MA TESOL Students' Perspectives on and Experiences with Group Work

Meng Shao
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MA TESOL STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON
AND EXPERIENCES WITH GROUP WORK

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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May 2014
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This study investigated multilingual MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work. Eight multilingual MA TESOL students in a mid-sized state university in the northeastern United States from seven countries were separated to two focus group discussions to share their information about topic. The data was coded according the issues of culture, language, timing, assessment and misunderstandings and forms used in group work. The result indicated that group work was contextual, individual and long-term cultivated. The result also showed the interactions among both students and professors were crucial in group work.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I first introduce how group work began to catch my attention. Later, I illustrate the purpose of the study, which are MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work. After that, research questions are proposed and explained. Past literature is also briefly reviewed and methodological approaches are introduced. Finally, the significance of the study is emphasized at the end of this chapter.

Contextualizing the Study

During my past learning and teaching experiences back in China, teachers always played a much more important role than their students. Most of the teachers used lectures during the discussion. As a result, I could not get used to the discussion at the very beginning of the semester in my MA TESOL program and I always looked for accurate answers. During the course of teaching methodology, one of the teaching strategies—group work caught my attention. I had never thought the group work could be illustrated so specifically and could represent a type of teaching philosophy. This kind of student-centered teaching idea was seldom used back in China.

The lecture-centered teaching idea was rooted in my mind during the past years and had a strong influence on me as a Chinese teacher-scholar. I used to advocate giving students large amounts of individual work which lacked interaction among students. At the same time, I ignored the students’ potential to learn from each other and concentrated too much on the authority of teachers.

When I came to the United States to study in the MA TESOL program, I found that most professors emphasized encouraging students to study by themselves. At the
same time, lectures given by the professors were just a small part of the class. Most of the time, the professors would assign the students to different groups and tasks, fully trusting and respecting what the students found in the discussions. The teacher’s authority was reduced in turn and this phenomenon was unfamiliar to me according to my past learning experiences.

Thus after the class introducing the group work, some questions came to mind: could group work be effective anywhere? What are others’ opinions on group work? What other factors should we concentrate on if we are going to implement group work?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work. The study also served an educational purpose in trying to make valuable and practical suggestions to the implementation of group work in this MA TESOL program.

Group work, which emphasizes interactions between students, is also viewed as an important form of socio-cognitive and sociocultural teaching pedagogy (Baines, Blatchford, Galton, & Kutnick, 2003; Best, Sutton, & Zamora, 2005). The theory behind group work is a development from Vygotsky’s theory of zone of proximal development (ZPD), which state that “education’s role is to give children experiences that are within their ZPD, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 24). The further exploration of ZPD tried to break the limitation of learner-teacher/expert interactions in ZPD, and argued that, for second language acquisition (SLA) to occur in a way that will promote language learning, learners need to interact with their peers in small groups or pairs (Donato, 1988, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Storch,
2002). It has only been in recent years that the potential benefits of peer-peer interactions have become widely acknowledged (Clark, 2008).

**Relevant Literature**

An inclusive usage of group work including cooperative learning, collaborate work and pair work can be traced back to the last century. The studies focusing on group work in terms of language teaching and learning context mainly discussed several aspects in the context of English as Second Language (ESL) and English for Academic Purpose (EAP) in universities, including group work as teaching pedagogies, students’ attitudes to and challenges in group work, and some advice for implementing effective group work (Allen & Rooney, 1998; Dobao, 2012; Hu, 2005; Huong, 2007). The relationships among students and those between students and teachers were also discussed in the past studies (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011; Fushino, 2010; Melles, 2004). It was revealed from these studies that some ESL learners in ESL and EAP classes were facing challenges coming from language proficiency, culture background and other elements. Group work was beneficial to students in the ways of providing students higher thinking skills, self-esteem and confidence, intergroup relations, social skills, language skills (Davidson & Worsham, 1992; Greenfeild, 2003; Hu, 2005).

The implementation of group work in ESL classrooms has produced great achievements in students’ different language skills including their English reading, writing, listening and speaking competency (Day & Ainley, 2008; Huang, 2005; Hu, 2005; Melles, 2004). However, according to Allen & Rooney (1998), Hu (2005), Martine (2001) and many other studies, EFL learners were still facing some problems when they were doing group or pair works. For instance, research done on the challenges faced by
international students reveals that lack of experience with working in small groups and pairs has been a stumbling block in regards to their classroom interaction with native English speaking classmates (Martine, 2001). Also, Chinese students in EAP classes were facing challenges like how to maintain interpersonal harmony when giving advice to their peer review partners (Hu, 2005). At the same time, students also had different standards when choosing their partners according to their ages, genders and English proficiencies (Storch, 2007). It was indicated from the studies that some of the challenges faced by EFL students in group work may be caused by unsatisfying interactions between the partners.

However, there were still only a few articles exploring MA TESOL students’ understandings and experiences with group work. Therefore, my study attempted to investigate this gap.

The research question was: What are the multilingual MA TESOL program students' experiences and understandings of group work in learning and teaching contexts?

**Research Method**

To answer my question, a focus group interview as a data collection method was used. Participants were put into three focus groups, and each of the groups contained four participants. This smaller size of the group helped to make the discussion more effective than a large one, as Bloor, Franland, and Robson (2001) argued. The data collection was started by recruiting the participants. E-mails were sent to MA TESOL students to introduce the study and invite them to join it. After that, the prospective participants would receive emails about the schedules of the focus group interviews. Each discussion lasted for 45 minutes, and was both videotaped and audio recorded for analysis.
As reflected in the research question, the participants were students studying in an MA TESOL program. As for this study, 12 to 14 MA TESOL volunteers studying in a mid-sized state university in the northeastern United States were involved in the interviews after receiving an informed consent from the researcher. Some of the participants were English native speakers, and some were international students coming from other countries like Saudi-Arabia, China, Iraq, and South Africa. All of the participants spoke at least two or more languages besides English. All of these participants had abundant English learning or teaching experience.

I’d like to discuss the criteria for selecting this sample. First, choosing students from one program was an important aspect of achieving successful focus group interviews. Being in the same program, the participants were relatively familiar with each other, and in that case they could produce more information during the discussion by providing each other with a safe space to share information.

Second, according to the students’ syllabus, some of the students had taken a course named “Introduction to Teaching Methodology,” which explicitly introduced group work in education. As a result, deeper understandings of group work could be discussed by these participants.

Third, these MA TESOL students were prospective teachers who would probably conduct group work in their future teaching, thus they would be more active in discussing their “common interested question” (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2007).

Finally, since these participants were from different counties and backgrounds, it was likely that they would provide various experiences and contribute to the study.
In the beginning of the discussions, three scenarios about group work were presented to the participants, and prompt questions like, “please think about group work you have been involved in, and tell one another what it was like” were asked. The participants were free to discuss anything related to group work in learning and teaching contexts, and some follow-up questions were asked to find answers to the research question.

The data from the interviews was first transcribed. Later, the transcripts were grouped according to different topics including the following: the participants’ opinions on group work in their classrooms, the problems they faced encouraging their peers and their students to interact during group work and their solutions, and their advice for group work in classrooms as novice teachers. After that, the data was summarized and concluded according to the categories. The implications from the results were discussed in the final part of the research.

**Significance of the Study**

During the study, I explored some issues concerning group work based on MA TESOL students’ experiences. I, too, was involved in cases similar to ones the participants discussed. After analyzing the cases, I started to realize why some group work was not as effective as they were expected to be. As a result, I began to pay more attention to some factors influencing the final outcome of group work. At the same time, there are benefits for the MA TESOL students who can gain additional understanding of group work by listening to and discussing it with other colleagues. Also as prospective teachers, we can learn more about group work strategies by understanding students’ opinions. The study can also provide strategies in future learning and teaching contexts.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, past literature focusing on group work in learning and teaching context is presented. The scale of group work used in this chapter is firstly defined. Later, the literature on group work is reviewed including group work used in primary and secondary schools and group work used in universities. Next, group work employed especially in universities is deliberately discussed in terms of different themes, such as group work as a teaching pedagogy, students’ attitudes towards group work, challenges and solutions to the implementation of group work. The relationships between teachers as instructors and students as participants, and the interactions among students are also reviewed. Finally, the requirements for all the participants of the group work, both of the teachers and students, are summarized.

