought to understand the perspectives East Asian students had of their ESOL experiences in the English-language learning process.

Cooperative Language Learning

The concept of learning together is widely used in ESOL classrooms and is "based on a basic need to communicate" states Larson-Freeman (2000, p. 129) who recommends using a collaborative-type learning method because "almost everything that is done by individuals is done with the intent to communicate with others" (p. 129). Extensive research of cooperative learning methods has been performed in an effort to better

understand how this radically different approach to instruction is so successful (Slavin, 1996). Johnson (1998) reported that more than 168 studies have been done on cooperative learning since its initial conception in 1924. These studies found the basic elements recognized in cooperative learning are: interdependent learning efforts by/among group members, individual contributions by every group member toward the assigned task, face-to-face communications among group members, and a collaborative use of group members learning skills to complete the task. Therefore, the goal of incorporating cooperative learning into language learning classroom activities over more traditional approaches is to provide unique opportunities for increasing the acquisition of a student's oral and written communication skills.

The use of these concepts builds upon Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach to learning a second language, which states that one of the goals should be to ensure that students are able to communicate or negotiate their intentions with others. This inquiry-based communication is focused on gathering information and is less concerned with the structural, grammatical elements that students may have been learning in other assignments. In these activities students are meant to speak, inquire, and solve problems without worrying about how accurately they speak the language. Learner or student-centered teaching methods focus on interactions between the teacher and the student in the target language being learned as well as student-to-student interactions in the target language. Students may work in pairs, groups, or alone depending on the activity but students have the freedom to discuss and problem-solve the activity without the teacher correcting their vocabulary and grammar during the discourse. Feedback and corrections

may be provided by the teacher when students ask a question, but students' general conversational flow is unmonitored by the teacher with the goal being increased language usage. Student conversations often comprise questions to other students in discussion of the task as well as with the instructor, which means the classroom contains noisy, busy collaborative-learning exchanges.

Some advantages in using cooperative learning approaches are: an increased frequency and variety of opportunities to practice speaking the second language with classmates (Swain, 1995; Calderon & Slavin, 1999), more opportunities for students to act as a resource in classroom activities, an increased variety of activities that may be introduced to students for language learning, content-based instruction which creates opportunities for students to integrate L1 and L2, and increased opportunities for cognitive development (McGroarty, M., 1989 as cited in Richards, 2001). Another important goal of CLAs in U.S. classrooms is to facilitate student cooperation in the learning process rather than promoting individual student performance of tasks (Richards, 2001). This concept is essentially different from East Asian classrooms where students are encouraged to work independently on assignments and results in a more competitive approach reflecting the individual learning focus of the students. Research studies on cooperative learning have revealed that this approach is the choice of U.S. teachers and students alike because of the effective focus it places on student-centered learning activities in the classrooms (Chan, 1999; Johnson, 1998; Lui, 2007; Norman, 2005). However, in East Asian classrooms, students and, adult learners in particular, may have experienced a didactic form of instruction, which leaves them less familiar with more cooperative forms of learning.

One possible explanation for this comes from research on instructional methods in Chinese classrooms, compared with U.S. classrooms was conducted by Xu (2011). Xu's research indicated that some Chinese teachers were employing more interactive methods of classroom instruction such as teacher guided question/answer sessions with students, teacher discussions with groups of students and individual student presentations before the class. However, Xu's research also found that Chinese teachers still depend heavily on a lecture format (82% of the time) for classroom instruction. Additionally, in the 12 Chinese classrooms Xu observed, there were no learning-center type activities for students to participate in, while observations of 13 U.S. classrooms found them intensively used in classroom instruction. Consequently, East Asian students may appear to be slower to engage in CLAs because they have had limited or no exposure to this type of instruction.

Using this approach has had mixed results for some ESOL classrooms for a variety of reasons. While studies have noted that ESOL students have stated they like CLAs, it has also been noted that there is less interaction between students due to the cultural environment and/or the social context associated with the event. Students, who felt uncomfortable in working groups and reported higher anxiety, were more inhibited and demonstrated lower levels of social interactions (Cantwell, 2002). Of particular relevance to this research is a study conducted by Cheng (2000), where teachers in China observed more passive learning and reticence in the discussion portion of their EFL classes. Results indicated this phenomenon could possibly be due to a lack of proficiency in the language resulting in less interaction among students (Cheng, 2000). In another study by

Liang (2004), it was noted that required social interaction, associated with CLAs created a concern on the part of non-native speaking English students due to the requisite acceptable communication norms necessary for discussion with the native English speakers in their group (Liang, 2004). Finally, it has also been noted that non-native speakers of English may identify strongly with their "out-group" identity in CLAs due to a lack of "inclusive behavior" toward them on the part of the native speaking members of the working group (Wright-Landers, 2003). As Norman (2005) pointed out in his research on cooperative learning among fifth and sixth-grade Korean students, merely "putting students together in groups does not guarantee positive results" because students need to feel they have the ability to contribute to the activity in a positive way and that their efforts will be met with understanding and acceptance by the group as a whole (Norman, 2005, p. 30). The core of cooperative language learning is the communicative interactions that occur in student-to-teacher and student-to-student activities that have been designed to facilitate the learning process.

The diversity of most ESOL classrooms requires that teachers carefully examine the way in which they select participants for group activities with regard to their student's cultural background, previous educational experiences, academic motivation, age, and gender. When students cannot or will not engage in CLA interactions the learning process fails and teachers are challenged to discover why this teaching method is not effective for a specific group of students.

English Language Learning in Asia

An important factor in studying the classroom interaction patterns of students in ESOL activities is that of their previous educational experiences. The level of participation observed in classroom activities, may provide teachers with clues to the student's previous learning experiences and help identify student perspectives on the teaching method being used. East Asian students who have studied English in their home countries may be not be familiar with collaborative methods being used in ESOL classrooms in the United States in spite of the fact that the governments of China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have designated that formal introduction of collaborative learning methods be included in their national educational curriculum (Li, 1998). Yet, the level of interactive CLAs being used in these classrooms has been reported to be very low due to the fact that teachers do not feel competent to expand the oral discourse portion of the activities nor do they feel the size of their classes allows them to use cooperative learning groups for task based learning (Xu, 2011). Consequently, teachers continue to teach English in the traditional lecture-oriented method (Butler, 2005; Jeon, 2006; Li, 1998). Research conducted by Jeon (2006) also revealed that, in addition to teacher negativity, advanced students' perceptions of group work were also negative. Students indicated that they felt group work would not specifically improve their own grades and preferred to work individually. Whereas East Asian countries have included CLT methods into their curriculum, South Korea has moved to also incorporate task-based and activity-oriented language use into their classroom activities. Many teachers perceive that this type of instruction adds too much additional work in lesson planning to be implemented (Butler, 2005; Jeon, 2006).

While the governments and ministries governing education in East Asian countries have established goals to incorporate more communicative language teaching methods into the classroom, the reality is that teachers are not willing or sometimes able to incorporate these new teaching methods into their classrooms (Li, 1998). Teacher education programs often do not incorporate many Western methodologies. Teachers who have had exposure to Western methodologies may not utilize cooperative language learning tasks, which may be another reason their own ability to speak English may challenge their interaction in the communicative language task assigned to the students (Jeon, 2006).

Cultural Influences on Language Learning

Additional factors that may contribute to the failure of CLL activities include a student's cultural perspective of other group members, the preferred communication norm of the student's L1, and the student's perception of the learning process (Knight-Giuliani, 2002; Park, 2002; Pashby, 2002; Xiao, 2006). A concept worth examining in this regard may be that of cultural conditioning. Cultural condition is defined as, the often unconscious process by which we are socialized into adopting specific types of behavior or thinking in a given social settings based upon the culture of an individual's native country. Understanding how cultural conditioning influences may be affecting group dynamics may be helpful in determining why CLAs are sometimes not successful. Studies on how and why students are prompted to communicate and interact have suggested that increased communication may only come when students have a better understanding of the cultural reasons that influence the way they responded to various group members

28

(Pashby, 2002; Tan, 2006). In the educational process, possible cultural motivations for learning English as a second language may provide insight into understanding student responses to CLL and whether they perceive there is a benefit to participating in CLAs.

Additional research on adult student participation in cooperative working groups in ESOL classrooms has noted that Asian students may not engage in interactions with group members but appear to choose to remain silent rather than engaging in conversations when group members include mixed ethnicities, ages, and gender (Knight-Guiliani, 2002; Pashby, 2002; Tan, 2006). It has been suggested that the ways in which individuals choose to communicate may reveal the subtle influences of the cultures in which students were raised as well as the cultures in which they have lived and that Asian cultures tend to be collectivist or group focused while Western countries such as United States are more individualistic in focus (Gudykunst, 2001).

Dimensions of Cultural Influence

The cultural attitudes and perspectives an individual may have regarding what is acceptable behavior in social contexts or a specific way of thinking are thought to develop over time without the individual's realization. One of the leading researchers on cultural influences on social interactions is Geert Hofstede, a Dutch scholar whose research into the basic value system of IBM Corporation employees identified five cultural dimensions that have been found to influence group dynamics. The cultural dimensions Hofstede identified offer insight into the ways that individuals may choose to respond during cross-cultural interactions and offer a context for understanding aspects of class-

29

room interaction patterns and a means to discuss cross-cultural communications in class-rooms (Hofstede, 1988).

The cultural dimensions his research identified are: low vs. high power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long vs. short term orientation (Hofstede, 2004). Low vs. high power distance identifies the extent to which less powerful individuals of a group will accept that power is not equally distributed in the group of which they are a member. Individualism vs. collectivism refers to how integrated group members perceive themselves to be within the group as a whole. Individualistic preferences are for loosely formed group dynamics as opposed to collectivistic preferences for more hierarchical order among group members. Masculine and feminine gender preferences among cultures define the values a culture may place on the individual's performance as part of a specific social group. Uncertainty avoidance preferences define the extent to which individuals may feel comfortable within group interactions that appear to be ambiguous. The most recently identified dimension, long v. short term orientation, defines how a culture views the importance of traditions, perseverance, fulfilling obligations and maintaining face. When Hofstede (2003) examined Asian societies, he concluded that great value is placed on relationships within groups (e.g., family, work), as well as the social attributes of shame, persistence, and social traditions.

An important finding on cultural conditioning within collectivistic societies revealed there was a preference for individuals to operate within groups which would look after them in exchange for loyalty, while members of individualistic societies feel that

30

individuals are only responsible for themselves or for their immediate family members (Hofstede, 1980). These two different perspectives may bring differing influences that may have bearing on the communication process within language learning activities. These influences can also be demonstrated through what has been defined as high or low context communication behavior (Hall, 1976).

High-context methods of communication are often used where there is low diversity of populations and so messages may be less explicit and more indirect due to a shared common history and social values among in-group members. It has been noted that this type of communication is effective because the audience can infer the relevance of what is being said or implied based on a common heritage and culture (Gudykunst, 2001). This is important since most high-context Asian cultures are perceived as exhibiting openness in communicating personal information but may focus instead on conforming to a group consensus. Western cultures might consider this style of communication more passive and even ambiguous at times, while Asian cultures see this style as merely more reserved (Gudykunst, 2001). In contrast to high-context communication is the low-context method, which is used in most Western nations where direct, explicit communication is needed by members who may not share a common cultural background and where clarity is paramount to the communicative process. It has been noted that the culture of the United States often appears to be more concerned with clarity in conversations for effective communications when compared with more collectivistic cultures such as Korea (Kim, M.S. 1993 as cited in Gudykunst, 2003, p. 24).

Aligned to these communication styles is the concept Hofstede (1980) described as uncertainty avoidance, or the degree to which members of a group or culture will go to avoid uncertainty. Gudykunst (2001) noted that collectivistic cultures which tended to be high-context in communicative preferences were also often found to be high in uncertainty avoidance. These cultures tend to prefer consensus among members of their group and may feel threatened by what is different or disrupts consensus. Communicating with strangers might prove to be one of the circumstances in which group members may feel threatened and therefore feel more anxiety and stress. When dealing with non-group members, those cultures that are high in uncertainty avoidance tend to have a lower tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty in their interactions with outsiders. Members of collectivist cultures may retreat into silence or simply ignore the outsider when they are unsure of what rules apply to the situation in which they find themselves (Gudykunst, 2001). This would mean that the initial goal of CLAs would be to provide a way to create and establish relationships among group members which could facilitate communicative interactions and would then lead to the secondary goal of language learning. Recommendations for teachers based on this research may be for ESOL teachers to do a more in-depth examination of their students cultural perspectives on what motivates communication prior to creating CLAs in order to more effectively meet the needs of students in the group (Pashby, 2002).

Closely related to high/low-context communication preferences is the influence of an individual's power among group members of a culture and how the use of that power facilitates or inhibits communication among group members. It has been said that all in-

dividuals recognize that power, however legitimate, equitable, or oppressive is evident to some extent in all societies. For example, whether individuals have a high or a low perception of power may dictate how they will respond to perceived power, which is contingent upon their cultural background (Gudykunst, 2001). Most Asian cultures tend to maintain high-distance power relationships, while Western countries tend to operate with low-distance power relationships (Hall, 1976). When these two communication styles interact, those from a high-distance power relationship perspective may be startled by a questioning attitude to what has been said by those from a low-distance power perspective. Questioning or asking for clarification may be perceived as disrespectful and challenging, resulting in conflict within the group dynamics.

The cultural influences of gender should also be included in discussions of communication and power relationships because Asian and Western cultures have different perspectives on traditional interactions between men and women. Hofstede (1980) noted that Asian cultures typically perceive the role of men as assertive; with performance-driven value attributes perceived as strong and have differentiated roles for males and females. In contrast to this, women tend to be engaged in more nurturing and care-giving roles which may be perceived as more submissive and less assertive. Gudykunst (2001) states that research has found that while men and women have different roles in the social interactions of Asian countries, their attitudes toward certain issues may also reflect aspects of both masculine and feminine cultural characteristics. While all cultures exhibit aspects of both masculine and feminine characteristics, some cultures tend to have a stronger tendency for one over the other. Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan are seen

as having more feminine cultures because of their sympathy for those perceived as weak and their tendency to be motivated by issues of relationship, while Hong Kong, Japan, and the Philippines tend to have more masculine responses to gender in their cultures (Gudykunst, 2001; Hofstede, 1980). Understanding these viewpoints on gender roles is an important aspect of discerning how students may choose to respond to group interactions with CLAs comprised of mixed genders. Communication between genders in group activities is often influenced by previous cultural perspectives students may have of their roles in social situations and which may also influence their willingness to engage in whole CLAs.

Asian Historical Influences

A key dimension in responding to power relationships in Asian cultures flows from an individual's perception of his/her social status within a group and how people will be regarded within a specific group's hierarchy. Reasons to choose to interact socially with others are often influenced by traditional values that Asian countries share which are based on a collectivist view of social interaction (Phuong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2005). These traditional values often emphasize that individuals need to live their lives with benevolence, reciprocity, wisdom, and propriety in order to maintain social harmony (Hofstede, 2003; Pashby, 2002; Yum, 1988). The influence of a these values in Asian society has been noted through the importance parents place on the obedience of their children, the respect that workers show their superiors and the conformity that students should offer to their educational institutions (Seo, 2005; Yum, 1988). Phuong-Mai (2005) pointed out that in Asian cultures collaborative group work is seen to foster a feel-

ing of responsibility by group members to support the goals and obligations established by the group. Therefore, it seems that collaborative working groups would be a compatible option for communicative interactions between Asian and Western ESOL student groups, yet teachers have found that CLAs have had mixed success (Phuong-Mai, 2005).