Introduction of Group Work

As “group work” and “teaching” were typed in EBSCO, several key words appeared—group work, collaborative work, peer review, and pair work. It was still hard to give a concise definition to group work after reading all the related literature including literature on collaborative work and pair work. As a result, in this literature review, group work is defined in an inclusive way as “a general teaching strategy where students work together in face-to-face interaction without direct teacher supervision to achieve a common goal” (Bowering, Harvey, Hui & Leggett, 2007, p. 105). There are two main reasons to define group work in such a way. On the one hand, there is no obvious strict line among the different types of group work in all the reviewed literature. Moreover, different types of group work in literature were often discussed together. For instance,
Fushino (2010) elicted group work with the descriptions of “Group work (including pair work) has been increasingly used in English as a second language (ESL) classroom” (p. 700). Also, Dobao (2012) stated that its research field concerning group work was confined to “pair and small group activities” (p. 40) and Storch (2007) conducted the study on “small group and pair work” (p. 143). As a result, it was implied that group work defined in a general way was acceptable.

On the other hand, although some of the clear definitions of different types of group work, such as cooperative learning, was in past literature as Olsen & Kagan (1992) described,

Although commonly used to describe any form of group work in a classroom, CL (cooperative learning) is actually a highly structured method defined as a group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the social structure exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. (p. 564)

It still could be interpreted that group work, collaborative work, cooperative learning, pair work and so on shared the nature of the interactions between group members (Blatchfor, Kutnick & Galton, 2003). These forms of group work emphasized interactions between students, and was also viewed as an important form of socio-cognitive and socioculture teaching pedagogy (Baines, Blatchford, Galton, & Kutnick, 2003; Best, Sutton, & Zamora, 2005). The theory behind group work is a development from Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The theory suggests that education’s role was to give children experiences that were within their ZPD, thereby
encouraging and advancing their individual learning (Berk & Winsler, 1995). The further exploration of the ZPD tried to break the limitation of learner-teacher/expert interactions in the ZPD, and argued that for SLA to occur in a manner that would promote language learning, learners needed to interact with their peers in small groups or pairs (Donato, 1988, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Storch, 2002). In relatively recent years, the potential benefits of peer-peer interactions have become widely acknowledged (Baines, et al., 2003; Clark, 2008), and argued that contextual considerations for study were substantial in education but frequently overlooked.

**Group Work in Teaching and Learning Context**

Many of the articles discussed about group work in different teaching contexts. Baines, Blatchford, Galton and Kutnick (2003) talked about group work as a social pedagogy in the background of the United Kingdom. The research argued that a suitable method to the contextual and group based features of classroom learning had been ignored. It also talked about four main scopes of group work, which were “the classroom context, interactions between teachers and pupils, the nature of group tasks and activities, and a strategic approach to their interrelationships” (p. 163). The authors finally emphasized the need of realizing these four dimensions and that high quality group work was a mixture of “knowledge based constructivism” and “effort based learning”. They also suggested that it was necessary to build a social pedagogy that could help the improvement of the use of group work in school, and foretold that group work and co-learning might be more critical in the future.

At the same time, Donetta, Woods-McConney and Wosnitza (2011) conducted empirical research in primary-level science classroom. The study investigated 130
students’ individual objectives and views (appraisals) of small group work in their class. The study found students’ individual goals were strongly connected to how they thought of doing science in groups. Moreover, the study provided advice on group work in beginning science classes and helped teachers know more about students’ opinions on group work. The study also indicated how teachers’ grouping of students would influence students’ group work goals and views. The study suggested that there were benefits for explicitly helping all students to develop their positive view of the implications of group work for their learning.

Although some articles discussed group work in the context of primary schools, more research on group work was conducted in universities. Some of the main issues of group work deliberated below were based on that background.

**Students’ Perceptions of Group Work**

Many articles indicated great connections between students’ perceptions, attitudes toward group work, and their performance in group work. (AlKandari, 2012; Cool et al., 2008; Hu, 2005). As it was mentioned previously, the primary students’ attitudes toward group work were seldom shown in past literature. As a result, most of the data in the literature was selected from undergraduate and graduate students, including international students in EAP and ESL classes.

Chang (2010) studied on how group developments like group cohesiveness and group standards, would affect EFL students’ motivation. The study tried to focus on the relationships between students’ personal experienced and their communications in group work. Over a hundred Taiwanese university students from the English Department took the questionnaires, and the results showed that there was a slight to moderate correlation
between group processes (group cohesiveness and group norms) and students’ level of motivation (self-efficacy and autonomy) (p. 129). Students indicated that they would have more positive motivation when they were with other enthusiastic students, while students would have less motivation when grouped with less passionate students.

Hui and Leggett (2007) investigated Chinese students’ understandings on different types of collaborative work in a Master of Education program. The research indicated that students regarded think-pair-share and teamwork as the most effective forms of group work. The study finally reinforced that “group work could be very effective in such bilingual, content-based courses in China” (p. 113). It also showed that group work was realizable among Chinese students by “providing opportunities for the students to deepen their understandings, untangle problems, share their experiences, and extend their networks in the educational field” (p. 113).

Campbell and Li (2008) studied Asian students’ views on collaborative learning concepts by interviewing 22 Asian students in a New Zealand institute. The study used group work and group assignments as two main types of collaborative learning. The results showed that Asian students thought highly of those kinds of group works because they were benefited in terms of improving English and extending views on culture making new friends. However, doing group work as a project was least welcome among those Asian students. It also indicated that “factors affecting group dynamics included: members’ attitudes and willingness on students’ time and attention, heterogeneity from the natural abilities of students, and the varying cultural values and beliefs held by group members” (p. 78). The study indicated that both advantages and disadvantages existed in collaborative learning. In future group work implementation, “students’ needs, interests,
cultural values, beliefs, and teaching effectiveness rather than teaching trends should be considered a priority in teaching in tertiary institutions” (p. 86).

Hu (2005) also tried to discover the attitudes of peer review in English writing class but in the long run. She compared students’ attitudes in the years of 2001, 2002, and 2003 in the researchers’ English writing classes. It was indicated that the most successful implementation of group work was in her 2003 class after she gained experience from the previous years, and it was this group work that students developed the most favorable attitudes toward peer review. The data implied that students would take group work seriously under their positive attitude toward group work with peers. It was also pointed out that students clearly recognized the value of peer review in improving their academic writing competence.

The studies not only revealed students’ attitudes towards group work, but also showed those students’ expectations to different roles in the group work. AlKandari (2012) introduced students’ expectations to the faculty members’ roles in encouraging their classroom engagements. Students desired different activities that could lead to supportive environments for quality learning and communication. It was indicated that students mostly preferred to participate when they felt respected by their instructors and classmates as well. As for the students’ ways to view their peer advice, the results showed that students made efforts to incorporate peer suggestions in their revision but didn’t take up peer advice without careful thinking.

Fushino (2010) helped to deliberate some inter-factors influencing students’ attitudes to group work. This study provided three individual factors in second language (L2) group work settings: students’ communication confidence, beliefs about group work,
and willingness to communicate (WTC). This study indicated that WTC would be
influenced by beliefs in L2 group work strengthened by communication confidence, and
as a result, WTC influenced students’ participation in group work in learning.

Mansfield and Volet (2006) also talked about students’ appraisals toward group
work in terms of their goal of participating in group work. The study examined the
mediating role of students’ objectives in group work at an Australian university and
emphasized the relationships between students’ learning objectives and their views on
group work. The study discovered that students with negative attitudes towards group
work were more likely to focus more on themselves in group work while students with
positive attitudes on group work usually had more than one objective in their study. The
study lastly reinforced the importance of the relationships between social and well-being
goals in group work. It also stressed the importance of explicitly valuing social forms of
learning at university, and observing group processes to encourage positive outcomes for
individuals and the group.

**Relationships in Group Work**

There were more studies, led by Vygotsky’s ZPD theory, which emphasized the
interactions between teachers and students, and among students (Bowering, Leggett, and
Hui, 2007; Dobao, 2012; Huong, 2007). The relationships include the roles of teachers
and students in group work.

Some of the articles emphasized the role of and expectations to
teachers/professors as instructors in group work. Long (1985) pointed out, “Correctly
organized group work does not reject, but necessarily stipulates the leading role of the
teacher” (p. 186). Donett, et al. (2011) indicates the important role of teacher when
designing a group work activity. Also, explicit teaching about the positive implications of small group work in science would likely benefit all students and increase the overall effectiveness of this frequently used instructional activity. Brown and Huang (2009) stated that North American teachers usually regard themselves as students’ facilitators of learning, not authorities of knowledge.

At the same time, Baines et al. (2003) provided the requirement for teachers’ roles, which were getting prepared to work with groups, and being sensitive to wider classroom issues. The article suggested some ways of conceiving how teachers could make group work productive. The article argued that the role of teachers in group work was crucial in terms of “lowering the risk for pupils and making work fun,” and “to structure lessons carefully to facilitate learning in group.” It also pointed out that it might also be helpful to think of the teacher as a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage.

Best, Sutton and Zamora (2005) stressed the significance of practical decisions teachers made when they implement group work. The study was based on two professors’ descriptions of group work in their literature and writing classes. It was found that “both of the teachers structured groups in advance, determined group size, how to form groups, specific work agendas for groups, and the amount of time to set aside for group work” (p. 77). The teachers also emphasized the role of instructors, “pointing to a blending of direct instruction and group facilitation, capturing the shifting from one student to the other, and telling how they simultaneously maintain distance from and monitor students’ groups” (p. 77). At the same time, the study showed that one of the professors’ implementation of group work cultivated students’ critical thinking skills, while the others stressed the necessity of trust among student writers (p. 77). The group work not only helped students
improve their writings in classes, but also cultivated students’ responsibility and contribution that would lead to a succeeding class assignment. The study concluded that “the practical decisions instructors must make when incorporating group work into a class activity should be highlighted, and group work was a flexible pedagogy responsive to course content and course level in support of student success” (p. 78).

The interview in Chang (2010) indicated, “the most important feature of a good group was the cohesiveness of the group—being with classmates who are interested in learning and supportive of each other” (p. 150). Whilst there were many articles focusing on the role of teachers in group work, there were some studies focusing on the interactions and relationships among students as well.

The interactions between students’ choice of partners was indicated in Balghizadeh (2011). The study was on students’ preference to their group members and it was suggested that learners would prefer to work in pairs rather than in small groups, which further indicated that in some classes learners might feel more comfortable in pairs with certain tasks, and the teacher could consult with them on this issue and then come to a compromise to do certain tasks in pairs, group or even as a whole class. This study also indicated that students would like to choose to work with those who were familiar to them—their friends in most cases—and those the same age as they were.

Baines et al. (2003) also talked about the interactions between children. It suggested that pupils had to learn to trust and respect each other, and also needed skills on how to plan and organize their group work with the aim of working. Only in that way could students improve their communication skills.
Huong (2007) investigated the relationship among a peer’s ability and how to do group work and the result of doing group work. Such relationship tried to illustrate the concept of “peer,” which was less discussed by Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). First-year Vietnamese English learning university students were examined in “unassisted” and “assisted” settings, the first contained five students from the same class and the second included four from the same class and a more experienced student from a higher class. The senior student made a marked difference to the group of the assisted group’s process (p. 229). The results suggested that the more experienced student played a very important role in the progress of group work. This study showed the power of giving instructions. The senior student assisted the group work in three effective ways according to the research.

Existing Problems and Tentative Solutions

Many articles discussed the challenges in group work and gave effective suggestions. For instance, perceptions regarding the challenges of group work appeared to be similar to those of their native speaking counterparts and it was difficult to participate in small group discussions (Melles, 2004). For ESL students in Yang’s case, the students stated that they were not confident speaking in English during their group presentation. Also, five Chinese students of Commerce studying in Canada reported that they had limited experience with group work, which led to hours of discussion on how to conduct their group work. What was worse, they didn’t get a good score in presenting their group work in class because they failed to follow the teachers’ instructions. The Chinese students also talked about their perspective on other group work experiences with other native students in the Commerce class, feeling that local Canadians didn’t like
to work with them. At the same time, the students talked about the difference between the
group work in this EAP class and their former ESL class. According to students, the
professor was usually expected to present his knowledge rather than communicate with
the audience.”

Therefore, it was clear that different cultural background could be a problem in
the implementation of group work. Melles (2004) showed that students had some
difficulty “understanding some of the underlying principles of western approaches to
group work and how these different principles seem to contradict, e.g., democracy and
convergent responses, each other at times.” And the article provided the solution by
saying “future research could explore further the role of modeling in apprenticing the
newcomers into their academic community.”

Brown and Huang (2009) discussed how Chinese ESL students’ culture
influenced their academic learning (p. 643). The study showed that large amount of
student participation, and discussion decreased students’ understandings of academic
lectures (p. 648). It also argued that Chinese students tend to work individually and
students studying liberal arts approved that group work caused them more challenges in
lecture comprehension than students of science (p. 649). It suggested that better learning
environments for culturally different students should be provided in the research context
of a North American university. It also suggested that teachers should be aware of
challenges faced by Chinese students in the classroom. Also, they should encourage
students to actively participate in classroom discussions, adjusting teaching methods to
make it easier for Chinese students to accept the form of class. The other solution to fix
the problem included listening to the voices of students. In Yang (2010), the students argued that they would do better in group presentation if they were given a model first.

Pearson (1999) suggested that one solution to improving cross-cultural communication was getting students to workshop and negotiate the meaning of culture and use this to restructure learning. Donetta et al. (2011) also gave suggestions on identifying students’ appraisals of group work to investigate students’ views on group work. They could ask students to respond to some statements like “I am happy to do this group work with this group of people” or “Doing this work with this group makes me feel nervous” (p. 24). By looking at these responses, teachers could adjust their group activities and hopefully avoiding ineffective group competition. Bosh & Helfrich (2011) pointed out that one of the barriers in teaching was that teachers might not be aware of the value peers, including other ELLs, have in the inclusion and education of ELLs. It argued that ELLs could benefit from each other in terms of language and process of acquisition, and the opportunity to further practice his or her skills, no matter what language proficiency these students have.

While culture was one of the challenges faced in the group work-facilitated classroom, Allen (1988) proved two special problems with conducting problem-based group work. First, students were often grouped together as a result of enrollment patterns or seek each other in group assignments. Second, their backgrounds typically involve prescriptive educational models that match their preference for orderly, hierarchically arranged, classified, segmented, and quantitative dissemination of material. The solutions to these phenomena in learning and teaching contexts consisted of the responsibilities given to students as group members and teachers as instructors.
Fashion (2010) provided requests for teachers to improve more effective group work. It suggested that at initial stages, teachers should make extra efforts to reduce communication apprehension in L2 group work by providing team-building activities with which group members could develop bonds and thus could reduce their communication apprehension. It was also implied that enhancing students’ confidence to communicate in English might be more efficient. Huong (2007) also argued that effective employment of instructors contributing to effective group work should be paid attention to.

Chang (2010) suggested that since students’ relationships contributed to the effective group work, teachers could “focus on members of the group getting to know each other better”, or “using ice-breaker activities at the start of the term” (p. 150). The study also emphasized the importance of ensuring various opportunities for sharing ideas and feelings with a wide variety of classmates. It also suggested that teachers could hold activities at the end of group work to summarize or praise students’ group work.