Maintaining harmony in social settings is also important in Asian cultures (Hofstede, 2003; Phuong-Mai, 2005; Tan, 2006; Ting-Toomey, 1994). Social interactions are communicative in nature, and it has been said that the term communication refers to the exchange of messages and the creation of meaning when information is transferred (Gudykunst, 2001). East Asian cultures value spoken and unspoken communication in social settings and have complex responses for verbal interactions with others depending on their age, gender or social status (Gudykunst, 2004).

Since Asian cultures tend to be collectivistic, they strive to respect the hierarchical order of group members, which means social settings may be more formal in tone and are often evidenced by a polite communicative distance (Gudykunst, 2001). Consequently, social settings that are perceived as ambiguous may require more guidelines for Asian students because Asian culture has a highly developed social ritual in order to avoid situations that might be considered impolite or embarrassing. These guide-lines or politeness rules, within Asian cultures are directly related to behaviors perceived as offering respect to others when speaking based on their social status. Gudykunst (2001) points out that this allows "individuals to minimize themselves and others" (p. 137), thus ensuring that speakers may not have their personal status/power compromised.

The concepts of social harmony and empathy are important components in social interactions and are closely linked to what is commonly known as face which is the principle that governs the way Asian students perceive proper social behavior and may, in part, explain the phenomena of silence which may occur in U.S. classrooms. Losing face is a serious personal issue (Hofstede, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 1994) and avoiding situations in which this might happen is more important than influencing the groups activity or even telling the truth (Phuong, et al., 2005). When group interactions create an opportunity for an individual member to be criticized or challenged, students may opt for silence rather than risk losing face. Flowerdew (1998) observed that many Asian societies are hierarchically ordered and individuals are automatically endowed with respect according to their age, seniority and rank. She further noted that, interdependent relationship(s), peers, and especially superiors, must always be accorded "face" and not caused to lose it through overt and/or public criticism (Flowerdew, 1998, p. 325). While the Chinese students in Flowerdew's Hong Kong CLAs were supportive of the members in their working groups, they were reticent to challenge the voiced opinions of others and disliked giving critical feedback to peers in their group because of their understanding of the social concept of face. The reticence of students to engage in constructive, critical discussions with other groups may often reflect the students' sensitivity to their understanding of humility and respect for others within their group. Researchers have stated that the lack of engagement by some Asian students may not reflect a dislike for this type of learning methodology but instead point to a social construct of proper communicative behavior based on cultural perspectives (Kramsch, 1993, p. 327 as cited in Flowerdew, 1998).

Asian Cultural Motivation

While students may exhibit a reticence toward social interactions within coopera-tive learning activities, their presence within adult ESOL programs does represent moti-vation to learn the English language. Gardener (2007) stated that motivation to learn a language may be evidenced in a combination of three ways: a willingness to expend an effort to learn, a desire to achieve the goal of learning the language and an enjoyment in the learning experience itself. An additional motivation that may be influencing the Eng-lish language learning process for students is that English has become one of the most commonly spoken languages around the world due to globalization factors in commerce, science, and technology (Stevens, 2006). Researchers studying language acquisition pro-grams in South Korea have observed that while Korean is the first language of that nation individuals are pursuing English language acquisition in a very systematic way (Stevens, 2006). That is to say the Korean government's decision to spend time, money and effort to learn English are motivated by what appears to be a national strategy based on per-ceived future economic needs for that country.

Historically, the appearance of the American military after World War II in Korea as a deterrent against the spread of Communism in the region established an acceptance for the use of English for political, social and economic reasons on the part of the Korean nation. Since 1945 these factors have lead to a national perception that the ability to use the English language was a benefit for Koreans in their ever expanding economy (Chung 1983, cited in Stevens, 2006). The rise in the economic status of English speaking Kore-ans due to increased opportunities in business has led many Koreans to see the acquisi-

tion of English as a means by which they may effectively advance their social status. An example of this change may be seen in 2004 when the Korean Civil Service Commission began requiring all applicants for senior service positions to pass an English proficiency exam similar to the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Test English Proficiency – Korea (TEPS) exam in order to be considered for employment (Stevens, 2006). It has also been reported that some businesses in Korea are requiring their employees to be bilingual and that promotions to higher management positions within the company are often given to those who are bilingual (Sudol, 2009).

Additionally, English only instruction of the national curriculum within third, fourth and seventh grade classrooms was instituted across Korea in 2001 (H.N. Lee 2001, cited in Stevens, 2006). Parents who support this educational effort have engaged after school English tutoring for piano, drawing, math and computer help as well as English language learning and may also elect to send their children to intensive English language holiday programs all of which is very expensive and time consuming for students (Choi, 2001). Further evidence of motivation to learn English can be seen in those Korean families that have elected to move to Canada, the U.K., Australia or the U.S. in order to provide greater opportunities to acquire English language skills than home study or short-term visits might offer (Stevens, 2006; Sudol, 2009). One parent questioned on the migration approach noted that "Korean society is very global" and that their move to the United States due to the husband's profession would allow the children to acquire English language more effectively than could be found in Korea (Sudol, 2009, p. 1). The willingness of families to make these sacrifices demonstrates how "very important [it is]

38

to write and speak English" fluently in Korea today (Sudol, 2009, p. 1). These families are hoping that this type of strategy will pay huge rewards economically for themselves and their children when they return to Korea and reveal a new perspective on how cultural influences may be motivating Korean students to pursue English language acquisition.

Nunan (2003), in his research on the impact of the English language upon educational policies and practices in Asian-Pacific countries noted that governments in this region now believe that English language skills will promote greater economic opportunities for their workers than either monolingual or other than English workers. Consequently, China and Viet Nam, like Korea, have established a national focus on English proficiency requirement for university entrance as well as professional and government employment.

Summary of Literature Review

The process of language acquisition is influenced by the type of instruction used in the classroom and students' understanding of their role in the classroom to learn the target language. U.S. schools promote a student-centered approach that incorporates cooperative learning, and research studies have indicated that this may present a cultural conflict for some East Asian students in regard to normative communicative interactions formerly experienced in Asian classrooms. Research findings have indicated that the previous educational experiences of Asian students may reflect a preference for a teacher-lecture classroom format. This may leave them with challenges as they attempt to participate actively and naturally in collaborative language learning activities. Motivations for learning a second language may vary between students and may be reflected in the level

39

of participation they are willing to expend in classroom activities. Student perceptions of what authentic learning processes may entail may also be influencing their choices in participation in cooperative learning methods in U.S. ESOL classroom activities. While these factors may be seen to influence student behavior across a variety of cultures, they offer special challenges to adult Asian students enrolled in coursework in the U.S. Research in the field of SLA and ESOL teaching methods have explored a variety of the factors and effective teaching methodologies mentioned above with the exception of student perceptions on the value of cooperative learning as a means to acquire a second language. This study sought to provide a greater understanding of the influences that might be guiding student perceptions of the language learning process and the activities associated with ESOL classroom instruction.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

This is a qualitative study which focused on the perspectives (views) of the participants regarding the use of cooperative learning activities (CLAs) in adult education ESOL classrooms in the community college setting. The use of qualitative method provided rich data for analysis by allowing students the opportunity to share their perceptions (understanding) of the effectiveness of cooperative learning methods in ESOL classroom activities through their own stories and words. The objective of this study was to seek a greater understanding of adult East Asian student perspectives of CLAs used in their U.S. ESOL community college classrooms, in an effort to identify what factors may be influencing the level of student participation in CLAs and to determine what implications the students' perceptions might present for achieving effective pedagogical practices in ESOL classrooms. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the preferences and perceptions of adult East Asian students, studying at the community college level, regarding collaborative working groups and other cooperative learning activities (CLAs) that have been designed to help them acquire oral English language skills?

RQ2: What are the learning expectations of adult East Asian students regarding language-learning activities when enrolled in their community college ESOL classes?

RQ3: In what ways might the cultural perspectives of East Asian students be influencing their classroom performance and level of participation during discussion activities associated with cooperative learning methods being used in the community college classrooms?

Setting

This study was conducted in two community college ESOL classrooms, located in a large metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Twenty-five students from two classes participated in this study; they were between 18 and 30 years of age and were enrolled in the intensive language ESOL program of the College. The College is the largest educational institution in the state and the second-largest community college in the United States, with an enrollment of more than 60,000 students and 2,300 faculty and staff members in 2009. It is also one of the most internationally diverse colleges in the U.S. with a student body representing more than 180 countries spread across six campuses along with two satellite educational centers. The College offers more than 160 certificate programs and degrees at the associate level, along with distance learning programs through its Extended Learning Institute and Continuing Education courses through Workforce Development.

The College offers two types of English-language programs, a regular English-language program and an Intensive English Language Program. The Intensive English

Language program meets four hours per day, five days a week while the regular English language program meets only two days per week for approximately two hours. These classes are designed to improve reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills with classes grouped from beginning to advanced levels and placement being determined through language testing upon admission to the College. There are two stated purposes for these classes, to help students enter a degree program in the United States and to improve their English language skills for professional use. The Intensive English and ESOL classes contain international students who are here studying for a short period of time as well as students who have immigrated to the United States and are either preparing for college entrance or who need to improve their English for their current careers. The study takes place in two Intensive English classes.

Participants

Students

Two adult Intensive English Program classrooms comprised the sample population of participants for this study. Since one benefit of using CLAs in ESOL is to allow individuals to work collaboratively in groups to solve problems and to practice their oral language skills, the diversity of student backgrounds and languages spoken by all 28 participants in this study provided valuable insight into communication choices of participants during CLAs. The larger of the two classes, taught by Kay (pseudonym) contained 17 students, all of whom were from either Southeast Asia or East Asian except for three students. The three students from other than Asian countries were from the Czech Republic, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. The smaller class, taught by Cindy (pseudonym) had

11 students, six of which were from either West, Central or East Asia. The remaining

five students were from Tunisia, Turkey, South Africa and Kenya. Not all the students

from Cindy's class filled out a Questionnaire because they were not in class the day the

survey was administered or did not turn it in to the teacher. The students from South Af-

rica and Kenya were four weeks late in registering so were not initially in the classroom

when the Questionnaire was administered or the first observation session. Additionally,

the student from Turkey came to only one class during the study, an observation session,

where she received a Questionnaire but did not turn it in. There was only one student,

from Morocco, in Kay's class who did not fill out a Questionnaire but did participate in

all the CLA observation sessions. The interviewed students from East Asia represented:

three students from Korea (2/M, 1/F), two from China (1/M, 1/F), and one from Viet

Nam (1/F). The pseudonyms used for these students are Helen, Jim, Peter (Korean- KO),

April, Charles (Chinese- CH), and Jennifer (Vietnamese-VN).

Both teachers stated that all the students in their classes were willing to participate

in the study so all 28 students were observed during at least one or more of the observa-

tions sessions. The data drawn from these classroom observations noted how the East

Asian students chose to participate in the CLAs, particularly in comparison to their non-

East Asian counterparts.

While one aspect of this study focuses on the preferences that East Asian students

have for CLAs in their ESOL classrooms, noting the preferences of the remaining non-

East Asian students for language learning activities also provided important insight on

communicative interactions within groups containing Asian and non-Asian students.

44

Since one benefit of using CLAs in ESOL classes is to allow individuals to work collabo-

ratively in groups to solve problems and to practice their oral language skills. The eth-

nicity of group members, their native languages and their choice of interaction during

CLAs will be discussed more fully in Chapter IV. The variety of languages spoken by

the students in this study is shown in Table 1 and is organized by class. The percentage

of the Asian students participating in CLAs for the Kay's (K) class was 80% and was

55% in Cindy's (C) class. Both classrooms had slightly more females than males with

ages in both classrooms ranging from 18 to 35 years.

Table 1

Student responses for language of participants

Kay's Class* (Nationality/Language) 17 students	Cindy's Class* (Nationality/Language) 11 students
Korea/Korean (KO) 10 – 5 males/5 females	Korea/Korean (KO) 2 – 1 male/1 female
China/Chinese (CH) 2 males	China/Chinese (CH) 1 female
Viet Nam/Vietnamese (VN) 1 female	Viet Nam/Vietnamese (VN) 1female
Japan/Japanese (JA) 1 female	Tunisia/Tunisian, French (TU) 1 male
Saudi Arabia/Arabic (AR) 1 male	Mongolia/Mongolian (MO) 1 female
Morocco/Arabic (MO) 1 male	*Turkey/Turkish (TK) 1 female*
Czech Republic/Czech (CZ) 1 female	Indonesia/Indonesian (IN) 1 male
	South Africa/English (SA) 1 female
	Kenya/English & Swahili (KA) 2 males

*NOTE: Students in italics were observed but did not submit Questionnaires and were not interviewed for this study. *Classes hereafter will be referred to on tables as "K" and "C".*

Teachers

The two teachers who participated in this study taught for the college's Continuing Education and Professional Development department. Both teachers have been instructors in the Intensive English Language Program for at least seven or more years. The classes met five days a week for four hours each day and focused on reading, writing and speaking for advanced ESOL students. Kay has worked with international students since 1989, both in the United States and in Japan. She has a M.Ed. in international and comparative education with a focus in adult learning. Cindy (whose background is in linguistics has been an instructor for the college since 2000 and has a degree in Slavic languages as well as having worked as a translator of Russian, French and German.

Their roles as instructors in the Intensive English and ESOL Programs provided an excellent opportunity for me to gain insight into how they might be perceived by students because both teachers use cooperative learning methodologies for some portion of instruction in every class. These classes included a text-based reading and writing focus which provided students' with an opportunity to compare which activities most appealed to them in their language-learning experience at the college.

Procedures

Approval for this research study was obtained through George Mason University's (GMU's) Office of Research Subject Protections and its Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) review process as required by U.S. Federal Regulations and GMU policy requirements prior to the commencement of data collection. Approval for research from the community college where data collection took place was submitted to GMU HSRB. Signed consent forms to observe classroom CLAs and to audio-tape interviews with students and teachers (Appendix B and C) were obtained according to GMU HSRB requirements.

The research design for this study closely followed an interactive, constant comparative model (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005), which has a clear methodology for the selection, collection, and analysis of data in relation to stated goals, conceptual framework of the researcher, specific research questions, and addresses issues of validity. The collection of data from all three sources previously mentioned followed a similar process of selecting, sorting, categorizing and interpreting individual elements of information derived from written and spoken conversations. This analysis process for each data source

allowed terms and themes to be compared and contrasted in an effort to answer the research questions posed and accomplish the goals of this study.

Data Sources

Data were first gathered from responses submitted by participants on the Student Questionnaire (D) during a 15 minute break of one class period and collected by their teachers. All 28 Questionnaires, from East Asian and non-East Asian participants, were included to provide a better understanding of how individual CLA group members might choose to interact based on their stated preferences for language learning. Reviewing all Questionnaire responses provided deeper insight into the various language learning methods that had been experienced by the whole class prior to this study. Data were then collected from classroom observation field-notes of participants working in cooperative language-learning groups with time periods ranging from one to two and a half hours each. The construction of these learning groups provided East Asian students an opportunity to interact with students possessing a variety of foreign language skills during each class session. The classroom observations were conducted by the researcher and generated field notes. Final data sources came from transcribed audio-recorded interviews sessions, lasting approximately one to one and one half hours for each of the six students. The selection of students to be interviewed was randomly chosen based on the student's availability; and willingness to take part in the event on the day designated for interviews. The following table shows the process of the data collection and analysis used in this study:

Table 2

Data Sources

Participants	Data Source	Procedure	Analysis
Students (25)	Student Question-naire	Administered by classroom teacher	Data were quali-tatively sorted by terms and catego-rized into themes.
Students (25)	Classroom observa-tions	Researcher field notes of classroom activities	Data were quali-tatively sorted by terms and catego-rized into themes.
Students (6)	Personal interviews	Individually con-ducted by research-er	Audio recorded interviews were transcribed, sort-ed and catego-rized into themes.