Other literature provided effective advice to conduct group work in learning and teaching contexts (Davies, Menon, Russell, and Zeegers, 2005) including some useful pedagogy of group work. It was suggested that fairness should be given attention during group work, and self-assessment or group assessments as reflections to students’ work is recommended after group work. DelliCarpini (2008) mentioned five essential components of collaborative learning activities, including positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face prompt interactions, social skills, and group processing. Training for group work to pupil was also required as Baines, et al. (2003)
pointed out. It argued that group work skills have to be developed, which means proper training of pupils are required.

Summary of the Chapter

It could be seen that there were many similarities and differences in the reviewed articles. First, as was mentioned before, there were a significant amount of articles emphasizing group work in EAP/ESL in the context of higher education, while the implementations of group work in primary school were less mentioned compared to the previous one as Cook et al. (2008) argued that the importance of group consciousness has been underplayed. And it was also mentioned that there was an assumption that group work didn’t fit pupils. However, it was indicated that group work could work effectively in the ways of improving pupils’ communicative competence and some other aspects (Baines et al., 2003). As a result, teachers’ views on doing group work in primary schools are valuable in the future development of group work application.

Many articles also mentioned students’ attitudes toward group work in classes. These perceptions connected group work with students’ daily goals, their motivations, and so on. It was undeniable that these perceptions on students’ group members, instructors, and group work itself had great influence on the implementation of group work.

Teachers’ role in the group work were frequently mentioned in the past literature review in different ways, from views of students’ expectations to teachers and achieving effective group work and their role as instructors, or just a guide on the side. AlKandari (2012) suggested that professors as instructors should appreciate students’ different experiences and ideas, even if they contradicted with their points of view. As
DelliCarpini (2008) stated, teacher educators could close the gap that sometimes existed between practices that are recommended and the teacher educators’ or trainers’ own approach. Moreover, there was often a gap between teachers’ theoretical knowledge and their classroom practice. Lack of support, negative experiences, and lack of self-efficacy contribute to teachers’ low incidence of implementing CL (cooperative learning). It could be inferred that teachers’ knowledge and education were an important part of taking group work in classrooms. As Allen (1988) described, teachers choosing the group task “provides the best foundation as scope, relevance, and interest are issues eventually affecting all communication outcomes” (p. 53). Also, to what extent the instructions should the teachers give was also discussed in some articles (Jocab, 1996). However, the teachers’ own opinions on their role in group work were seldom explored in the past literature. There was only one article focused on enhancing group work in TESOL teacher education.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the past articles on group work in classes, and found the gap of finding multilingual MA TESOL students’ perspective on and understandings of group work in learning and teaching contexts. In the following chapter, I introduce my research method to conduct this study.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter delineates the methodology used in this study to explore MA TESOL program students' perspectives on and experiences with group work. The reasons for the research design and chosen participants are explained. Later, the data collection method is discussed, and collection of the process is presented. After that, the data analysis procedures are described, and a summary of this chapter is provided at the end.

Research Design

The objective of the study was to look at MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work. As a result, my participants’ comprehensive past experiences with group work were an important part of my research. Fraenkel and Wallen (2001) pointed out that qualitative research emphasized “describing in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation” (p. 432). As for my study, the “particular activity” was the group work in my participants’ classroom. Consequently, I chose qualitative research to make my participants illustrate their group work productively during the research.

My choice of using the qualitative research method was also due to two other attributes of qualitative research. On the one hand, I wanted to get answers of how the participants viewed their past experiences with group work, such as their feelings and comments. This purpose fitted what Merriam (2009) pointed out about the nature of qualitative research, which “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their
experiences” (p. 5). As a result, qualitative research facilitated me in accomplishing my goal of understanding how MA TESOL students interpret their group work experiences.

To go a further step, since I was trying to discover how participants felt during their group work, their understanding about conducting group work and so on, the data I analyzed would be examined in depth. Accordingly, qualitative research tries to focus on delicate analysis, just as Fraenkel and Wallen (2001) pointed out, “The outcome of these kinds of studies is not the generalization of results, but rather a deeper understanding of what goes on from the perspectives of the participants in the study” (p. 433). At the same time, this study was about exploring participants’ understandings of group work in different aspects of their opinions. As a result, the study would achieve the goals better with a qualitative method as Christensen and Johnson (2000) explained, qualitative research is used to “look at many dimensions and layers of behavior” (p. 19).

**Participants**

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18 to 40</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>18 to 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education completed in home country</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of English teaching experience in home country</td>
<td>0 to 15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Subjects</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used a purposeful sampling strategy to find participants for my research. As Merriam (2009) stated, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a
sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). As reflected in the research question, the participants in my study were students studying in the MA TESOL program. Ten to twelve MA TESOL volunteers studying in a mid-sized state university in the northeastern United States were involved in the interview after the informed consents were explained and signed. Some of the participants were English native speakers, and some were international students coming from other countries like Saudi-Arabia, China, Iraq and South Africa. All of the participants spoke at least two or more languages besides English. All of these participants had abundant English learning or teaching experience.

The inclusion criteria for selecting this population were set for several reasons. First, to choose students from one program was an important aspect of achieving successful focus group interviews. Being in the same program, the participants were relatively familiar with each other. As a result, they could produce more information during the discussion because they were provided with a safe space to share information (Merriam, 2009). Second, according to the students’ syllabus, some of the students had taken a course named “Introduction to Teaching Methodology,” which explicitly introduced group work in education. As a result, deeper understandings of group work could be shared by these participants. Third, these MA TESOL students were prospective teachers who would probably conduct group work in their future teaching, thus they would be more active in discussing their “common interested question” (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2007). Finally, since these participants were from different counties and backgrounds, it was likely that they would provide various experiences, which would contribute to the study.
Data Collection Method

I employed focus group discussion as the data collection method. Focus groups, as used for conducting social science research, can be traced back to the work of Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2005, p. 391). Their research efforts constituted part of the legacy of using focus groups within qualitative research: capturing people’s responses in real space and time in the context of face-to-face interactions and strategically “focusing” interview prompts based on themes that are generated in these face-to-face interactions. All of these were considered particularly important to the researchers.

There were several merits to employing focus group discussion as the data collection method in this particular study as Kimitriadis and Kamberelis (2005) stated,

The use of focus groups has allowed scholars to move away from the dyad of the clinical interview and to explore group characteristics and dynamics as relevant constitutive forces in the construction of meaning. Focus groups have also allowed researchers to explore the nature and effects of ongoing social discourse in ways that are not possible through individual interviews or observation. (p. 396)

It was also implied that focus groups also facilitated the exploration of collective memories and shared stocks of knowledge that might seem trivial and unimportant to individuals but that come to the forefront as crucial when like-minded groups begin to revel in the everyday Kimitriadis and Kamberelis (2005). In that case, my exploration of my participants’ past experience with group work could be effectively traced with focus group discussion.
The focus group discussions were conducted in a study room of the library. According to the participants, the library was a convenient place for them to join the focus group discussions because they always went there to study. For them, the study room of the library was a familiar place comfortable for yielding informative results according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2001),

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the experiences of people in context. Hence, the natural settings of people is the place where qualitative researchers look, because it is here that they believe they are most likely to discover what is known about the phenomena of interest. (p. 434)

There were also some limitations of using the focus group interviews to collect the data. There were possibilities that some participants could not fully state their views or share their experiences with the disruptions of other members in the same focus group interview. However, it was believed that participants would be more stimulated by others and come out more useful information in focus group interview than being interviewed individually. Also, some certain topics would be more deeply and thoroughly discussed by participants in focus groups according to their interests. And as a result, the findings would be more profound based on more data.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection procedure was started by recruiting the participants. Invitation e-mails were sent to MA TESOL students, introducing the study and the confidentiality of their private information in it. The email asked them if they would like to voluntarily participate in the study, and if yes, they would be assigned to one of three meeting times. The meeting times were rescheduled after negotiation per the participants’ suggestions.
The participants were assigned into three meetings using a set of criteria: the first focus group consisted of students using English as their first language (L1); the second focus group consisted of first year second language (L2) English-speaking students; the third focus group consisted of second year L2 English-speaking students. Students using English as their first language were put in the first group for the reason that there was a gap between these students and the students studying in ESL/EAP classes in terms of presumptions of group work (Hu, 2005; Melles, 2004). In that case, productive information was expected from the first group to further understand their special perspectives of the group work compared with the other two groups. The second and the third group consisted of other first and second year students respectively, because familiar people and people from the same backgrounds were easier to generate more effective results (Fraenkel & Walllen, 1991).