The Questionnaire (Appendix D) was administered and collected by the class-room teachers prior to the researcher entering the classroom for the observations sessions. Four weeks after the study began three new students, two from Kenya and one from South Africa joined the class. Since the Student Questionnaires had already been sub-mitted and classroom observations were currently taking place, the decision to omit them from the study was made by the researcher.

Observational field-notes were taken by the researcher with a focus on observing student communicative interactions during classroom CLAs on three different occasions for each of the two classes. Data gathered from the Questionnaire was reviewed by the

researcher prior to the classroom observations in order to gain insight into the types of preferences most often listed by the participants. This data enabled the researcher to note various communicative responses given by group members during classroom CLAs. The decision to not video these sessions was made by the researcher in an effort to be as un-obtrusive as possible during learning activities.

The final data source came from scripted interviews (See Appendix E) which means that the same questions were asked of each individual in an effort to gather similar data. Follow-up questions were based on responses to the scripted questions and were requested for clarification of the statements being made. Six students, three from each class, who volunteered to share their perceptions of language learning in these classes, participated in the interviews.

The interviews took place in on-campus locations designated by the students' teachers on the day of the interview. These venues were selected to provide convenient access for students and a safe environment in which to talk to the researcher about stu-dents' classroom CLA experiences.

Interviews with students were audio-recorded and conducted in English. Transla-tors for the students participating in the study were available but not needed because the interviewees, who were enrolled in courses for advanced English speakers, were able to understand and answer all questions asked of them. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed with the permission of the interviewee; upon completion of this study these tapes will be destroyed.

As a validity check, the two teachers were provided an opportunity to review the data collected from their students' Questionnaires during an interview session in their offices on-campus with the researcher. Teachers were asked questions (Appendix F) on their methods of classroom instruction and their perceptions of the students' language learning experiences that semester as they reviewed the data. Their perspectives on the data they viewed were used as a check on the validity of the findings.

Data analysis

The three research questions guiding this investigation served as the basis for qualitatively analyzing data gathered from participants in this study. The data from all three sources were examined using a constant comparative approach to analysis (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). Additional information on participants' previous educational experiences in their native countries and classes taken prior to their current course at the College emerged from the Questionnaire and also emerged during interviews. These additional data provided greater insight into the participants' understanding of language learning methods of instruction being used in their courses.

Analysis of these data using the constant comparative method followed three stages: first, comments from the Questionnaires were examined for relevant terms or phrases describing language learning preferences of the students. Second, the terms or phrases were coded or categorized in order to compare the students intended meaning. Finally, the categories of coded terms that emerged across the data collected from the Questionnaires were grouped thematically.

The coding of data gathered from the Questionnaires and student interviews reflected the *emic*, or participant use of terms and phrases describing specific activities associated with learning English, such as activities preferred for learning vocabulary, grammar or practice in speaking English. Comments made during the interview session also produced terms which were similar to terms entered on Questionnaires, such as "teacher corrected sentences" and "teacher examples of writing sentences" which were then organized into categories of similar word groups. Examples from the category associated with educational experiences are "teacher-lecture", "individual" study or "group study" activities. The coding of interview responses and observational field-note data reflected an *etic* or researcher perspective of participants' actions in CLAs. When the etic data were combined and compared to the earlier emic data, broader categories were assigned such as "respect for social harmony" and "desire for maintaining harmony."

Finally, these coded categories were refined to reflect overarching themes to emerge across the data sources. The broad categories that emerged from the emic data were: teacher taught activities, individual study activities, English language ability, and group harmony. The etic data categories were teacher-centered instruction, oral English language skills and respect for social hierarchy.

The terms and phrases gathered from classroom observations were not analyzed with reference to the frequency of interactions among students because the focus of this study was on the perceptions that participants held of classroom language learning methods. Therefore, the data obtained from observation of verbal and non-verbal responses

made by students during CLAs provided insight into participant in-class learning interactions and student preferences for learning activities.

The six student interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then reviewed to identify and code specific terms and phrases describing preferences for and perceptions of language learning. These data were then categorized and compared to the data derived from the Questionnaire and classroom observations. The following table shows the data sources used to answer the research questions for this study.

Table 3

Data Sources and Collection Events

Research Questions	Student Question-naires	Classroom Observation Field notes	Participant Interviews
RQ1. What are the preferences and perceptions of adult East Asian students studying at the community college level, regarding collaborative working groups and other CLAS that have been designed to help them acquire oral English language skills?	X	X	X
RQ2. What are learning expectations of adult East Asian students regarding language learning activities when enrolled in community college ESOL classes?	X	X	X
RQ3. In what ways might the cultural perspectives of East Asian students be influencing their classroom performance and level of participation during discussion activities associated with cooperative learning methods being used in community college classrooms?	X	X	X

Interactively using data across three sources; the Questionnaire, classroom observations and individual interviews, helped ensure that researcher bias, specific methods and/or sources did not become a threat to the validity of the study (Maxwell, 2005).   The inclusion of additional independent data from previous research studies, which will be

discussed in Chapter V, further helped to ensure that researcher inferences drawn from observations and interviews offered a connection to a larger body of research on this topic.

Finally, my teaching experiences with international and ESOL students provided a framework for interpretation of the data collected from observations, interviews and surveys of both students and teachers. Having worked with ESOL students in the United States as well as Europe and Asia, I have gained a unique perspective of the language-learning process and the strategies that students often employ during collaborative task-based activities. My analysis of the perspectives of Asian students was also aided by my years of experience in teaching Asian students English in the United States and my observations of students in international settings pursing the same goals of learning a second language.

Validity Issues

Efforts were made to minimize any threat to validity. First, students did not have any relationship with the researcher prior to this study, and no personal interactions with the researcher occurred during the classroom observation phase of the study other than the initial introduction by the teachers explaining my current and future presence in the classroom. Teachers participating in the study do have a professional relationship to the researcher, which is to say, that they and the researcher were employed by the same College in which the study took place. Finally, the two teachers participating in this study were provided an opportunity to examine the data collected from observations of their classrooms and from the students' interviews in order to comment on possible miscon-

ceptions or inaccuracies on the part of the researcher regarding the interpretation of student behavior. The teacher reviews were conducted in an interview format with the researcher and employed questions (see Appendix F) to help guide the discussion of the data. The teachers were provided with transcription copies of the student interviews and encouraged to provide any further details they might have regarding comments on CLAs by the students. The feedback from these interview sessions helped ensure the accuracy of the data collected and sought to minimize any possible threats to validity based on the researcher's interpretation of events being studied.

Summary of Methodology

The data collected for this study include a Student Questionnaire, field-notes from classroom observations, and individual interviews with six students. The Questionnaire was completed and submitted by 28 participants in two ESOL classrooms. The individual interviews with both students and teachers were audio-recorded. Data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and sorted for descriptive terminology and themes related to the opinions of East Asian students and their teachers perceptions of the effectiveness of CLAs in language learning. Previous research studies, books, journal articles, and papers presented on this topic have been used to further guide the data analysis of the study. This study sought to discover an understanding of adult Asian ESOL students' perceptions of CLAs used in their courses and identify what these perceptions may mean for their participation choices and engagement during classroom activities.

Chapter IV: Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This study sought to gain greater insight into the preferences and perceptions adult East Asian ESOL students regarding the use of collaborative learning activities (CLAs) in their Intensive English-Language Program courses at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S.   Also of interest was whether the participants' previous educational experiences had prepared them for the communicative interactions with other students that are a part of classroom CLAs. Finally, this study explored whether cultural factors might be influencing their communication and responses during CLAs.

There were a total of 28 students from two classes who participated in this study. Data were collected from three sources: a Student Questionnaire on preferences for types of activities used when learning English, classroom observations of CLAs and individual interviews with six students. The qualitative data analysis of responses from the Student Questionnaires in this chapter has been organized according to the questions and appears in Tables 4 to 9. These data revealed that participants perceived specific types of activities to be more valuable than others in learning English.

Analysis of the behaviors of the students observed during CLAs and subsequent statements during their interview sessions revealed they held expectations for learning English in their classes based on personal learning goals. These two data sources also

57

examined possible cultural influences which appeared to guide the participants' choice of response to classroom CLAs. This chapter will present the study findings based on the data collected and are organized according to the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are the preferences and perceptions of adult East Asian students, studying at the community college level, regarding collaborative working groups and other cooperative learning activities (CLAs) that have been designed to help them acquire oral English language skills?

RQ2: What are the learning expectations of adult East Asian students regarding language-learning activities when enrolled in community college ESOL classes?

RQ3: In what ways might the cultural perspectives of East Asian students be influencing their classroom performance and level of participation during discussion activities associated with cooperative learning methods being used in the community college classrooms?

In general, four overarching themes emerged from the data and occurred across data sources: previous educational experiences, English oral language skills, preferences for language activities, and cultural communication patterns. These themes will be discussed in this chapter as they specifically relate to the three research questions. Discussion of the findings in this chapter address how these themes may have influenced participant preferences and perceptions of English language learning activities at the community college level, what expectations the participants had for their ESOL classes and whether cultural perspectives influenced their willingness to participate in classroom CLAs.

58

RQ1: What preferences and perceptions for learning do adult East Asian students studying at the community college level have regarding collaborative and other CLAs which have been designed to help them acquire oral English language skills?

This section examines the activities East Asian students prefer to use when learning a language and their perceptions of language learning in their current classes and is presented in two sections. First, the data drawn from 28 Student Questionnaires on preferences for language learning activities, and second, data from six student interviews of their perceptions of CLAs in learning English are discussed. The data drawn from these two sources are at times discussed simultaneously in order to give a richer context to the specific perceptions that participants expressed regarding their learning experience.

The data in the sub-section on Participant Perceptions are presented in three topic categories: *affirmative, ambivalent*, or *negative* views of whether CLAs were helpful in learning English. These categories emerged from data drawn from the six interviewed participants. The affirmative views were those statements that recognized the value of CLAs in growing student language skills, both written and oral. The ambivalent views were those statements that held CLAs to offer some benefit to learning but did not change the mind of the speaker in having a preference for learning activities other than CLAs. Negative perceptions were those statements that indicated the participants did not see any helpful learning aspects in using CLAs for learning English. The data also showed that the perceptions of CLAs and expectations for language-learning appeared to be influenced by the students' previous educational experiences.

In order to provide a context for the discussion of the data presented in this section and subsequent sections in this chapter, it is important to describe how the classes were conducted. The two classes in which participants were observed for this study were found to incorporate a variety of opportunities for students to read, write, and speak English each time they met. In the six observations (three for each class) conducted for this study, the teachers opened class with a whole class question/answer discussion that reviewed the concepts presented in the previous session and were then linked to the introduction of new concepts for that session. The concepts were then combined with a written component (i.e., worksheet, summarizing a text or group topic discussion) which was to be completed in CLA discussion groups. The conclusion of the class involved an additional whole class discussion of the results of the completed written component. This often involved one member from each discussion group presenting a summary of their answers for the CLA task to the whole class for further discussion.

Participant Preferences

This section will discuss the activities students stated they preferred in a classroom language learning context with data drawn from the Questionnaires (Appendix D) completed by all participants. The Questionnaire sought to discover what students perceived as the most helpful activities instructors could use for their language learning in the classroom. The responses regarding students' preferred activities in learning English were mixed and included both individual learning and collaborative methodologies. Analysis of the data from the questionnaire and later confirmed in interviews indicated that students perceived that teacher-guided, text-based activities are the most helpful for

grammar, vocabulary and writing activities but they prefer group activities for practice in speaking English.

Student Questionnaire responses for preferences in language learning activities generally reflect instructional methods that were regularly used by ESOL teachers at this College. The Questionnaire data indicated that the students hold the perception that the most successful strategies for learning English would incorporate a mix of individual and group activities. More students preferred a more interactive instructional approach for oral speaking activities but preferred individual or teacher-centered learning for grammar and writing. These data and student interview data regarding previous learning experiences with language instruction in their own native East Asian classrooms will be discussed in detail later in this section. It is also important to note that students submitted more than one term or descriptive phrase in choosing to answer a question on the survey which means that the data collected does not reflect one answer from every student for each question. Therefore, the summaries at the bottom of each table reflect all comments that were submitted by students for this study.

The Questionnaire findings (see Table 4) indicated that participants' preferences were split between activities that involved opportunities to speak English [group activities] and activities that involved reading or writing [individual activities].

Table 4

Student responses regarding activities helpful in learning English

K	C
KO-speak opinion [read, write, listen]	KO- memorization [vocabulary & phrases]
KO- game, presentations w/non-Koreans	TU-writing
KO-TV	CH-speak w/native speakers, movies, newspapers, novels
KO-reading books	MG-memorization, games
JA-speak w/native speakers	VN-study, speak w/native speaker, radio, books
KO-listening, dictation	
VN-speak w/native speaker	
KO-discussions, presentations, diary-writing	
KO-communicating [with others?]	
CZ-small group work, writing, grammar [vocabulary]	
CH-speak w/native speaker, correction when speaking [teacher]	
CH-group work, communicating [activities]	
AR-vocabulary, creative writing	
KO-games, quizzes, speak w/native speaker	
KO-presentations, TV, newspapers, writing essays & paragraphs	
<u>Summary Preferences:</u>	
<u>Interactive: 11</u>	<u>Individual: 15</u>
6 – speaking w/native English speakers	7 – reading, writing
2 – class presentations [collaborative]	4 – TV, movies, radio
3 – games	1 – memorization
	2 – dictation/listening
	1 – individual class presentation

Nationality: Saudi Arabia (AR), China (CH), Czech Republic (CZ), Japan (JA), Korea (KO), Morocco (MO) Mongolia (MG), Tunisia (TU), Viet Nam (VN)

The second most effective type of activity participants perceived as helpful in learning English involved hearing English being spoken. Participants listed TV, movies, and/or radio programs followed by student presentations before the class [collaborative, individual] or whole class games as being their preference for hearing English spoken.

When participants were asked how they preferred to learn new vocabulary (see Table 5), there was consensus for individual/teacher-guided activities. Writing exercises followed by games and activities that would reinforce the introduction of new terms were also listed by participants.

Table 5

Student responses for learning new vocabulary

K	C
KO-review, sentences, re-writing	KO-flash cards
KO-guess[game], locate/listen/examples	AR-games
KO-make sentences [homework]	CH-games
KO-w/examples of use [teacher/text]	MO plays [memorize], skits
JA-reading-word games	VN-games, writing
KO-w/examples, memorization	
VN-w/examples, writing sentences	
KO-write sentences, read often	
KO-define, use in sentences	
CZ-reading, discussion [meanings]	
CH-exercises to use new vocabulary	
CH-study [memorize], use in class	
AR-use in creating sentences	
KO-teacher explanation, textbook examples	

Summary of Preferences:

Interactive: 7	Individual/Teacher-Guided: 16
6 – writing sentences	6 – examples given by teacher
1 – flash card	6 – writing activities
	3 – memorization
	1 – quiz/test

When participants were asked how they preferred to learn grammar (see Table 6), the majority response was in favor of text-based activities. Activities that involved writing and teacher-centered instruction or correction were also listed as a preference.

Table 6

Student responses for learning grammar in the classroom

K	C
KO (1) - memorize, review	TU (1) - games, doing many exercises
KO (1) - homework, teacher corrects mistakes	CH (1) - writing sentences, corrections [teacher]
SA (1), KO (1) - different exercises [variety]	KO (1), MO (1) - exercises w/good explanations
KO (1) - textbook activities	VN (1) - writing sentences/speaking [teacher corrects]
CH (1) - classroom activities	
VN (1) - work w/partner [group], discuss wrong grammar	
JA, KO (3) - textbooks – teacher corrects mistakes	
KO (3) – writing, teacher explains [usage]	
KO (3), CZ (1), CH (1) - teacher explains, practice	
KO (1) - learn rules	
CH (1), TU (1) - games [helps them r-member]	

Summary of Preferences:

Interactive: 3   Teacher/Individual: 12

Analysis of participant responses to the question regarding opportunities to speak English in class showed an overwhelming preference for speaking with classmates within discussion groups (see Table 7). Least preferred activities included text-based activities and teacher led demonstrations, followed by opportunities for teacher-student interactions where their speaking or writing could be corrected by the teacher. While participants stated a preference for opportunities to practice speaking with a native-English speaker, their responses indicated that group work/discussions with classmates would also be acceptable formats for speaking English.

65

Table 7

Student responses for preferences to practice speaking English in the classroom

K	C
KO (3) - talking with classmates, teacher	MO (1) - group games
KO (3) - talk w/classmates other countries	CH (1) - discuss topics in s
CH (2) - presentations, teacher corrects	TU (1) - Presentations, debates w/classmates
JA (1) - talk in class [teachers sometimes don't let you speak in class]	KO (1) – express clearly, speak "powerfully"
VN(1) - speak to teacher [corrects mistakes], class presentations/compare questions	
KO (5) - presentations, discussion, tutoring	
CZ (1) - small group [3 people] discussion	
CH (2) - working groups, classmates [pairs]	

Summary of Preferences:

Interactive-Group: 20   Interactive-Teacher: 6

When asked what type of activities they had experienced in working groups in the classroom, participants revealed a variety of interactive discussion based exercises (see Table 8). The variety of working group activities students listed in their response to the Student Questionnaire suggests that the format of CLAs may have been experienced in previous classes at this College.

Teachers for the classes used in this study stated that all participants had taken at least one previous class at the College before being enrolled in these current classes, which suggests the teachers may assume that students recognize the value of employing these types of CLAs for specific aspects of language acquisition. However, students may not understand yet the value of such approaches to support their language learning.

Table 8

Student responses for previous student working group experiences

K	C
Reading, discussing	Brainstorming
Learn about different cultures [presentations]	Share ideas
Talking with others [answer questions]	Organize ideas
Reading, textbook exercises, games	problem w/pronunciation of Asian speakers
Field trip, discussion	
"Brainstorming," discussion [*James]	
Outside of class contacts [F-Jap]	
Projects, discussion for writing answers	
Talk, think, solve problems	
Solve comprehension [book activity]	
Talk, "debate," discuss newspaper article	

An examination of data gathered for each category of preferences revealed that the only time all participants preferred group work over other options was for learning vocabulary in Cindy's class (see Table 8). Participants in Kay's class preferred a combination of teacher-guided or individual activities for learning vocabulary. Cindy's class was the smaller of the two and her students had more opportunities to build closer working relationships with their classmates because the students rotated into groupings more often. These closer working relationships among group members may help explain the participants' preference for interactive vocabulary-learning activities. Helen and April (Cindy's class) specifically noted in their interviews that they perceived that individuals in their CLAs were ready to help them when they were unsure of their answers (word,

concept). Three students (April, Helen, Charles) interviewed for this study felt that CLAs

offered them unique opportunities for learning new vocabulary or grammar, which was a

perception not shared at the whole class level. Student Questionnaire data (see Table 9)

indicate that more participants preferred individualized approaches to learning vocabu-

lary and grammar, but the reverse was true with the interviewed students who felt

group/collaborative activities were helpful for vocabulary. When stating preferences for

learning grammar, the interviewed students' responses matched the preferences of the

whole class who stated that individual learning was more helpful. The only area of the

Student Questionnaire responses where a majority of students stated a similar preference

for cooperative learning was for the "opportunities for speaking English" section.

Table 9

Summary of individual v. interactive preferences for English language learning activities

Table	Individual	Interactive
Table 4 General preferences	15 (3)	11 (3)
Table 5 Vocabulary preferences	16 (1)	7 (5)
Table 6 Grammar preferences	12 (4)	3 (2)
Table 7 Speaking preferences	6 (1)	20 (5)

Summary: Whole class language-learning preferences are for individual activities except when practicing oral communication in English.

Note: participants' interview responses are shown in parenthesis. Individual preferences include teacher instruction and text-based activities.

Summary of Participant Preferences

Data analysis indicated that the students viewed the most helpful activities for learning English (Table 4) to be those that focused on teacher centered and, textbook-based individual performance activities over other group activities. Similar responses were given for learning new vocabulary (Table 5) and grammar (Table 6). However students stated that they overwhelmingly preferred group discussion activities or games (Table 7) for practice speaking English. Classroom observations of the participants in this study found participation levels in CLAs varied between silence in some groups to laughing and joking in other groups.

The study participants' willingness to engage in discussion activities was discussed by the six interviewees. The individual interviews with April, Charles, Helen, Jennifer, Jim and Peter regarding their preferences for learning English in the classroom

revealed they had a specific perspective of what strategies they viewed as most effective. The following section on student perceptions provides further insight into why students preferred specific types of activities when learning English.

Interview Participant Perceptions

Data analysis of the six participant interviews in the following section shows that participants' views are ambivalent concerning their perception about the value of CLAs used during class. Data collected for this section were drawn from the six interviewees, researcher observations of the interviewees' interactions with other class members during classroom CLAs and from the specific Student Questionnaires of these six interviewees.

The six students interviewed shared a variety of perceptions of CLAs, ranging from affirmative, negative and ambivalent. All six interviewees noted that the class they were currently taking was providing them with a variety of ways to improve their English language skills and they mentioned specific aspects of activities that they found to be most helpful with four out of six students identifying activities that the teacher either led or guided as being most helpful. When specifically asked about CLAs in their classrooms, only two of the six interviewees' stated purely affirmative responses, the remaining four offered additional negative comments to clarify their perspectives on the process. Only one student, April had previous working group experience in her home country. The other five students had not been exposed to cooperative learning style activities prior to enrolling in classes at this College.

Observations of the interviewed students' behavior in CLAs suggest that when students indicated positive perceptions of CLAs, their participation levels were more ac-

71

tive. However, classroom observations of interactions by interviewees who offered negative comments of CLAs were varied in their participation levels in CLAs. At times, these interviewees were primarily silent in their discussion groups, yet at other times they appeared to be more participatory. Observational data indicated that interviewees with affirmative comments appeared to be more consistently engaged and willing to speak with other group members. The data suggest that the ambivalent views presented during the interviews on participants' learning experiences may indicate that their expectations for language learning in this class were based upon previous educational experiences. Data drawn directly from participant' interviews statements show that students who came from Korea (three), China (two) and Viet Nam (one) most likely had experienced teacher-centered instructional environments in their home countries. The students defined their participation roles as: listening to lectures, taking notes, completing homework assignments and taking exams. Comments made by four of the six interview participants regarding previous experiences indicated that they perceive learning contexts that educators would define as teacher-centered instruction as being more valuable than student-centered cooperative learning contexts. The following sections will present data drawn from the six interviewees regarding participants' previous learning experiences which may be influencing their affirmative, negative, and ambiguous perceptions of the value of CLAs in language learning.

Affirmative participant perceptions. Interview responses indicated positive perceptions by four of the six participants regarding their learning when engaged in CLAs. Observations of these students during classroom CLAs supported their comments as

found in the interview data and showed them to be actively engaged in the topic of discussion with other group members. At times these students assumed the role of facilitator to help complete the assignment. During observations, Jennifer and Charles were often seen to be laughing and joking during discussion activities, which appeared to engage even the less communicative students in their groups. Helen and April were more serious in discussion activities but appeared relaxed which supported their comments that they viewed CLAs as enjoyable and helpful. The positive comments offered by Charles (Chinese), Jennifer (Vietnamese), Helen (Korean), and April (Chinese) noted that they viewed CLAs as enjoyable and valuable because of the support they received from other group members and the interactive format CLAs provided between students and teachers.

Helen, who had taken one previous ESOL class at this College, said she was "forced to speak up" in CLAs. Otherwise she would choose to sit passively in her chair. She also said it was "easy to talk" with others and ". . . usually I will not be a leader" for the group, but observations indicated that she stepped forward on three separate occasions to help another student who was new to the format of discussion activities in the class.

April, a student with university experience in Shanghai, was in her second class at the College. She shared that she "receive(d) help" from other group members when discussing the assignment topics.

My classmates and my teacher are very kind. We talk each other, we share ideas and but sometimes I forgot some special word and I don't know how to say it

[laughing] so they are also patient for me as I use body language [uses physical gestures] so they can understand me [more laughter].

Charles, who is from Hong Kong and is in his second ESOL class at the College, stated that he felt CLAs were a helpful way to practice speaking English because "they [everyone in group] are from different countries so you must speak in English." He also shared that he learned new vocabulary during the group discussions and when he didn't understand what was being said "they will explain to me if I don't understand." He also stated that the games used in class to help introduce or reinforce vocabulary were "helpful for that because my vocabulary is not good so this is helpful for me."

Jennifer, who is a student from Viet Nam, had attended college in her native country for around 18 months prior to attending classes at this College. She is currently taking her second ESOL class at the College and stated that the informal collaborative nature of CLAs allowed her the opportunity to approach the instructor more than her previous educational experiences. The informality in cooperative learning in her ESOL classes also allowed her to question the instructor without appearing impolite. When asked about communication with classroom instructors in Viet Nam she stated "we have to make very polite with them" because they might perceive that the student was questioning their teaching ability. She also pointed out that the interactions at this College had allowed her to "start to have teacher like your friends and joke with them."

Jennifer's statements specifically addressed the importance of receiving help from perceived "friends" in group activities, which were similar to the statements April and Charles made regarding the support they received from their group members. Research

on relationships in learning environments among Vietnamese students found that relationships are a critical to student perceptions and preferences for learning (Thanh, Gillies & Renshaw (2010). In their study of 145 university students' response to group work in Ho Chi Min, Viet Nam, Thanh et al., found that students were more engaged in activities where they perceived group members to be "friends." This study supports these findings as well as, based on statements and behavior attributed to Jennifer, who specifically used the word "friend" in regard to other group members as well as her teacher during the interview session. Jennifer was often observed by the researcher to approach discussion activities more socially with joking banter and laughter when she perceived the group members to be "friends." Data from researcher observations noted that she demonstrated a willingness to draw the quieter members into conversation by asking them questions during group activities. Jennifer shared,

> . . . I like make a joke – I like someone who is quiet – when I make a friend with someone who is talkative they cannot listen to me – so only me – when I want to make someone laugh especially the people who is quiet.

Jennifer's positive perception of CLAs and her learning experiences appear to be based on opportunities to establish relationships with group members during CLAs.

Previous research on cooperative learning indicated that students were found to respond positively to CLAs through active participation when the context and language proficiency levels would allow them to do so (Littlewood, 2001; Liu, 2005; Wong, 2004). These two aspects of cooperative learning were also found to be supported in the comments and behavior of participants in this study. The classroom context during group

75

discussion for Jennifer and Charles provided opportunities for them to practice speaking English in a non-threatening environment with classmates of a similar proficiency level, which was exhibited by their shared laughter. Research on classroom observations revealed a continuous exchange of dialogue among the group members, which suggested their willingness to participate or speak regardless of concerns about their responses being misunderstood or incorrect. When asked to comment about the level of difficulty in group activities, Charles stated "yes [it can be difficult] because I not speak that much then I am shy [laughing] so it is hard . . . but it is OK when we go to groups." Charles, Jennifer, Helen and April perceived CLAs to be positive experiences even though they appeared uncertain of their English language skills. They reported that when group members helped and supported them during these activities, they felt encouraged to participate and felt these were worthwhile experiences in language learning. These students also stated that their instructors appeared more open to their questions regarding how to complete assignments or to inquire about grammar points compared to instructors in previous educational experiences in their home countries.

Ambivalent participant perceptions. In the previous section, four of the six interviewed students commented positively on the value of CLAs in learning English. However, positive comments made by participants about their CLA discussion experiences in class were then juxtaposed by ambiguous comments made by some of the same students. Helen, Jim and Peter noted that there were two determinants in their perception of the value of a learning experience: first, the oral English language skill of the other group members should be greater than their own level, and second, group members

76

should be willing to speak up during the activity.   While these three students offered positive statements on CLAs they also specifically stated that they viewed teacher-centered lectures, one-to-one sessions with the instructor or textbook-based assignments as the most valuable learning activities. The teacher-lecture format used in earlier learning experiences prompted Peter to compare his perspective of individual-learning with the CLAs he was currently experiencing,

. . . if I do any assignments or essay and only focus on my idea and then submit to professor, then get revised then I can totally understand what is wrong with my essays. Group work is a little . . . it is not my own. I know my own . . . what is my weakness and my strengths so individual working is better. [It is] definitely better than group work.

All six interviewees stated that while the information provided by their instructor was valuable, they were divided as to whether the information offered by group members during CLAs was of benefit to them in learning English. It is possible these perceptions may be tied to previous learning experiences where teacher-centered instruction was used, which may not have prepared them to participate in more interactive learning activities, or consider CLAs as a learning pathway toward English language acquisition.

Comments offered by Helen indicated that she prefers participating in CLAs with students of higher oral English language skills because she perceives she gains more language skills from those interactions. She stated that the most valuable time she had experienced in class was when she worked with a classmate from Mongolia because that student was "very fluent in English," as opposed to those times when she was guiding less

fluent students through the exercise. Helen was observed at three different times in CLA

discussions interacting actively with questions and responses from classmates some of

whom were new to the class. When she was observed with more fluent speakers she was

less talkative and wrote more on her paper. Helen stated in her interview that she appre-

ciated when her fellow group members would help her with grammar or vocabulary

terms which might have been the reason she wrote more and spoke less with more fluent

classmates.

Peter, a young man from Seoul is studying English with a goal to eventually es-

tablish a business of his own and was in his second class at this College. He completed

his mandatory military service in Korea serving as a Korean-English translator with a

U.S. infantry division prior to immigrating to the United States. When asked on the Stu-

dent Questionnaire how he would like to practice English in the classroom he stated [he

wanted to be able to] "think expressions clearly and speak powerfully."   When asked

whether he thought CLAs helped him learn English he stated,

> it depends on who I'm with . . . someone who speaks really well then I learn Eng-
>
> lish from them but someone who speaks not very well I don't think I can get more
>
> beneficial from them.

Peter went on to state that he felt he benefited more from either teacher-guided activities

or textbook assignments than from CLAs when the group members were less fluent than

he. He was often observed acting as the facilitator in group activities because of his

higher level of oral English language skills. Consequently, he spent a majority of the

group time in organizing the tasks and asking questions of the group members in order to complete the assignment.

The influence of oral English language skills on student participation in CLA discussions was also stated by Jim, who said he was unclear whether the words used in group discussions were used correctly and had sometimes been confused by their application. Consequently, he did not always consider group discussions to be of value in learning English. Comments he shared during his interview suggests that his lack of interaction in activities may reflect his perception of the value of CLAs for his learning experience.

Jim shared that he studied English from the 4th grade to 12th grade and had taken two other classes at this College prior to the current one. While his College placement test stated his ELP levels were adequate for this class, he was often observed by the researcher as silent in CLAs regardless of whether the other group members were Asian, non-Asian or Korean. He rarely spoke and usually kept his eyes on the paper in front of him, even when the other group members were ones with whom he had worked with in previous activities. Observation field notes also indicated that during whole-class discussions, he did not speak to the class in response to any of the questions posed by the teacher or other classmates. Researcher observations of Jim during CLAs indicated that even when group members would look in his direction, as if inviting him to speak, he rarely responded to their unspoken prompts to join the discussion. When asked about speaking to members while in discussion groups he shared that "if someone doesn't know that [what] words can be used in conversation then it can be very awkward." In those in-

stances, he said he would sometimes stop speaking because of the types of words being used. Jim viewed the time he spent with teacher-centered instruction or individual study to be more valuable than group work.