Each focus group discussion lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was recorded using a video camera on a tripod. The participants were first be greeted, and sent the informed consent to read and sign. Later, the scenarios were delivered to each participant and read to the participants clearly. After waiting for one minute, the interviewer announced the start of the discussion. If there was no participant starting the discussion, questions like “what group work did you experience” would be asked.

Methodological Challenges

According to the IRB board, the video and capture during the focus group interviews would disrupt the participants’ confidentiality. As a result, the focus group discussions were only audio-recorded. Also, only two focus group interviews were conducted because of the limited number of respondents. The volunteers were provided
with two to three meeting times, and they were grouped according to their most convenient schedules.

Data Analysis

The next step after conducting the focus group discussion was to analyze the data from the discussion. The audio of the two focus group discussions was transferred to the computer and I slowed down the speed of it with Storm (software) when I carefully did the transcription. I distinguished different voices according to my acquaintance with the participants and one of the focus group participants listened to the audio again to make sure the transcription was accurate.

Coding

After finishing the transcription, I printed it out and read it three times to have a brief idea of the data. I noticed some similarities in two focus groups and tried to group them into three parts. First, most of the participants experienced different forms of group work, and illustrated the group works to some extent. Second, the participants stated that pair work was very different from other forms of group work, and discussed pair work separately from other forms. Third, the students illustrated more about group work when they mentioned a particular issue in group work. So based on these three points, and my study subject, MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work, I discovered several categories for each focus group.

Based on the categories, I focused on the transcript of the focus group 1. I marked which category every line in the transcript belonged to with different colors and wrote down key words and the number of every line under each category on a big chart. Later, I summarized the key words under each category and defined the code for it. Sometimes
when there were lines which fit in two or more categories, I tried to adjust the boundary of the code so that they would not overlap. However, if the line was important to all the categories, I would allow the overlap, and prepared to illustrate the data in different aspects. After adjusting the codes, I printed out the other new transcript and marked the lines with different colors according to their categories to make everything clear.

For the focus group 2, I did the same procedure of coding, as it was shown in the following chart.
### Table 2

**Focus Group 1 Coding System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code 1</th>
<th>Code 2</th>
<th>Code 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group work practice in participants’ contexts</td>
<td>Types of group work (after class, in class and pair work)</td>
<td>Compare and contrast of the forms of group work between home countries and the U.S.</td>
<td>Participants’ general feelings about the group work and the reason (without detailed illustration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work performance influenced by culture values</td>
<td>Students’ performance during the group work back in participants’ country</td>
<td>Explanations from the participants why students back in their countries performance</td>
<td>Participants’ assumptions of the factors influencing students’ performance during the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language issue</td>
<td>Incidents of language issues during group work</td>
<td>Feelings when students come across language issues during group work</td>
<td>Solutions to the language issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing issue</td>
<td>Timing issue for participants in MA TESOL program</td>
<td>Examples about how timing issues happened during group work and the negative effect on participants</td>
<td>Reasons causing such problem and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstandings in group work</td>
<td>Examples of participants’ misunderstandings during group work</td>
<td>Participants’ reactions and solutions to such incidents (so we just keep silent again, it was impossible to raise our hand ask professor, what does this mean…)</td>
<td>How participants think of such misunderstanding or incidents during group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ views on pair work</td>
<td>Participants’ experience and descriptions of pair work</td>
<td>Issues during pair work and students’ feelings and understanding on the incidents, and their concerns</td>
<td>Some suggestions discussed to effective pair work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Focus Group 2 Coding System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code 1</th>
<th>Code 2</th>
<th>Code 3</th>
<th>Code 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue of participation</td>
<td>Participants’ descriptions of the group work conducted in their countries and the issues relating to students’ participations</td>
<td>Participants’ understanding of such issue and their solutions to such phenomena</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work assessment</td>
<td>Participants’ description of the incidents related to assessment</td>
<td>How participants feel about such incidents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns as participants in group work</td>
<td>Participants’ concerns about their performances during the group work</td>
<td>Examples and their solutions to these kind of concerns</td>
<td>Worries about the discussion topic during the group work and participants’ solutions to it</td>
<td>Participants’ feelings during group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work in different backgrounds</td>
<td>Participants’ assumptions about how to do group work</td>
<td>Reasons they make such decisions</td>
<td>How group work was conducted in different backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulation factors and role playing in group work</td>
<td>Participants’ illustrations of how group work stimulate their brains</td>
<td>How participants think of their roles during group work and how they feel about the different roles during group work</td>
<td>Examples of role playing during participants’ group work</td>
<td>How participants feel about such stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ views on pair work</td>
<td>How participants feel about pair work and why</td>
<td>What participants do during pair work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of the Chapter

This chapter firstly illustrated why the qualitative research and the specific data collection method were employed. Later the nature of participants and the data collection process were presented. After that, data analysis was presented and how the data was coded was presented. The next chapter presented the data of the focus group interviews, which finally contributed to the whole study—exploring the MA TESOL students' perspectives on and experiences with group work in learning and teaching contexts.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I presented and analyzed the results of two focus group interviews on the research question of the study—what are MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work? The data was analyzed respectively according to different categories. For focus group 1, the categories are a comparison and a conclusion of all the data from two focus groups was presented in the end of this chapter.

Table 4

*Focus Group Interview Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Focus group interview 1</th>
<th>Focus group interview 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Group work practice in participants’ contexts</td>
<td>Issue of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Group work performance</td>
<td>Group work assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Language issue</td>
<td>Concerns as participants in group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Timing issue</td>
<td>Group work implementation in different backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Misunderstandings in group work</td>
<td>Stimulation factors and role playing in group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Feedback in pair work</td>
<td>Participants’ views on pair work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Focus Group 1*

In focus group 1, there were three non-native English speakers—Tetche, Hassan, Nesia—and one native English speaker, Conrad. All of them were second year MA TESOL program students. One of the participants was Tetche who was a West African male. His first language was Kabye, and his second language was French. He
learnt English as an additional language. He also spoke two additional languages from his country. He started learning English at secondary school and then enrolled in the English Department at a university in his home country. Later he taught French and English at a secondary school for six years and taught English at a high school for four years. Group work was a part of teacher trainings in his country, and he liked using it. He valued group work in his classes, and his students liked discussing in groups. He indicated that his students were very enthusiastic to learn through discussions with peers and teachers. According to him, group projects were very helpful for his students' progress.

The next participant is Nnesia who was an Asian female. Indonesian was her first language while the position of English was a foreign language in her country. She taught English to undergraduate students in her country. She did not have much experience with group work when she was a student, but she tried to apply group work in her teaching practices. She experienced different types of group work and learnt how to conduct it when she studied in the United States for her graduate degree. Her personal group work participation in group work and the lessons gave her perspectives on how group work could be applied in her future classroom. Being exposed to group work after she came to the United States significantly changed her views of group work.

Hassan was an African male. He was a multilingual writer. Apart from English, he spoke French, Hausa, Djerma-Songhai, and had good literacy in Arabic. Before coming to the United States, he had little experience of group work. As such, his main experience working in groups started in his MA TESOL program.

Conrad was a European-American male. English was his first language; French was his second language. He began studying French when he was twelve years old. He
had a significant amount of experiences working in groups during both his public school education and his undergraduate career. However, group work was rarely used in his foreign-language classroom. He taught elementary students for two years and advocated contextual, construction of knowledge and that group work could be both helpful and productive in the educational process of students.