The findings of this study support previous research (Xiao, 2006; Liang, 2004; Park, 2002) in which ambiguous or mixed preferences of Chinese (Hong Kongese) and Vietnamese students favored group learning while Korean students hold a negative opinion of group learning. Of the three Korean participants in this study (Helen, Jim, Peter) only one student (Helen) had only favorable comments on CLAs. The ambiguous perceptions stated by these students provided further insight into the experiences that helped shape their perceptions of the effectiveness of CLAs in the ESOL classes at this College.

Negative participant perceptions. Negative perceptions of CLAs were shared by Peter, Jim and Jennifer when discussing the willingness of group members to join in the learning activities for their classes. These interviewees again touched on their desire for the English language skills of the group members to be higher than their own when evaluating the value of CLAs in their learning process. Their comments did not offer any positive aspects to CLAs as part of the learning activity. Additionally, negative comments were made regarding the value of CLAs by these interviewees when CLA group members choose to be silent rather than joining in discussion activities. The choice of silence as a response to group activities appears to have frustrated the students who were attempting to participate in the group discussion and left a negative impression of the CLA.

Another negative aspect of silence offered (by Jennifer, Jim, and Peter) referred to the division of workload in CLAs, which was seen as inequitable among group members when some chose not to participate. The choice of some students to remain silent in activities meant that the work needed to complete the assignment had to be done by those students who were willing to participate in the activity. Two of the three interviewees (Jim and Peter) stated that they preferred to work individually on their language skills because it gave them and the teacher a better understanding of what they needed to learn. Their comments indicated that group work did not allow them to focus on their individual learning needs, which are an important factor in their evaluation of the value an activity in supporting language acquisition.

When Peter was asked about the value of group members working together on a task in his English language class, he shared that when others do not speak he has to speak more,

> Personally I think, I really. . . I took part [spoke during the discussions] in a lot of group work because my personality is very outgoing, easy going like to meet somebody else. I think it depends on the individual personality. Not everyone likes to speak, some other students don't think they have to [speak].

During class activities, Peter was often observed serving as a facilitator in group discussions. He appeared to organize the tasks in a manner that would prompt group members to contribute to the completion of the group assignment. He was also the group member most often seen to present his group's findings and answer questions during whole-class discussion when the other group members would not speak up. His com-

81

ments reveal his acceptance of the fact that these activities are part of the curriculum for this course; however, in previous comments he stated that he does not perceive that CLAs offer him the same learning opportunities that individual or teacher-student guided activities do.

Jim indicated during the interview that he did not like CLAs and felt that work that he could perform by himself was of the most value. When asked whether discussions during CLAs had offered him the opportunity to improve his English language skills, he said it was "a little difficult with people from other countries. If we say something in group words [discussion time] . . . vocabulary difficult." When queried on whether he felt comfortable in discussing possible answers to the task when the teacher would stop by their groups to check on their progress Jim said,

> . . . some people including me sometimes are uncomfortable working in groups. I sometimes when Kay gave some questions . . . I knew the answer but I didn't say anything. But teacher sometimes think 'you don't know.'

Jim's response to preferences for speaking English on the Student Questionnaire also indicated his preference for individual study where he stated that presentations in front of the class were most helpful. Although his preference appeared to conflict with his non-communicative behavior in class, the interview data indicated that he had liked participating in individual presentations in a previous class. When asked to describe what the task involved he said,

> [It was] very good. Teacher gave us topic to do some [research]. . . and just some subject for present[ation]. We do web search and from this website, television,

media and we talk [to s]. . . and we present our topic with PowerPoint using com-

puter.

When asked whether he preferred to do these by himself or with others he stated,

Just myself. I don't like groups because some people didn't do anything – their

parts – that was my case [experience]. When asked whether he had ended up do-

ing a lot of the work by himself he shared, they didn't do [shakes head for nega-

tive] – it's not fair.

Jim's comments provided insight into his opinion that group work was not helpful

and served to frustrate his learning experience in the classroom. It was apparent that he

did not mind the work involved in the presentation he gave by himself but he did not like

depending on others to accomplish a group task. Jim's silence during CLAs appears to

be a conscious choice on his part since he stated that even though he knew the answer he

chose not to speak. His preference for a specific type of learning activity appears to be

guiding his perceptions of the value of CLAs in language-learning, which is supported by

the research of Park (2002) who noted that Korean students preferred a more structured

individual approach to learning than did other immigrant ethnic groups and therefore did

not perceive that CLAs were effective in language learning. Park also noted that Korean

students' previous educational experiences with teacher-guided instruction may have left

them with the impression that this approach is a more successful strategy than CLAs.

Jennifer also pointed out that an additional negative aspect of silence occurs in

CLAs. She stated that when some members choose not to help complete the tasks it cre-

ates difficulties for the remaining group members who must pick up the extra workload.

One difficulty includes an increased workload for the members choosing to work on the task. When she pointed out her frustrations with silence in group work, I asked what strategies could be used for moving group members to take part in the conversation. Her response was,

> . . . when I want to make someone laugh [engage in discussion] especially the people who is quiet like [mentions names of male Korean students] . . . [I ask them] 'Wass up?' cause Korean guys almost all quiet

Her strategy was to encourage casual conversation which could be used to guide her group members to comment on the assigned task given the group. When asked why she thought Korean males were quiet she said, "I don't know but they don't like talk." When asked how that affected the activity she said, "Not good because only me talking." She then shared that

> then I make them have to talk . . . I give them . . . so example is that [task] is two parts or three parts with three people in group so I will start my part first. Only me who give the parts . . . they didn't say anything but I will say to a person 'hey, you read this one, and you read this one' because I don't want to only me be talk-ing. Don't you think so [she asks the group members] they say 'OK.' They say 'it's great idea.'

When asked for clarification on who was not speaking (males/females) she laugh-ingly stated, "The boys an(d) girls the same." Jennifer also observed that "Korean(s) when they speak they quiet they speak very small so I say to them 'speak louder' . . . I cannot listen to you [she whispers to demonstrate their speaking volume]." She noted

that when she challenged the "guys" they did in fact speak louder. She also stated that in addition to speaking very softly they often spoke very slowly. When asked if she thought their soft speaking was due to concerns about the correct pronunciation of the word she thought for a moment then stated "yeah."

One of the quiet students that Jennifer referred to in these CLAs may have been Jim. Given Jim's negative comments on CLAs I realized that his and other students lower participation levels were also being noted by fellow students. When Jim was observed in groups of various compositions: all Korean males, mixed Asian males/females and Arab males/Vietnamese students, he was silent in the discussion activities. In an effort to determine if his silences were linked to a lack of ELP, Jim was asked whether he ever considered speaking Korean when working on a task in groups comprised of all Korean speakers. He laughed and said "yeah"; however, observations of his participation in groups of only Korean students did not note an increase in conversations on his part. An example of this was seen in one classroom CLA with Jim and two other male Korean students. During that activity, they were all predominantly silent and appeared socially reserved with each other, even though the teacher said they often chose to work together when given a choice in forming a working group. They did not look at each other when they spoke but instead kept their heads bowed and chose to look down at their papers. Jim did not reveal any specific reason for his or the other group members choice to remain silent rather than speak in Korean to solve the task. The group members appeared to be of similar age and were dressed similarly in informal clothing, so determining if their individual social class or status may have been an influence in their choice of inter-

action could not be determined from observations alone. From earlier comments Jim had made, it may be that the level of his English language skills influenced his choice to remain silent during these activities and reflects his perception that focusing on individual learning activities is more valuable to him than CLAs.

Research on ELP by Cantwell (2002) in Australia and Cheng (2000) in China found that lower language-proficiency levels made students uncomfortable in social interactions and resulted in less communication among group members, as demonstrated by Jim in this study. Findings from this study also suggest that the slow and cautious speaking behavior of students observed in CLAs may have been influenced by their lack of understanding of the discussion process in addition to their English language skill levels (Cheng, 1998; Littlewood, 2001; Liu, 2001). This may have been what Jennifer was encountering when she discovered the need to allocate individual responsibilities in group activities with silent Korean students. Cheng (1998) noted that while some students may choose to be silent with heads bowed in reading, other students may use laughter and joking conversation to explain their lack of understanding of the task before them. This perspective was supported in this study by observations of Charles, Jennifer, and Peter in working groups where their higher oral English language skill levels and their outgoing personalities facilitated the activity through their solicitation of answers and thus contributed to higher discussion levels during CLAs, whereas Jim's lack of response or silences were often reflected in his groups lack of conversation. The students enrolled in the classes observed for this study had been tested and determined to have advanced English language skills by the College, the small number of communicative interactions during class

86

activities suggest that factors other than oral English language skills may be influencing their level of participation in CLAs.

Summary of Participant Perceptions

In summary, the affirmative, negative and ambivalent perceptions of interviewees regarding their expectations regarding teaching methods that would aid them in expanding their English language skills indicate that some students are engaged and motivated by the interactions of group members in CLAs, while others experience a variety of challenges and frustrations with the structure of cooperative learning. Researcher observations of CLA discussions described in this study found that some students in each group were slow to speak or to guide the activity for group members but through the encouragement of group members they gained the confidence to speak, which was evidenced by their level of participation. Three out of six students interviewed perceived that they were working more diligently and providing more information than were other members of their groups. Their perception of an imbalance in the work being accomplished led them to voice their frustration with CLAs and their perspective that they were of less value than teacher-based, text-based or individual work. Student participants' perceptions of the value of CLAs in their language-learning expectations for the class were divided, with three positive and three negative perspectives on the value of CLA in English language learning. In summary, three factors appeared to be influencing student perceptions of the value of CLAs in language learning: oral English language skill levels of group members, value of information provided in teacher-centered instruction and use of silence by group members during activities.

87

RQ2: What are the learning expectations of adult East Asian students regarding language learning activities when enrolled in community college ESOL classes?

Data analysis from the Student Questionnaire responses and the individual interviews of six students addressed the second research question. While the Questionnaire did not specifically solicit comments on expectations for the teaching methods they would experience in their classroom, the Questionnaire did ask students how they liked to learn English. Students' responses indicated that they expect that their preferences for specific activities will offer them a more successful language learning experience. Student preferences and perceptions on what they expected would be the most successful teaching method for learning English was more fully explored through interviews with the six students. RQ2 sought to discover what expectations the participants had for their English language learning classes at this community college and what personal learning goals may have been influencing their perception of CLAs as an effective means of meeting those expectations and goals.

Data collected on the learning goals of the six interviewees indicate that they intended to improve their grammar and writing skills through participating in these classes with an overall goal of seeking university admission or employment in the United States. The six interviewees also stated that their previous classroom learning experiences had been focused on skills which would help them pass written exams and not oral communication. The expectations of these six students for learning were found to be closely related to personal and professional goals they had set for themselves and appeared to be embedded in previous educational experiences prior to enrolling at their college. Conse-

88

quently, interviewees' statements on language learning placed a higher value on individual written performance than performance in CLAs. The following sections will discuss the influence of previous educational experiences and student goals on the participants' expectations for language learning in their community college ESOL classes.

Previous Educational Experiences

All six interviewees shared that their perception of how best to learn a language in the United States was at times based on previous English language learning experiences in their home countries. Student participant interviews and their responses to the questionnaire all indicated that the instruction they had received in their home country had been largely delivered through teacher lectures which gave a priority to written performance that subsequently focused on the memorization of grammar and vocabulary. The interviewees reported that their student responsibilities in the classroom activities in their home countries had two parts: to complete homework assignments which would be turned into the teacher for scoring and to take notes during the lecture portion of the instruction in preparation for a quiz or an exam. April, Charles, Helen, Jim, Jennifer and Peter stated that the classrooms in their home countries focused on attention to the speaker and rarely provided an opportunity for interaction with other classmates or between teacher and student.

April, a student from Shanghai stated that homework or classroom activities in her classes in China involved grammar translations which were predominantly individual activities. She stated that since her teachers were the only ones speaking English in class and because she perceived they spoke with an accent, she would often watch English TV

or movies to gain a better phonetic grasp of speaking English. She stated that individual, written work was the primary focus of teacher instruction and did not include opportunities for English speaking activities she had to arrange these activities outside the classroom. April's experience was similar to that of Charles who was from Hong Kong, as well as Peter, Jim and Helen who are from South Korea. These four participants shared during their interviews that although they had studied English from approximately the third to the twelfth grade they had little opportunity to speak the language because their classroom experiences were focused on grammar and writing exercises. All six interviewees reported that the teaching methodology used by the teachers in their home countries was delivery by lecture and supported by written materials from the blackboard. Peter and April shared that in all their classes, not just English language classrooms, the teachers 'spoke only' and that students were expected to just take notes. Consequently, the interactive teaching style used in their current U.S. college classroom has presented them with a very different learning context compared to their prior classroom experiences in their home countries.

For example, April and Helen shared that any questions students might have had regarding concepts presented during teacher-lectures in their native countries would have required them to meet separately with the instructor or seek the help of peers who were knowledgeable in after school study sessions to gain clarification. This meant that the time they spent in classroom learning was devoted to receiving information from the instructor and did not necessarily require any response from students nor did it provide opportunities for clarification. Helen stated that students were to take notes and further

consider the material after the class had finished. Helen also stated that prior to her current classes at this community college, she would "usually just sit at table and [look] at blackboard and professor just say [speak]." April also commented on her attention to the teacher in her home country when she shared "my teacher only has [is the one] to talk in English class" and that her responsibility as a student related to "the teacher just want you to finish your homework and then you have a chance to have [know] everything." This approach to learning implies that students did not have to 'search' for information or concepts because they would have been provided by the instructor during the lecture. Consequently, the student role appears to have been more passive in nature and perhaps did not encourage students to take a more interactive role in classroom learning activities.

The requirements for student responses in the classroom in Helen's home country were seen as fundamentally different from those she was experiencing in the United States. April compared her less interactive learning activities in China with those of her current classes saying, "in America when you have the activity you should ask the question and take part in some school [classroom] activities."   Whereas students received concepts from their instructor who they consider the subject-matter expert in their home country, they are now being challenged to formulate learning concepts on their own based on guided classroom discussions. They are being asked in their U.S. classroom to move from a more passive-role to a pro-active role in their learning activities.

Classroom observation data indicated that the course instructors usually included an opportunity for students to further develop concepts covered in the lesson during group discussion times. For example, a general pattern for discussion scaffolding is as

follows. Teachers would introduce a concept and demonstrate it via printed material

(textbook or supplemental resources) along with a technology component (computer,

smart board) for the discussion topic of the day. During the whole class CLAs discussion

phase the teachers used videos or images via whiteboards to create an opportunity for

discussion between the teacher and students. Teachers would then pose a question to the

whole class and participants were encouraged to respond to the question with their

thoughts on the topic. The final component of the lesson was to break up into smaller

student groups to further discuss the concepts and to formulate an opinion or generate an

answer from their lesson for that session. The six students interviewed for this study

shared that their previous educational classroom experiences had prepared them to work

on text-based written aspects of their lessons, but they had not experienced CLAs as a

learning approach. Jim shared that this interactive approach to language learning was not

something he had experienced prior to the courses at this college and consequently he felt

unprepared at times to participate in these discussion activities. All six participants

shared that their perceptions of the effectiveness in using CLAs in language learning was

related to whether the time spent in these activities would allow them to meet their learn-

ing goals of greater English language proficiency which they see as necessary for further

education or employment in the United States.

Goals for Language Learning

The learning expectations of the participants and their subsequent views on the

value of CLAs in language learning in this study were found to be influenced by specific

learning goals. Data gathered from the Student Questionnaire did not reveal any of the

28 participants' specific academic goals; however, the six interviewees stated that they had selected studying English at their college to help prepare for university admission in the U.S. They specifically indicated that they did have a goal in taking these classes which was to prepare for admission to a university and that they viewed reading, writing, grammar activities to be the most important focus for this learning experience.