**Group Work Practice in Participants’ Contexts**

During the focus group discussion, participants described how their past group work was conducted according to their teaching and learning experiences. It could be inferred that all those participants have facilitated or participated in group work to some extent. The types of group work included after class group work, in class group work, and pair work mainly about giving reflections. All three non-native English speakers indicated that the group work they experienced in language classrooms was somehow different from what they did in the MA TESOL program, and the native English speaker indicated that his past experience with group work “dealt more with humanities” before the MA TESOL program.

In the discussion, Hassan first pointed out that the type of group work he had experienced was different from those I described in the scenarios. Compared to the given examples, the group work back in his country was mostly after class group work discussion. During the class, his professors would assign the group and the work was supposed to be finished after class and presented in a later class. Though the group discussion was rather casual according to the time and place, their group work sometimes “ends up to be very difficult” because “people are not given like advice on how to perceive most of the times…sometimes it’s even one person that would do all the work.”
However, when Hassan came to the United States, he experienced more kinds of group work as described in the scenarios including in class discussion and pair work.

Similar to Hassan, Tetché’s group work experiences before coming to the United States were “not really like here in the United States.” He indicated that he had some group work in courses like mathematics while most of the time, the in class activities were “more individual” and they “do group work at home.” Like Hassan’s after class group work, Tetché’s was unrestricted in terms of time and place as well. Tetché thought after class group work was “more organized because you are responsible and you are forced to come back to school with the results. And if you don’t do it, you are punished.” He also mentioned that the group leader was very strict, and it was frustrating for other group members because of that. According to him, universities used this type of group work “because the class was very, very large, it was not possible to have group work….groups in the class working”. He later mentioned that as a college teacher, he did not have group work during the beginning year due to the number of students (600 as he mentioned); though the number of students decreased by the fourth year, he still had no in class group work.

As a teacher, Tetché used group work when the sizes of his English and French classes were “not that large”; though, he did not experience much group work as a student. He conducted the group work in a way of asking questions and letting the students discuss answers in small groups. He asked the students to present the results in class and students were very energetic because “In our culture, people are competitive, so they are very active” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013).
Nesia’s experiences of group work were not much different from those of the other two non-native speakers. She mentioned that there was a possibility “students didn’t have any group work at all because of the teacher they don’t know what to do (with group work)” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). In other words, students’ experiences of group work were related to their teachers’ knowledge of group work.

In the middle of the focus group discussion, Conrad, the only English native speaker in this focus group, clarified that in the United States, not every classroom tended to do group work, and “there are several teachers that don’t know group work and whatsoever.” He found his group work experiences “tends to center around classes that deal more with humanities… such as math….we don’t really do lots of group work unless it was a lab or project” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013).

No matter what the four participants’ group work experiences were in the past, their experiences dramatically changed in MA TESOL program. Though the participants did not discuss what the group work was really like in the program, they all indicated that those experiences were more positive and effective than what they experienced before, in terms of types and efficiency of group work. Hassan recalled he once had a similar form of group work before. However, the group members performed in a different way. His MA TESOL cohorts “tried to assign jobs to each member of the group. And that’s how it worked. And it was really great learning” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013).

When talking about the future implementation of group work, Nesia mentioned that she “have to follow the school” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013) if she wanted to use group work. According to her, for the private schools with higher standards, students and teachers could probably conduct better group work than the schools with less strict
policies and lower standard faculties. For her, she had to take the culture of her country into consideration if she wanted do the group work in the future. As a result, group work may work for high level students, but she was not sure. Nesia, also, talked about how she would implement group work back in her country.

Nesia: I knew this is a different kind of group work that I had here, what I am going to implement it there.

Conrad: Okay so you see a kind of adaptive

Nesia: Yeah…but again, I was not sure…(Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

So for Nesia, the group work she experienced in her MA TESOL program was different from what she experienced before. This new kind of group work was what she was going to implement in her future teaching back to her country. However, she was still not sure if the new form of group work would be beneficial to her future students back to her country. As a result, the different group work Nesia experienced in the United States might need to be adopted to see if it really fit the Nesia’s context back to her country.

In this section, four focus group participants briefly introduced their past experiences, and Nesia foresaw how to implement group work in the future. It could be concluded that the group work they experienced in MA TESOL were somehow different from what they did before. For most of the participants, after class group work was more familiar to them before coming to MA TESOL. It was, also, indicated there were some reasons for the different implementation of group work in different situations. Also, it could be inferred that the participants had some concerns during their group work such as
Hassan’s group work ending with nothing; Tetché’s feeling of pressure because of the strict group leaders and Nesia’s future adaptation of group work back to her country.

**Group Work Performance Influenced by Cultural Values**

In focus group participants’ descriptions, there were several issues emerging from their past group work experiences in their teaching and learning context. One of the issues was about students’ performance during group work participation which, according to the focus group participants, was mostly due to their cultural background.

Tetché mentioned the difficulty in getting people together to do the group work because “the students would not do anything.” He thought such a phenomenon was due to students’ non-preparation for the group work. He further illustrated the idea by saying “the students are not assigned roles in the group …they [students] think if I say this, this guy [who might good in grades] may mock me…because I don’t speak well” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). It could be inferred from his analysis that the environment of competition caused the students’ fear of being inferior to others during group work. As a result, they kept silent to avoid being embarrassed in front of others in group work.

Such idea of competition also existed in Hassan’s culture. According to him, competition was “really something that highly-evaluated” in his culture, and it became a concern in his group work after coming to the United States. Hassan wondered in the group work whether he should “show people that I am a good students or I am the best? I don’t know. It’s some kind of difficult sometimes.” In his culture, it was positive to show one’s ability; Hassan started to question whether it was acceptable in the United States. Also, he pointed out that because of his culture background, “It’s difficult to accept other people’s suggestions. Mainly when you think that (you are right) …probably it’s not the good way.” When Hassan came to the MA TESOL program, he mentioned that such
problem was solved by assigning different group work sections to different people, “There is a difference between cooperation and collaboration…and that’s how it worked and it was really great learning” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). Instead of discussing and working on one same segment, they worked individually and then combined the results together. Completing different sections of group work independently helped the student to feel more comfortable because the idea of competition was weakened in this way. They did not have to take others’ opinions and they could just make their own decisions.

Though Tetch and Hassan provided some examples influenced by their cultural values in group work, they held positive attitudes toward group work. They applied new techniques when they clearly realized how their traditional concept influenced their or their students’ performance in group work. Tetch designed competitive in class group work among different small groups and that motivated the students. The result was notable because all the students wanted to perform better than other groups. Hassan thought his persistence for competition reduced after coming to the United States because of the different environment.

Contrary to Hassan and Tetch’s culture of competition, Nesia expressed her concerns about group work implementation in her country as a result of competition deficiency. She complained that in high school and university level, “only one or two members would participate in the group work while others just asked their partners to write down their names.” When she came across the situation as a student, she had no chance but to do the group work by herself because “we had to finish it and get the score.” Students would only be active under the situation of teachers asking their comments on
other group members’ participation. According to her, teachers did not usually assess other members’ contribution in the group work. “Maybe the teacher doesn’t know that is the case…the only thing they know is …just see everything is done. It’s complete. The teacher thought that group members work together, but in fact, no, only one or two” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013).

Based on this situation, Tetchè mentioned that in his case, even though the teacher did not ask students to report whether all of them contributed or not, the students were still supposed to tell the teacher if something happened like in Nesia’s case. Tetchè also mentioned that sometimes teachers might not take the issue seriously because they did not have enough time. Such unbalanced participation was considered unfair according to Hassan. He thought it was unjust “when you (teachers) don’t like training your students how to work together.” For Hasson, it was the teachers who were responsible to this unbalanced participation, or even other issues in group work, because students were never taught to do so. As a result, the teachers should make the rules and the steps of doing the group work clear before they asked students to really do the group work.

Nesia finally expressed her concerns of cultural values during group work. As she said, in her culture, people were not supposed to give others direct critiques or comments. So during the group work, students might keep silent even though they want to make some comments. What is more, it was totally acceptable that others did not adopt their advice or did further revise even though students spoke out their suggestions.