This perspective was best illustrated by Peter, a young man from South Korea who was living with his brother while taking classes at the college. Peter said that he had been studying electrical engineering at a university in Korea after completing his military commitment but had decided to come live with his brother because they wanted to establish a business together in the U.S. once he graduated from a university. Being able to gain the necessary language skills to pass university admissions testing was a goal he had established when choosing classes at the college. When asked whether this class had met his expectations for learning, his comments specifically referenced the importance of improving his written skills in classroom activities:

> [I] think the most important thing to [do is to] memorize sentences than to just memorize single words. . .when I first time met Cindy [teacher]. . . actually taught me you have to do this – this kind of formal direction [format style] of essay. I can really follow her because I really learned in S. Korea how to write essay in Korean style but Korean/English style aren't [same]. But every time I submit to Cindy she corrected and she showed me 'you better write this way' because this is like broken English so then I re-write over and again. She's on textbook grammar and there is another part of index of useful model sentences. So I memorized six

93

or seven of these model sentences . . . 'these are American style; these are English style' [pointing to different sides of an imaginary page].

Out of all the classes in which Peter had participated, only teacher-guided interactions were given as examples as having met his expectation for language learning. Since he had stated the reason for enrollment at the college was to prepare for university admissions, Peter's interview responses suggest that his learning goals are guiding his expectations for effective classroom learning activities.

April, who had been studying nursing for two years in China prior to taking classes at this college had decided to pursue a degree in Business Administration at a local university and seek employment in the U.S. upon graduation. She felt that studying at this college was helping her prepare for that goal because the teaching methodology was more interactive and afforded her more opportunities to learn from the teacher and fellow classmates compared to her experiences in China. However, April shared that she felt she was working harder in the current classroom activities in order to improve her language skills and reach her goals compared to the system in China. She said that in China learning was focused on "the completion of written assignments . . . classes were longer time there but in the US the [daily] school [schedule] was shorter but feels it is harder to get a degree here" by which she means the amount of work involved in classroom activities here. She stated that she wanted the ESOL courses at this college to prepare her for university coursework and, at the time of her interview, felt those expectations were being met.

The comments provided by Charles, Helen, Jennifer and Jim regarding their goals for language learning also focused on specifically wanting to improve their ability to read and write English accurately with a secondary emphasis on oral proficiency. They also expressed their satisfaction with the number of opportunities they had for individual teacher-student interaction during writing activities. Having these one-on-one classroom discussions with the teacher on their individual work was viewed as an important aspect of meeting their goal of English language proficiency.

Summary of Participant Learning Expectations

Analysis of the Student Questionnaires of the six interviewees along with their responses to questions regarding expectations for learning English during their interviews indicate that their perspectives on previous educational experiences were influential in establishing goals for learning English at this college. The interviewees expected that gaining greater skills in grammar, and writing were important in helping them pass written exams and gain university admission to U.S. colleges and universities. Secondly, participant goals of future employment in the United States meant that speaking the language accurately was important to them and that CLAs were helpful in that aspect of learning English. These findings help provide insight into why participant expectations and goals to first seek university admissions influenced their preference for teacher-centered, text-based instruction. This influence was greater than their second goal of more oral proficiency in English in order to find employment in the United States. The impact that participant expectations and goals have on their language learning experiences at this College were found to be based on their perception in their home countries that

passing written exams is an important educational accomplishment and is possibly based on cultural perspectives of success. The influence that culture had on educational experiences of participants in this study will be more closely examined in the next section.

RQ3: In what ways might the cultural perspectives of East Asian students be influencing their classroom performance and level of participation during discussion activities associated with cooperative learning methods being used in community college classrooms?

This section presents the findings concerning the role that cultural perspectives had on the social interactions of the six interviewees; findings also address the impact their views had on their participation during CLAs. The findings in this study suggest that the importance East Asian cultures place on maintaining group harmony may be guiding some of the interaction and response modes of the participants during CLAs.

It has been said that "culture is the rule-governing system that defines the forms, functions, and content of communication" (Gay, 2000, p. 79). In East Asian culture, the level of communication and acceptable social interaction is often based upon the personal status (i.e., profession, age, or gender) of individuals in a group's social structure or class (Gudykunst, 2004). Therefore, the level of interaction that is expected to occur among group members engaged in CLAs in their U.S. ESL classroom suggests that East Asian students may need to understand the status of the various group members before they are willing to engage in discussion activities.

A characteristic that may be used to define or recognize the status of participants in this study would be that these individuals are all students in an ESOL classroom. So

they are meeting on the same social level for these classes but their status may be further identified by the individual participant's age which has been shown to an important characteristic in social interactions (Gudykunst, 2004; Pashby, 2002). A final characteristic that may identify status in this school context would be that of academic skills, specifically an individual's knowledge and use of the English language. As previously discussed in Chapter II, an individual's ability to communicate, in this instance in English, would bestow on them a perceived status and power within classroom activities. This perspective of status or value was discussed earlier in this chapter when participants related their perception that interaction within CLA group members with higher oral English language skills was a valuable learning experience. They also stated in the interviews that interactions with group members of perceived lesser language skills was a less valuable experience, and they would prefer to work individually with the teacher or by themselves in order to maximize their learning time spent in classroom. Consequently, the cultural perception that language skills have value and therefore have an intrinsic power which can be equated to social status in social or group communications indicates that understanding cultural influences may play an important role in constructing effective classroom CLAs.

The construction of CLAs in this study was organized by the teachers who said their selection of group members was at times random, but at other times it was structured to include specific students according to the level of their English language skills or their interpersonal communication skills. During classroom CLAs, participants were asked to break into groups for discussion of a topic, which required them to sometimes

interact with classmates they did not know in order to complete the assignment. Partici-
pant interviews revealed that, at times, participants felt the selection process used for in-
dividuals in CLAs was socially disconcerting because not everyone in the group ap-
proached the task similarly and they did not know how to socially interact with other
group members since as Jim explained "they [were] strangers." For example, when
asked about the types of interactions they had experienced in CLAs, participants noted
that responses by group members had ranged from non-responsive or silent to an auto-
matic agreement to any suggestion offered. Individuals who wanted to voice an alterna-
tive perspective on the discussion at hand, yet avoid what they perceived as a potentially
confrontational encounter when negotiating consensus, concluded that if they wanted to
maintain harmony during the activity they would need to adopt new strategies in order to
complete required tasks. Interview data revealed that participants' responses and interac-
tions appeared to be based upon their cultural perspective of what were acceptable social
interactions with other group members.

Cultural Perspective and Communicative Interaction

East Asian students in this study appear to be guided by their perception of what
constitutes acceptable cultural and social communicative interactions when participating
in CLAs. This section will examine how a desire to avoid conflict and maintain harmony
and respect for social status or hierarchy in groups may be an influence in the interview
participants' approach to CLA discussions in the classroom. The data analyzed for this
section came from the six participant interviews and researcher observations during class-
room CLAs. Findings suggest that there were cultural perspectives influencing students'

willingness to participate or not participate in classroom CLAs. These cultural perspectives appeared to be based on the participants' concept of acceptable interactions which would avoid conflict and therefore, maintain harmony in group discussions. Also, part of the interviewees' interactions was a concept of respect for the social status of individuals in their group interactions. The interviewees shared that they developed strategies to cope with the challenges of possible conflicts while showing respect for group members during their CLA interactions.

The following section will focus on the Asian cultural perspective of social or group harmony within CLA discussions. Negotiating differing opinions to determine the answer for an assigned task in a non-confrontational manner was found to be an influence for some participants. The data also suggest that the desire to avoid conflict and maintain harmony may be related to the desire for acceptable communicative interactions in social settings. Cultural aspects present in the data will be discussed in the following sections.

Avoiding conflict in CLAs. Research studies have shown that the desire to avoid conflict is an important factor in Asian cultures (Gudykunst, 2001; Pashby, 2004; Tan; 2006; Yum, 1994); it also emerged as a factor that was present in responses of the six students interviewed. Four of the participants (April, Peter, Jennifer, Helen) commented on their desire to avoid confrontations when offering a different opinion with other group members during CLAs. April said she often wanted to state her opinion during discussions but did not always succeed because she did not feel confident in speaking up when her perspective was different from that of other group members. Peter specifically said, "I don't want to make a mess in classroom" when referring to his caution when offering a

99

difference of opinion on the correct answer to a classroom assignment. Jennifer also said she is very cautious about the manner she uses to resolve differences of opinions with group members after challenging another group members' opinion in an earlier class led to a strained and uncomfortable relationship in class. Jennifer, who had commented on the difficulties she had experienced with other groups members during CLAs, now said she thought these difficulties may have come from differing social and, cultural views on acceptable responses to differences of opinion. Jennifer stated that the other group members, who were also Asian, appeared to interpret her insistence on knowing the correct answer as being disrespectful to older group members who were stating a different opinion. She said,

> Before came here [this s] the first semester I make a fight [difference of opinion
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> in a discussion] an after that I come home and I told my sister of that and she say
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> 'you have to listen to people because you are young and they are older than you'
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> and most of them are Korean and are very strict about you young so you have to
>
> listen to them. You have to remember you are younger than them and say 'yeah.'

She has now adopted a less confrontational strategy of offering her opinions during discussions with group members of varying ages and cultures but letting the group as a whole decide on which answer to submit rather than trying to persuade the group to accept her perspective on the correct answer.

April stated that she also employs a non-confrontational strategy for resolving stalled negotiations by asking the instructor to help the members of her group select the correct answer rather than challenging a specific group members' choice. April also stat-

ed that she has had experienced "problems" associated with presenting her point of view in previous class discussions. She said,

> Before in my CLAs we had presentation but sometimes the guys or the ladies want to just make some decision but I don't want it so I have to say 'Wait, wait I want to say my own opinion. I want you to know I don't like your ideas' but sometimes if they want to keep their ideas then I say OK I will follow you because we don't want to fight each other.

Helen said that since taking classes at this College, she feels it is important to offer her opinion during discussion. She stated that she wants to "give my idea but sometime they don't take I" for the final decision of the group.

Three of the participants in this study appeared to use non-verbal communication during their CLA interactions as a means of avoiding conflict in discussion activities while others felt it important to verbally offer their opinions in spite of previous unpleasant experiences. Interview data revealed that April, Helen, and Jennifer said they wanted to adopt a communication strategy that would allow them to speak up which would allow them to avoid creating, as April stated "a fight" which could be troublesome for the group's interactions. These three participants wanted to be able to participate in CLAs, and avoid conflict by using strategies that would preserve the social harmony of the group.

Finally, all interviewees were asked whether they had encountered any difficulties within CLAs due to age or gender differences and all six said "no." However, Jennifer's confrontation with an older Korean classmate seems to be related to cultural, social per-

spectives on age and acceptable social interactions. Additionally, observation notes indicated that Jennifer's interactions with Korean male group members and the Arab male students were markedly different. Jennifer's responses, which indicated that she perceived there were no problems based on age or gender, suggest that she has adopted communication strategies based on what may be a culturally related desire for maintaining group harmony.

Perception of social status within CLAs. The importance of recognizing social status and the perception that individuals have of status in groups is prevalent in most Asian cultures (Gudykunst, 2001; Pashby, 2005; Seo, 2005; Tan, 2006). The concept of social status, which was discussed more fully in Chapter II, helps provide insight into how participants may have decided to approach what they perceived as ambiguous social interactions within CLAs. Examples of this, as presented in previous sections, include Jim who stated during interviews that he felt uncomfortable in class with classmates he called "strangers", and also Jennifer who shared that having to establish a leader once they were in the group made her unsure at times how to respond to discussion requirements in order to avoid being disrespectful in not recognizing their social status. Additionally, Peter shared that those group members who thought they didn't have to speak made discussion activities less than satisfactory as a language learning tool for him. Consequently, group activities involving problem solving tasks, which were meant to encourage communication among students, may in fact have resulted in some students being more passive than pro-active within the group. This occurrence might be attributed to the cultural communication patterns of the Asian students.

102

When Jennifer spoke at length about the silence of the Korean students in her discussion groups, she shared that she did not know why her group members were quiet but both girls and boys were equally silent in the groups in which she had participated. Because Jennifer liked to work with students she perceived as friends, she was observed coaxing and joking in an effort to solicit responses from these non-communicative group members. However, observation data indicated that even Jennifer sometimes chose a subdued approach to discussion activities when the group members were non-Asian. Jennifer was observed in five groups during the course of the observation period for this study and in all but two she was laughing, joking, and very out-going. Most of her CLAs were comprised of either Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or Malaysian students. However, when she was grouped with Arab males, she was silent during the discussion portion of the activity. The Arab male students in the group were freely talking to each other but did not look at her or ask her questions. Instead they only spoke to each other, which may reflect the Arab cultural communication perspective of being respectful to women. Research has shown that in some Arab cultures males may not feel free to interact with females who are outside of their family, and if they do they demonstrate respect by not looking the female in the eye but instead look down or away from her face (USATDC, 2006). Jennifer followed their comments with apparent interest, in that she looked at their faces when they spoke even though they never looked directly at her nor seemed inclined to solicit comments from her. Even though the goal of this CLA was to provide the group members with an opportunity to speak the language while collaboratively

working on a task, the one-sided level of interaction between these students during this activity appears to reflect cultural communicative influence.

Whether Jennifer was aware of the social/cultural guidelines of the Arab male students in her discussion group is unknown, but her response of listening politely appears to reflect Asian cultural respect for social status within groups and a desire to maintain harmony in mixed group dynamics. In the second group in which Jennifer participated she again appeared unusually quiet. The group was composed of one Moroccan and two Korean male students, one of whom was Jim, who was always silent in discussion groups. Having observed Jennifer assume the role of facilitator in previous groups with Korean males, I was curious to see how she would respond to this mixed cultural all male grouping. She was again subdued, as were the Korean males, along with the Moroccan male student who was also speaking very little. It was unclear from interviews with the participants in this activity whether the Asian students response reflected their uncertainty on when to speak and how much to speak but their subdued performance in this group with non-Asian group members was more quiet than in groups with only Asian students. Of the four group members, the Moroccan male student was the most fluent in English, followed closely by Jennifer and Jim with the other Korean male the least fluent of the group.

During the interview session, Jennifer was asked about these interactions and the difference in her communication level with these specific students. She remembered the activity with the two Arab male students but she was hesitant to comment on those discussions for some reason. I asked if she felt more comfortable talking with females in

class rather than males, and she stated the opposite to be true. She clearly said in her interview that she like talking to "boys" more than "girls" in this class. While she had commented on the challenges of trying to engage the Korean students in discussion or comment on strategies for posing questions politely to teachers, she did not offer any insight into why she chose to remain silent in these two groups.

Research on Asian students' communication strategies in classrooms (Liu, 2001) pointed out that non-verbal communication may have a variety of explanations based on cultural experiences and expectations which are not immediately obvious. Class participation modes may be determined by a combination of factors such as a student's willingness/intent to speak, the opportunity to speak and a supportive classroom climate. He also noted that non-verbal communication strategies offered by Asian students may take the form of facial expressions or other physical responses rather than actual speech to show agreement with the speakers. This might explain, in the first example, Jennifer's response of intently watching the faces of the Arab males in the group when they were discussing possible answers to their assignment, yet not offering any comments of her own. She appeared to agree with their comments by a nod of her head and writing down notes on her paper while they spoke. The fact that the other group members did not apparently feel the need to include her in the conversation, which they could have done by asking her opinion, and her sensitivity to speaking her opinion in group discussions, may have contributed to her ongoing silence during this activity.