In this section, focus group participants talked about how students’ performances in group work was connected to their cultural values before coming to the United States.
However, they also mentioned the important role of teachers in group work and implied that with some proper instructions, group work would be done better.

**Language Issue**

There were many personal concerns about group work discussed in the first focus group. Hassan brought his anxiety from language in group work very early in the discussion in terms of “not to commit mistakes…not to express ideas that people were not really understand”. Such uncomfortable feeling was not only in the group work, but also in his daily conversation with other native English speakers. When others asked for clarification during group work, Hassan did not felt comfortable and started questioning his language proficiency. “this kind of situation discourages you to have group work ….basically that’s…my main problem” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). According to Hassan, he would feel uncomfortable and become discouraged if someone asked him to clarify his views during group work because he thought he did not express his meaning successfully in English. As a non-native speaker, Hassan worried about his English during the group work, and such worries might influence his participation in group work.

Tetche also considered language as barrier in group work because

Sometimes I have to listen…and for some members of the group, like Chinese, I have to learn…accent. That…it took me some time to learn their accent because some of the things I was not able to…not to understand, but to hear, to make sure this is the way it’s pronounced. So it took me some time to learn that. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)
From those two non-native English speakers’ statements, it could be seen that in this MA TESOL program, there was a language issue during the group work. Sometimes according participants’ own adjustment like Tetc, the problem could be solved by keeping practicing listening to get used to the “accent”. However, such language issue, according to Hassan, might cause negative effect or influence students’ mood during the group work.

Timing Issue

At the end of focus group discussion, Tetc pointed out that there was one thing which made him uncomfortable with group work in MA TESOL program—limited time for in class group work discussion. Immediately, other three participants expressed their agreements. It could be assumed that there was a great possibility those students facing the same issue in their MA TESOL program.

Tetc: The thing is that sometimes there is no time to prepare. And you have to present…

Nesia: I totally agree with you.

Hassan: Yeah

Conrad: I hate that. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

When Tetc talked about his dissatisfaction with the short time given in the group work, the rest of participants in the focus group immediately showed their agreement. It could be inferred that for those MA TESOL students, they probably shared the same problem of running out of time when they were having group work in the MA TESOL program. What’s more, since the responses from the rest of participants were fast, it shows the significance of the issue for the participants.
Tetch, later, provided a related example and said that during the in class group discussion, less preparation disabled him from getting a clear idea about what he was going to say during the final group presentation. Under the pressure of time, he started thinking if this pressure as the same pressure always mentioned during the job interviews and needed to be overcame.

Conrad assumed that the reason for teachers giving a short time to students in group work was that they thought students had already been familiar with the material. However, as an English native speaker, he also felt it was a kind of challenge to finish the group work task in a certain time.

Hassan tried to find a way to solve such timing issue when he first met it during his first semester in the MA TESOL program.

Hassan: You know, it’s not recommended by any class, but like the first semester, we realized that it’s necessary to come up with some kind of group and some classmates and I decided to meet like, one hour, every time we have a class. And we discuss the content of the article and then you know, it worked…really it worked. It gave us an opportunity to be active in the class. Because we used to take one to two hours discussing the content of the articles. I can read the article and have a different opinion. You…really, you’ve another understanding. So when we come together, you know, we share all these ideas and we take notes. And you know the fact of discussing, unconsciously are memorizing things…(Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)
When some participants mentioned that they did not have much time to prepare for the presentation in group work, Hassan offered his solutions. He held a small group discussion before the class to prepare for the in class group work. The small group discussion helped him to understanding the reading material better, and made him perform better in the in class group work on the same reading material.

Conrad: So someone like you uses group work before the class to practice for the group work in class…

Hassan: Yeah, and it was a really, really a good strategy because it helps you know, it’s still the issue of time. In class you don’t have time to… but outside the class, before the class, it’s a personal choice, you have time to discuss all these.

Conrad: That’s interesting because then the teacher thinks there’s people who just bring it up in a moment and this group work idea is working so well. But the reality is putting more stress on the students because they had to prepare more out of the class because they know this is what’s going to teach in class.

Hassan: Absolutely. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

Hassan used after class group discussion, which was a familiar type of group discussion back in his country as he described, to fix the problem of the in class discussion he confronted. He benefited from this after class group discussion with other group members by sharing different thoughts and ideas. Also, he did not have to worry about the time in the small group discussion off the class. The small group discussion helped him to fix the timing issue and to provide more useful information in class group
work. Hassan was more laidback and confident during class group discussion. However, at the same time, the question Conrad proposed left the further discussion: such preparation led the teachers to a misunderstanding of how effective their group work worked. Hassan’s solution might assist him and other members in after class group discussions, but other students without extra work might feel frustrated during the in class group work. To some extent, the issue of time and the frustration were not really solved.

Tetche finished this timing issue by sharing the group work he conducted as a teacher back in his country. “They (students) like it (group work). Sometimes I think it’s the time, I give them time to do that.” Tetche indicated that since he didn’t do the group work every class, he spent a large part of the class doing it when he had a chance. But he also mentioned that the timing issue might exist for other levels of students, “Mostly because they are from low level, and it was from higher level, probably, I think it’s same anxiety facing…it’s the time issue” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). In other words, higher level students might face more difficult tasks in group work and they might need more time to deal with them.

In this category, the participants proposed the timing issue in the group work discussion in their MA TESOL program. They also expressed their concerns about it and proposed some effective solutions. According to Tetche, the time management in group work could be flexible according to different levels of students. And for Hassan, he used another after class group work to fix the problem of lacking time in group work in class. However, his solution might generate more problems like misleading the professor about the effectiveness of the group work in the class. And this could cause misunderstandings in group work, which was the following category I would like to discuss.
Issue of Understanding in Group Work

The issue of understanding during group work was put forward right after the timing issue. Nesia indicated her problem of not understanding the discuss question in the group work in her MA TESOL classes. As she mentioned, she tried to guess the question from others’ answers when she could not understand the question. Later when she made sure what the question meant, she started to speak. However, if she did not really understand the question, she was going to keep silent. Nesia also mentioned that when she went back home, transcript the question and read more times, she would suddenly realize how easy the question was. She ended up the description of such issue by asking “Why, for example, a people don’t say this way while not that way, come on, I don’t understand it that way. That’s the problem I found about group work” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). As for Nesia, maybe she needed clarification from the professors when they promoted the discussions of the questions. Sometimes she misunderstood the question or was not able to comprehend the question without further explanation.

Conrad, the only native speaker in the focus group discussions, expressed his confusion on such issue because though “everybody was saying these things” (issue of understanding), “why didn’t you (non-native speakers) express that you didn’t understand the question. or …you may need more time” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). He could not understand why students did not ask or speak out when they have questions in group work. For him, students should ask for clarification if they could not understand the group work instructions.

Conrad: Those things(the issue of understanding) never seem to be expressed in a multi-lingual group work context to those who speak English as their first language.
Hassan: sometimes you need to save face, you know, not to show other people that you’re stupid.

Conrad: Oh, I don’t think you’re stupid [laugh]

Tetche: sometimes it’s true because

Hassan: Yeah, you know, I don’t understand the question, okay, best way is to keep quiet. If other people have understood, probably when it start, explaining, or when it start responding to the question, probably it will help me to trigger my answer to be understanding. Otherwise I think…(Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

Conrad, the only native speaker in the focus group 1, could not understand why students of other languages did not show their problems to others in group work. According to him, asking for clarification or not knowing what to do in group work did not mean the students were not smart. However, Tetche and Hassan had more concerns and thought the best solution for them not knowing what to do in group work was keeping silent. It could be inferred that non-native English speakers in this focus group had less confidence during group work.

All the focus group participants joined this topic and it could be assumed that most of them realized such issue. For those non-native English speakers, one way they dealt with such issue was to keep silent and listen to what others’ answers, and then guessed the question and got their own answers.