Jim's choice of silence in group discussions may also be related to his cultural perspective of social status and his comfort level in the social setting. He stated in his

interview session that he is often quiet in group activities because he does not know the other students very well. He also stated that he does not like group work based on previous experiences and said the conversations are uncomfortable.   CLAs placed him into social settings that he describes as "too much, too soon." Jim pointed out that even when the teacher sat in on their activities to help facilitate their discussion he "would not speak." He stated that he recognized he was leaving the impression that he was unsure of the answers to the task when in fact the opposite was true. When asked why he chose to respond this way, he shared that group activities placed him in communication situations that were socially uncomfortable. Jim's response was similar to the research findings of Tan (2006) with university students in Singapore who purposefully avoided any communication that would challenge the speaker in group activities. The Chinese students in Tan's study revealed that the goals of the students were more focused on maintaining harmony than on honesty hence their "unwillingness to confront and argue with others in public" (Tan, 2006, p. 659). Lui (2001) also pointed out that while Asian students are not always quiet or reticent in their classes; their willingness to participate can be influenced as much by social-cultural factors as pedagogical linguistic and cognitive factors. His study noted that some "students who were highly competent in spoken English were at times unwilling or hesitant to speak up in their content classes" and that this choice varied among individuals and across time (Liu, 2001, p. 209).

The ambivalent responses to participation activities by Jennifer, who at times was willing to speak up and facilitate the discussion of group members but at other times appeared to make a choice to remain silent, may reflect cultural influences on the part of the

106

group members involved. It may be that in an effort to show respect for the social hierarchy of the group, Jennifer's lack of speech reflects a concern for her oral English language skill level and a concern for conveying offense by offering comments that might have been considered an alternative view to the other group members (Gudykunst, 2001). While the higher oral English language skills of the male Arab students may have influenced Jennifer's choice of silence in their group activities, it would not explain earlier group interactions with Asian students of equal or higher oral English language skills levels where she confidently engaged them in discussion. It appears the cultural perspectives of the other group members (male) and the way the Arab male classmates chose to interact with her in the activity needs to be considered as a possible influence on the way she chose to participate during their discussion activities. It also appears that the difference in Jennifer's two participation levels may have been guided by cultural influences based on the individual social status of group members and their cultural responses to her.

Summary of Participant Perspectives of Cultural Influences

Participants' cultural perceptions appeared to assign importance to two areas of social interaction: avoiding conflict in group discussions, and individuals who were perceived to have social status within the group or power based on their language skills. The behaviors and the responses of Asian students in this study demonstrated varied responses for avoiding conflict in group activities. The desire to avoid social situations that may appear to be ambiguous or have uncertain outcomes is important factor in guiding social interactions in Asian cultures (Gudykunst; 2001; Pashby, 2002; Tan; 2006). The partici-

107

pants' responses to CLAs in this study did appear to reflect a concern for behaviors that were deemed acceptable and a desire to maintain a good working relationship or harmony with their group members. Four of the interviewees stated that their previous negative experiences had prompted them to adopt various discussion strategies that would allow them to participate in without being disrespectful or disrupting group harmony in this study. Consequently, participants were seen to modify their behavior in situations they felt may have the potential for conflict.

Finally, cultural perceptions of participants in this study regarding social status or power, as was discussed earlier in this section, may be seen to be a group members' higher oral English language skill during discussion activities. The participants with higher oral English language skills often assumed leadership roles which in turn appeared to garner the respect of lesser language proficient group members as was noted by classroom observations where group members were silent until one of the members provided a cue for discussion either through a statement or a question. Therefore, the findings indicate group members with higher oral language skills were more willing to speak and convey their thoughts, which in turn appeared to give them influence and status or power in guiding the group's discussion toward the conclusion of the tasks.

Summary of Analysis and Findings

The findings of this study were drawn from data collected from 28 Student Questionnaires, six personal interviews with Chinese (two), Korean (three), and Vietnamese (one) students, and researcher classroom observations in two ESOL classrooms. The study examined participants' perceptions of their language-learning experiences in their

adult English language classes at a community college in the United States, as well as their views and perspectives about what was the most effect approach to language learning. Findings revealed that adult East Asian participant perceptions of CLAs in support of their language acquisition during class time were generally more negative than positive. Participants stated that they perceived teacher-centered, text-based instruction as the most effective way for them to learn and develop English grammar and writing skills. However, findings indicated that East Asian participants overwhelmingly considered interactive, CLAs as providing the best option for improving their skills in speaking English. Additionally, the data suggest that while participants' previous educational experiences were in predominantly teacher-centered classrooms in their home countries, they stated that they viewed their learning expectations (RQ1) for language learning in U.S. classrooms as meeting their learning expectations. While they stated that their expectations for learning were generally being met and they were pleased with their current classroom experiences, data also indicated that some participants hold negative perceptions of CLA (RQ2) usage in class based upon their personal preferences for language learning. Finally, student interviews and classroom observations suggest that participation levels of some Asian students during CLAs may be culturally influenced (RQ3) by cultural perspectives for what some Asian cultures consider as acceptable behavior (Gudykunst, 2001; Hosftede, 1988, 2003; Seo, 2005; Yum, 1994).

Conclusions and implications of the study are presented in Chapter V. Additionally, recommendations based on the findings are offered to aide in improving the commu-

109

nicative interactions of East Asian students in classroom language-learning CLAs and

thus support their SLA in a culturally responsive manner.

Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion and interpretation of the findings, followed by the implications of the study, specific recommendations for engaging East Asian adult learners of English in interactive learning via CLAs and implications for future research. The recommendations born of these findings seek to inform and broaden existing research-based teaching approaches to promote language acquisition and communicative competence. Finally, the findings have led to new questions which should be addressed in future research regarding English language learning for adult East Asian students.

This study examined the perceptions, preferences, expectations, and cultural influences of adult East Asian ESOL students about the use of classroom CLAs at a community college in the mid-Atlantic area of the United States. Findings indicate that these students' learning preferences regarding communicative and group activities are both individually and contextually based and suggest that their interactions during CLAs are culturally influenced. The findings will be discussed following the three research questions that guided the investigation examining the views East Asian ESOL students have of their language-learning process:

RQ1: What are the preferences and perceptions of adult East Asian students studying at the community college level, regarding collaborative working

groups and other CLAs that have been designed to help them acquire oral English language skills?

RQ2: What are the learning expectations of adult East Asian students regarding language learning activities when enrolled in community college ESOL classes?

RQ3: In what ways might the cultural perspectives of adult East Asian students be influencing their classroom performance and level of participation during discussion activities associated with cooperative learning methods being used in the community college classrooms?

The findings related to language learning preferences and perceptions (RQ1) were drawn from 28 participant Student Questionnaires and six interviews with student participants, three from each of two classes. Findings related to participant expectations (RQ2) and the goals students held for their English language learning experiences were drawn from personal interviews. In addition, participant perceptions of cultural influences on their ESOL learning experience (RQ3) were drawn from the Student Questionnaire, personal interviews and classroom observations by the researcher. Classroom observations of language learning in CLAs were conducted in six sessions; three from each class for this the study and served to support the findings drawn from the Student Questionnaires and participant interviews. Teacher interviews to review the data were conducted as a validity check and served to support the findings of this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

112

The data obtained from the Student Questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations of adult East Asian English language learners provide answers to the research questions and reveal new data on student perceptions of learning. The following interpretation and discussion of the findings will follow three specific areas of influence related to CLAs: preferences and perceptions of the language learning process, expectations and goals for their learning, and participants' cultural perspectives of acceptable social interactions during CLAs.

Participant Preferences and Perceptions of Learning English (RQ1)

Preferences. Data drawn from the Student Questionnaires (28) and participant interviews (6) indicate that the adult East Asian students in this study held specific preferences regarding what they felt were the most effective strategies for learning English in the classroom. Their preferences for learning activities did not vary by gender or ethnicity. Their preferences for learning grammar and vocabulary were for teacher-centered or textbook-based individual learning activities, which participants stated allowed them to focus on their personal learning needs. Preferences for practice in speaking English were for activities that would allow them to engage the teacher in conversation, followed by speaking with classmates whose language proficiency seemed stronger than their own, and finally through presentations or discussions which would involve the whole class. The basis for these preferences was found to be shaped by the participants' previous learning experiences in their native countries and the United States. The desire to obtain the most accurate and relevant concepts when learning English were the stated reasons participants preferred teacher-centered and/or text-based activities over CLAs.

These findings affirm earlier research (Jeon, 2006; Thanh, 2008) which found that students preferred to work individually because group work did not help them improve their grades. In addition these findings support research (Butler, 2005; Park, 2002) which found that East Asian students often preferred teacher-centered, text-based activities based on a desire for more structured approaches to learning which they had experienced in their native countries.

Perceptions. Participant perceptions of the effectiveness of CLAs in class for their language learning were mixed. Data drawn from the Student Questionnaires (28) and six individual student interviews revealed a mixture of views regarding this teaching approach: affirmative, negative and ambivalent. These perceptions were also found to influence the type of interaction and the level of participation that took place in the CLA and were supported by researcher observations of participants during classroom CLAs. Some participants appeared engaged and motivated by their interactions in classroom learning activities, while others experienced a variety of challenges and frustrations with the structure of their CLAs.

Two factors emerged from the data as influencing student perceptions of CLAs as an effective mode for their language learning needs. First, classroom activities should maximize the time for learning opportunities, and second, the work required to complete CLAs should be equitable among the group members.

The first factor is based on the perception that the value of information provided in teacher-centered, and/or text-based instruction is greater than information shared by group members during CLA discussions and any time spent in activities other than teach-

114

er-centered or text-based was less valuable. Therefore, participants prioritized language learning interactions based on their desire for interactions with individuals or resources perceived as offering the most opportunities for learning the English language. In a classroom context, the participants perceived that the individual was the teacher and the resources were text-based materials; i.e., books, printed handouts, web sites. This perception is aligned to the previously discussed preference for teacher-centered, text-based instruction, because it was deemed more accurate and focused on concepts relevant to language learning than CLAs. This process of evaluating and assigning values to the types of learning opportunities available in their classes resulted in affirming, negative or ambivalent participant perspectives of CLAs.

This finding supports two areas of previous research with East Asian students that indicated, while some aspects of interactive learning may be perceived as valuable, these students prefer classroom settings that are teacher-centered, text-based and promote individual learning opportunities (Liang, 2004; Littlewood, 2001; Liu, 2005; Park 2002; Wong, 2004; Xiao, 2006). The research by Park (2002) that specifically noted South Korean students preferred more structured, teacher-centered learning contexts was affirmed in this study by Jim and Peter who stated a desire to obtain concrete examples of learning concepts given by the teacher in their classes. Second, East Asian students may have negative views on group work because they feel it does not allow them to concentrate on acquiring language skills as effectively as teacher-centered instruction (Butler,2005; Jeon, 2006). No research has been found on East Asian students' processes for

evaluating and prioritizing learning activities they perceive as most effective in English language learning.

The second factor found to influence students' perceptions of their learning experience in the CLAs was that work be equitable with contributions from all members of the group. The choice of some group members to not fully participate in CLAs was perceived by participants as creating more work for those who were willing to engage in the task created and resulted in a negative view of the activity. Consequently, when individual learning activities or student-teacher interactive learning activities were an option they were perceived as providing greater opportunities to gain valuable knowledge by the participant.

This finding supports research that found East Asian students perceive the efforts required in completing an activity should also be equitable among group members (Liang, 2004; Littlewood, 2001). This was found to be an important factor since non-responsive or silent group members during CLAs in this study resulted in negative views of this learning approach.

The impact that non-response has on how CLAs are perceived has been noted in earlier studies. Those research findings indicate, and the findings of this study affirm, that there are a variety of reasons why participants may contribute less work or not respond in a cooperative learning context. When students are unfamiliar with the role they should play in an activity they may choose to observe rather than engage (Chen, 2003). The English language proficiency of group members may be an influence in the level of group interactions (Liang, 2004). While participant Jennifer viewed silence as an indi-

vidual cultural approach to group communication, Peter suggested that silence or non-response was just one option among others for individuals in group interactions. Jim also viewed silence as a choice when the context was unclear, or became uncomfortable. Identifying possible reasons why East Asian ESOL students in this study may be non-responsive or may choose to remain silent in group discussion of an activity does not eliminate the fact that some of the participants were required to do more of the activity than others. In that context, group discussions become problematic because silent students are in effect shifting more communicative responsibilities to other group members when they chose to not speak (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009). It should be noted that while the participants in this study recognized there were reasons for the silence, they were not uniform in their perspectives of what prompted that silence or how it should be resolved.

Participant Expectations and Goals for Learning English (RQ2)

Study findings indicate that participants' language learning expectations were influenced by previous educational experiences in their home countries. Additionally, learning expectations were tied to specific goals participants held for their classes which they did not perceive as being advanced during CLAs. Based on the data from the Student Questionnaires, study participants were focusing their current learning efforts on gaining English language skills which they perceived as enabling them to pass future written college entrance examinations in English and subsequently acquire future employment. While, they stated their expectations for language learning were currently being met in the classes they were taking, some did not feel all the activities were supporting their goals of passing university entrance exams. The following sections will discuss

117

how previous learning experiences guided participant expectations and goals for learning English and the impact that had on CLAs in the classroom.

All six interviewees indicated that their previous educational experiences had primarily focused on written exam preparation and testing strategies and included almost no cooperative learning opportunities. However, the CLAs observed in this study were primarily focused on practicing English oral language skills and required little grammar or writing be performed. This is not to say that they did not appreciate the opportunities to speak English during CLAs with other students in their classes, but they viewed these oral interactions as being less valuable for taking written exams.

This finding affirms previous research that indicates students' previous educational experiences did influence student expectations for their current learning environment. Students may expect classroom instruction to be what they perceived as appropriate for their specific learning goals (Cheng, 2000). They may expect that classroom activities will allow them to use what they perceive as previously acceptable and successful learning strategies (Flowerdew, 1998). Additionally, some students' perceived that oral discussions are an unnecessary interruption of instruction where instructors provide students with specific facts they can memorize for written exams (Liu, M., 2005).

The goals for learning that participants held provided an important motivation for some students to engage in classroom activities in this study. This finding supports research (Gardner, 2006) which found that classroom experiences and cultural perspectives may provide learners with an intrinsic motivation to respond to learning activities. Participants' in this study responded to CLAs in a variety of ways based on their motivation

118

for learning. Some participants demonstrated a more competitive learning approach (Jennifer, Peter) while others chose a more cooperative, supportive view of learning (April, Charles, Helen) that may be required in CLA settings (Liang, 2004). All the interviewees stated that their expectations and goals for learning English had in some degree provided them with the motivation to engage in the new or different learning experiences offered by CLAs. However, the level of participation they chose was often influenced by the participants' cultural views of acceptable social interactions with group members which will be discussed in the next section.

Participants' Perspectives of Cultural Influences on Learning English (RQ3)

The findings indicate two cultural values common to East Asian countries influenced interview participants' focus and level of interactions during classroom CLAs: a desire to avoid conflict and respect for the perceived social status individuals have within groups. This study did not specifically seek to identify or determine cultural similarities and differences in group interactions among the participants' East Asian cultures; however, five students from different cultures all referenced similar behaviors they perceived as acceptable/unacceptable in relation to their own culture.

As discussed in Chapter IV, the desire to avoid conflict and maintain harmonious social interactions with others is an attribute often identified with Asian cultures (Gudykunst, 2001; Hofstede, 1980, 1988; Zhou, 2003). Although the participants in this study represented a variety of cultures, China, Korea and Viet Nam, they all stated it was important to them that harmony be maintained with their group members. Four of the participants (April, Helen, Jennifer, Peter) specifically identified what they considered a

119

confrontational tone in conversations was a concern for them. In order to avoid conversations that might deteriorate into a disagreement, they developed strategies that would help them avoid that possibility. This action allowed participants to balance their desire for harmony with the requirement of participating in CLAs.

The desire to participate in agreeable discussions with classmates is probably desired by most students; however, research findings indicate that conflicts are especially problematic for Asian students (Thanh, 2008).   Discord challenges their desire to participate in classroom activities and often results in their total silence during interactive learning activities (Thanh, 2008). This study supports these findings and offers additional understanding how employing strategies for a conflict free environment can support and enhance classroom learning experiences for Asian students (Zhou, 2005).

The second influential cultural value, also discussed in Chapter IV, which emerged from the data, is a respect for an individuals' perceived social position in a group, East Asian perceptions of social position or status may include age, rank, or gender. Findings in this study found that some participants' (April, Helen, Jennifer, Peter) approached communicating with group members during CLAs based on their cultural perspective of the respect an individual should receive from them. Although these participants were not all from the same country, all indicated they would adopt a specific type of behavior during CLAs based on their cultural perception of the social status of the group members.

This finding supports research that indicates Asian cultures have specific approaches to communication that may impact group interactions (Liu, J., 2001). These

approaches may include an Asian speaker's uncertainty over the ability to communicate with individuals in a proper manner based on the social context (Flowerdew, 1998). This study also supports research that found some communication responses by group members are perceived as being identified with a specific culture (Pashby, 2002; Tan, 2006). In addition, Asian students often have a respect for authority that may inhibit their initial conversations with individuals that are older or perceived to have special status (Liu, M. 2005).

This study also found that cultural perspectives on maintaining harmony and respect for the social status of others were related to previous experiences (April, Helen, Jennifer, Jim, Peter) with CLAs at this college. Some participants chose not to engage in CLAs because they found working with group members, whom they did not know, uncomfortable. Being required to take part in discussion groups and not knowing how to greet or respond to the various group members might also have also been influenced by their cultural background. This finding supports previous research that indicates Asian cultures have specific titles or terms used to address individuals based on their age, gender, and social rank (Gudykunst, 2001); therefore, discussion activities presented a variety of challenges to some students in this study. Participants' comments in interviews revealed they were at times unsure of what to say to whom and when to say it in CLAs in order to avoid being disrespectful.

Research findings of cultural influences in classroom learning activities, which were discussed in Chapter IV, have been mixed. Some research studies indicate a specific classroom context as the critical influence on student participation (Ellwood &

121

Nakane, 2009; Liu, J., 200; Wong, 2004; Zhou, 2005). However, other research studies found that a student's culture does influence choices to communicate, and that cultural communication patterns do influence their behavioral responses (Gay, 2004; Gudykunst, 2001; Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1988; Littlewood, 2001; Phuong-Mai, et al., 2005; Tan, 2006). The findings from this study support the view that cultural perspectives do influence how students approach communicating and participating in CLAs. The social nature of interactions during CLAs (i.e., the communicative interactions of group members when working on a task) suggests that the individual culture of each group member may have an influence on the level of participation that occurs in the classroom. This builds on the point made earlier that East Asian participants in this study appeared to share a cultural communicative approach to CLAs but may require further exploration to fully understand the extent of that connection. While there may be specific differences among East Asian cultures of what is considered socially acceptable communicative interactions within groups that was not the focus of this study. However, the findings of this study do indicate that there may be different perspectives worthy of research which would extend our current understanding on this topic.

Limitations of the Study

This study is unique because it examined a specific population of students (East Asian) and their perspectives on language learning through the use of CLAs at the community college level and their expectations for that learning experience. However, there are at least two limitations to this study: first, the geographic area where the data were collected is very ethnically diverse. Second, the teaching approaches incorporating

122

CLAs, although well known as approaches used to promote authentic language usage aiming toward increased oral language proficiency, were distinctive to the teachers in these classes.

The cultural demographics of the geographic region for this study are not representative of most areas in the United States. While the cultural demographics presented a rich context for this study, it also presented a unique aspect because these particular community college classrooms on this campus contained more than 85% East Asian students. From personal experience over time, the percentage of East Asian adults attending the classes for this study is fairly representative of the population in ESOL classes on this campus. However, I recognize that the demographics of ESOL classes on other campuses in this region vary, and also may not represent ESOL classroom populations across the nation. The next largest groups of participants were from Europe (one) and the Middle East (four), which may not reflect the demographic composition found in other U.S. classrooms.

Additionally, the methods teachers used to create language learning activities for adult ESOL classes in this study reflect the preferences of these teachers and may or may not be reflective of ESOL teachers in other regions. Certainly, the teachers' selection of topics used for discussion during the CLAs of this study reflects their personal choice and would vary among ESOL teachers in other locations.

Conclusions

There are three principal conclusions that may be made regarding the preferences, expectations and cultural perspectives adult East Asians student have regarding CLAs

along with the implications they have for language learning. The following sections will discuss how these conclusions may influence classroom instruction, and offer recommendations for instruction of adult East Asian learners. Finally, implications for future research on cooperative learning activities in classroom instruction where adult East Asian students are enrolled will be discussed.

The first conclusion is that students who prefer teacher-centered, text-based instruction of English predicated on previously successful learning experiences in their home countries will need help in perceiving the benefit of participating in CLAs. These students may desire more concrete evidence of their learning progress, which often occurs in graded paperwork in teacher-based or text-based activities rather than in cooperative learning contexts. In addition, they may not understand how CLAs are constructed, what learning objective(s) will be addressed, or what role they will be expected to play in the activity. As a result, students may approach classroom activities with reticence because they feel unprepared to fully participate and that may forestall any potential learning opportunities for themselves and others in their group.

A second conclusion is that students often have personal or professional goals for learning English prior to entering the classroom which may influence their willingness to engage in classroom activities. The desire to achieve these goals may have created expectations by the students for specific types of classroom instruction they perceive as being the most effective in helping reach their goals. These perceptions may then serve to motivate their engagement in classroom learning activities. If students perceive that the most effective learning experience occurs through teacher-center or text-based instruc-

124

tion, based on their previous learning experiences, they may not be motivated to engage in more interactive CLAs in their classes. Therefore, it is important for students to understand that participating in CLAs will help them achieve their learning goals.

The final conclusion is that cultural perceptions of adult East Asian students were found to play a role in their perception of the value of CLAs and influenced their engagement in English language learning activities. Some students responded to CLAs based upon their cultural perception of what is perceived as acceptable social interactions with strangers or individuals from another culture. While students may be responding from their cultural perspective they may not have an understanding of the cultural response of their fellow classmates during group activities, therefore, recognizing that cultural perspectives on acceptable communicative interactions may vary between students, some students may need more time to engage in CLAs.

Recommendations

If an objective of using cooperative learning methods to facilitate English language acquisition is the active participation of students in CLAs, three instructional components must be included in the classroom curriculum. First, teachers must provide students with an opportunity to learn more about how cooperative learning activities are designed and implemented in order for students to accept the challenges that participation in CLAs may require of them.

Second, students need to understand how their level of participation impacts their acquisition of academic skills. Since students may have had limited experience with cooperative learning and therefore not have noticed any change in their learning level there-

125

fore providing them with knowledge of how participation promotes learning will serve as a motivation to engage in CLAs. For that reason students may find the inclusion of activities that offer them measureable outcomes of their progress will serve to engage their interest and their participation.

Finally, the potential influence culture has in classrooms with diverse student populations may require sensitivity when requesting students to participate in group activities. Given that East Asian students are uncertain about how to participate in group activities they may choose to be non-responsive, it may be helpful to offer alternatives that will encourage their engagement. For example, providing them with the option to select their group members may provide a non-threatening option that will promote their willingness to participate.

Implications for Future Research

Opportunities for future research regarding additional areas of influence on student language learning at the community college level emerged during the course of this study. One significant area concerns possible cultural influences that gender may have on East Asian adult English language learners during group discussion activities. Existing research findings have found that gender and culture may influence students' choices of classroom participation (Gay, 2000; Liu, 2001). However, this study found a disparity between participant responses when asked about their perspectives on gender influences during CLAs.

All the interviewees in this study were specifically asked whether they found gender to be an influence on their communicative responses during CLAs, and all of them

126

said they did not think the gender of the group members was an issue in their choice of participation in CLAs. However, observation data noted that there was a change in the participation levels on the part of some of the female students when male students were facilitating the discussion yet, the participants either would not or did not realize a change had taken place in their own behavior.

It is unclear whether the changed communicative behavior on the part of some female participants in this study was due to cultural influences, the context/environmental setting, or individual personality differences in communication styles. While the changes were noticeable during classroom observations, the remaining data sources, question-naires and interviews did not yield any additional insight into why these changes occurred, nor why the participants did not perceive a difference in their communicative interactions in these activities. Discovering the basis for such conflicting results with the self-reported data of the students and whether culture influenced the group dynamics would provide insight on how to construct effective CLAs for diverse classroom populations.

The role teachers played in helping students develop positive strategies for successfully engaging in CLAs emerged as an important aspect for some participants in this study, and thus further inquiry into this topic would be valuable. It would provide an understanding of how students' cultures may be influencing their motivation and self-efficacy in classroom learning activities.

An additional area of inquiry emerging from this study which needs further research was some students' desire for teachers to be an intermediary in learning contexts

127

they perceive as awkward or uncomfortable. Discovering how teacher mediation may encourage the development of student strategies for continuing participation would be beneficial. Further research into the role students would like their teachers to play during CLAs may also help provide insight into where students may feel most vulnerable i.e., language proficiency, cultural influences associated with gender/age, in classroom learning activities.

Final Thoughts

When I began this study two assumptions were guiding my inquiry: the adult East Asian students in my ESOL classes genuinely desired to be able to speak, read and write English effectively and that some of these students appeared to be reticent in participating in the activities I had planned for their classroom learning experiences. The findings of this study confirmed that both of these assumptions were true and were guided by a variety of influences which I did not or could not immediately recognize. In the course of gathering data for this study, my discussions with participants have allowed me to gain a broader understanding of how previous educational experiences in their native cultures may influence students' perceptions of classroom learning. These findings will serve to heighten my cultural sensitivity when selecting CLAs for future adult East Asian ESOL students and will challenge me to personally engage my students in discussions on their perspectives of their learning experience throughout the semester.

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

- *Cooperative learning activities (CLAs)* is the researcher's acronym for cooperative learning group work activities constructed by the teachers in this study to increase student language learning skills.

- *Cooperative Language Learning (CLL)* "is part of a more general instructive approach also known as Collaborative Learning (CL)," and which "has been embraced as a way of promoting communicative interaction in the classroom and is seen as an extension of the principles of Communicative Language Teaching." From Richards, J. & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- *Culture* "consists of knowledge, concepts, and values shared by group members through systems of communication. Culture also consists of the shared beliefs, symbols, and interpretations within a human group." From Banks, J. & Banks, C., Editors. (2001) *Multicultural Education: Issues & Perspectives,*4th Ed. NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- C*ultural conditioning* is the unconscious process by which we are socialized to adopt specific ways to think or behave. From Hofstede, G. (1980) *Culture's consequences:* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

• *Social or Society* is a group of people that share "an identity, a feeling of unity," and organized around "a social system that has a social structure of interrelated roles." Societies exert "a strong influence on the behavior of individuals, that behavior is shaped by group norms, and that the group behavior patterns they need in order to adapt to their physical, social, and metaphysical environments." From Banks, J. & Banks, C., Editors. (2001) *Multicultural Education: Issues & Perspectives,* 4th Edition. NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Appendix B

Student Consent Form

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY, College of Education and Human Development

Student - Informed Consent Form for <u>Classroom Observations and Interview</u>
RESEARCH STUDY: *Adult Students' Perceptions of Cooperative Learning Activities*
Employed in Adult ESOL Community College Classroom
RESEARCH PROCEDURES
This research is being conducted to learn *student perceptions of cooperative learning methods used in NVCC-Annandale ESOL activities used to learn English as a second language.* If you agree to participate, *you will be observed during one of your classroom activities. You will be asked to answer questions (Questionnaire) on your preferences for learning English and your previous experiences in learning a foreign language. Students will be observed in cooperative learning activities with other students and do not need to interact with the researcher.*
RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.
BENEFITS
There are no personal benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in the ways in which students perceive cooperative learning methods in learning English as a second language.
CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study will be confidential which means your name will not be included on findings resulting from this study. Data collected for this study will be numerically to reflect your identity and the identification key assigned will be known only to the research.
PARTICIPATION
Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party for participating in this study. Participants will receive no compensation for participating in this study.
ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

131

Students who do not wish to participate in the study do not need to fill out the questionnaire and may leave the form unanswered. Students may be allowed to leave the classroom during this time period and return when the questionnaires have been collected.
This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.
CONSENT
I have read this form and agree to participate in the activities associated with this study.

_____
Name

_____
Date of Signature

Teacher Consent Form

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY, College of Education and Human Development

Teacher - Informed Consent Form for <u>Classroom Observations and Interview</u>
RESEARCH STUDY: *Adult Students' Perceptions of Cooperative Learning Activities
                              Employed in Adult ESOL Community College Classroom*
RESEARCH PROCEDURES
This research is being conducted to learn *student perceptions of cooperative learning methods used in NVCC-Annandale ESOL activities used to learn English as a second language.* If you agree to participate, *you will be observed teaching during one of your classroom activities. Teachers and students observed during cooperative learning activities with other students do not need to interact with the researcher.*
RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.
BENEFITS
There are no personal benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in the ways in which students perceive cooperative learning methods in learning English as a second language.
CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study will be confidential which means your name will not be included on findings resulting from this study. Data collected for this study will be numerically to reflect your identity and the identification key assigned will be known only to the research.
PARTICIPATION
Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party for participating in this study. Participants will receive no compensation for participating in this study.
ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
Students who do not wish to participate in the study do not need to fill out the questionnaire and may leave the form unanswered. Students may be allowed to leave the classroom during this time period and return when the questionnaires have been collected.

CONSENT
I have read this form and agree to participate in the activities associated with this study.

_____
Name

_____
Date of Signature

Appendix D

Student Questionnaire

1.	What is your native language?
2.	How many languages do you speak?
3.	Which languages have you previously studied in school?
4.	What activities do you think will be most helpful in learning English?
5.	How would you like to learn new vocabulary for English?
6.	How would you like to learn English grammar?
7.	How would you like to practice speaking English in s?
8.	What experiences have you had with working groups in this s?
9.	What activities have not helped you speak English better?
10.	How has this class helped you learn English?

Appendix E

Student Interview Questions

1.	What type of instruction did your previous teachers use to teach you to speak English?
2.	How has this class helped you speak English?
3.	How do you like to learn grammar or vocabulary when studying a foreign language?
4.	Do you think working with other students on activities where you speak English to solve problems has helped you to speak English better?
5.	When working in a student group to create a class presentation, have you felt free to speak English and not worry about grammar or vocabulary? If so (yes) why do you think that happened?
6.	What part of the group activities did you like the most?
7.	What part of the group activities did you like the least?
8.	How does the age or the sex of a group member influence whether you feel free to speak up in the group activity or to remain silent?
9.	After working on group projects in this class would you feel free to discuss (negotiate) a different approach to solving a problem with the members in your group or would you remain silent?

Appendix F

Teacher Interview Questions

1.	How often do you use a cooperative language learning activity (CLAs) in your class?
2.	How do you construct (select members) the working groups?
3.	Can you tell me any observations you've had of the students' communicative activities during CLL sessions?
4.	What strategies have been successful in the CLAs? What didn't work?
5.	If CLAs are not successful what strategy do you employ for students to accomplish the task?
6.	Can you give me any examples of the student responses when initially asked to participate in CLAs?
7.	What types of communication have you observed between students while they are working in CLAs?
8.	What type of comments have you heard students make on this type methodology for learning English?
9.	Can you tell me about your experiences with this methodology in teaching language learners?

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Curriculum Vitae

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