In the later of the focus group discussion, Tetche mentioned that he and his group once spent all the time discussing the meaning of the question during a group work. According to Conrad, when the professors gave them maybe, two minutes to discuss,
“two minutes’ silence feel so long” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013) during the group discussion if they just didn’t understand the group work.

Participants also pointed out that though sometimes the professor might explain the question, they still couldn’t understand it. “So we just keep silent again. It was impossible to raise our hand ask professor, what does this mean, (if you do it) so all of the group members will (say) “what’s wrong with you, you don’t understand that” (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). For the participant, it might be embarrassed to ask for further clarification again because other classmates would know she/he could not even understand the question after being explained twice.

Conrad recalled that during his teaching in a language institute, his non-native-speaker students always kept silent during the group work. Though Conrad kept saying over and over again, if the students had any questions, just let him know. He finally commented. “But it still didn’t matter.” And the students still kept silent. From Conrad's experiences, students acted the same as what happened in his MA TESOL program.

In the discussion from the issue of understanding, it could be summarized that most participants, especially non-native English speakers, were facing a problem of understanding group work questions, which was the very fundamental part of the whole group work discussion. They looked for clarification by listening to others’ answers, guessing the meaning and sometimes asking the professor. But those solutions did not always work. For them, how other group members might see them were their concerns and the reason they didn’t ask for clarification.
Feedback in Pair Work

During the focus group discussion, participants discussed their understandings of pair work especially in giving feedback. They considered pair work as a very different form of group work and showed their opinions and worries on giving feedbacks in it.

Hassan firstly recalled his experience of pair work when peer reviewing a written assignment. He described his feeling when he received many comments from the other multi-lingual person.

I just …accepted the feedback but I didn’t like the feedback because I was asking myself, is this feedback really…is it realistic? Because I personally believe that it’s wrong…I feel like sometimes you know, some people tend to go beyond what they are supposed to …to be what kind of feedback. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

Tetche went further with the same phenomena and he tried to minimize such issue by suggesting a proper rubric from the teachers. “It makes me think of the instruction aspect of …the assignment…”He suggested that he was not sure about giving the feedback in terms of grammar or other aspect of one essay. “Should I focus on the instruction? One the other organization….” As for him, he chose to give general feedback “maybe most of the time, on the content”. He made such decision because “I try to compare what I am supposed to do, to what my professors do…”(Focus group 1, January 31, 2013). As a teacher, Tetche would not spend too much time on the grammar and thus he didn’t choose to focus on the grammar when he did peer review as a student.

As for Conrad, the rubric in his mind was “does this make sense”. According to him, it would be okay if his partner made some grammatical mistakes if everything else
made sense. However, when he found too many grammatical mistakes, he began to
wonder if too many comments on such mistakes would hurt his cohorts’ feeling.

Conrad: I am always afraid to hurt somebody’s feelings…

Hassan: yeah, that’s the point, it’s kind of tricky some time…Actually, it’s good
to receive grammatical feedback. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

While other three participants talked about their private concerns during group
work, Nesia cared more about the feedback implementation in her own country. She
thought whether the feedback could be successfully implemented depended on the
students’ educational context.

So for the feedback, for me, it goes back to the culture…for my culture, we’re not
allowed to criticize or give feedback on something which is somebody said that,
or to hurt somebody’s feeling this way. So when it is about feedback, for me
myself, for my culture, it’s always something which is …another people can give
some real reason. For example, the tense…this wrong because this one. But it’s
about content, for example, I myself have some my perspective like I think this is
wrong because this one this one…so that’s not the culture. So although we know
that’s wrong, we are going to keep silent or something like that…for me, it was
very stressful. And I was very agreed with Tetch said, the teacher should give the
instruction on what aspect should the students give feedback like it’s the content
or something like that. So although there’s something which is …rude or
something like that, the other people would receive that…oh this is a part of
feedback, this is hard or what teacher want. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

It could be seen from the conversation that different participants had their own
criteria when they were asked to do the feedback. For Tette and Conrad, they cared less about grammar and focused more on the content or the idea of the writing. While for Nesia, she wanted more emphasis on the set rules or criteria to obtain a harmonious atmosphere.

Finally, Tette gave some instructive advice on giving feedback.

The students might be asked to discuss... the person gave you the feedback, but you didn’t discuss that feedback with him. If I am the one who gave you the feedback, you discuss with me, I’ll learn from you. But because there was no discussion, the guy will not learn anything and you would maybe it would that you make mistakes. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)

According to Tette, it would help if students exchanged opinions after giving feedback in pair work. As the final step of giving feedbacks to pairs, having discussions between partners was significant because students might not learn anything without the discussion. Tette also added that for the teachers, they should be aware what happened in group work.

They should also give time for pairs to discuss was necessary because

It would be helpful for the students...Sometimes people don’t agree to the feedback they’re given in the group, but there’s no one to listen to them... to discuss that, with them. So if there’s an option, an opportunity for, at least, if the teacher can’t listen to the group individually, there are at least a possibility that the student can go to the teacher, and have discussion about the feedback it was given, so that they can really know if he really needs to change, what he is asked to change, or if he needs to modify. (Focus group 1, January 31, 2013)
According to Tetc, it was important for students to discuss after reviewing each other’s’ work, and to understand why their partners gave the comments.

As a conclusion, focus group participants gave their own views on how to give feedback and they indicated that it would be better for the teachers to let students communicate and exchange each other’s opinions after giving the feedbacks.

**Summary of Focus Group 1**

In the discussion of focus group 1, participants shared their experiences with and perspectives on group work. They provided their group work stories and talked about their understandings about the group work. They also mentioned some challenges concerning time, language and misunderstandings in group work they confronted. Some participants also shared their strategies to deal with these issues. Finally, the participants changed the topic to a particular form of group work—pair work, and shared their insights into some important elements of pair work like exchanging opinions after peer reviewing.

**Focus Group 2**

All of the participants in focus group 2 were non-native English speakers. They were Rachael, Jo, Takumi and Mustafa. The categories they discussed in focus group discussion included students’ participation in group work, group work assessment, some influential elements in conducting group work and some issues reflected in pair work.

**Participants**

The first participant is an Asian female, Rachael. Mandarin is her first language, and English is her second language. She learned English in Mainland China and did not have much experience with group work in China. She taught English in senior high school for one semester as a volunteer.
The second participant is also an Asian female, Jo. Her first language is Mandarin. She started learning English in third grade in primary school. According to her, she hated English at that time because of all the required memorizations for this subject. Her idea about English language changed when she was in college and she became an English teacher after her graduation. She loves using group work in her teaching. After she came to the United States to study in the MA TESOL program, she also benefited from doing group work in class. She believes that group work should be an essential part of class activity if handled well.

The third participant, Takumi, is an Asian male. His first language is Japanese, and English is his second language. During his study of English in Japan, he hardly had any experience with group work. He has taught English in several different environments, including public and private educational institutions for a total of three years. He thinks that group work is one of the effective ways to enhance language learning because he believes that sharing ideas with peers provides different insights and experiences of learning of the target language.

Finally, Mustafa is a male from Western Asia. Arabic is his first language and English is his additional language. He studied English as a major in the College of Education in his country. During his study for the Bachelor’s degree, he did not have the chance to experience group work. He learned language through memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary items from a variety of literary texts. A year after his graduation, in 2006, he started teaching English in high school. He rarely used group work in classroom activities. In the following years, the curriculum started to change with more focus on communicative language teaching, so Mustafa started using pair work occasionally. He
thinks that students, especially teenagers, need to be trained to work collaboratively before they were put in groups to work on a language learning task. There might be multiple challenges for teachers who want to promote group work in their classroom in contexts where this practice is considered new.

**Issue of Participation**

When the four participants in the focus group talked about their experiences with group work, most of them pointed out some problems during the group work and students’ participation was one of them.

As Jo recalled, she used to do group work when she was a teacher back in her country. “But there are always some people are hidden in some groups and not talking, just being there, and when I see them, I just hate them” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013). She later illustrated this phenomenon and explained how she reacted to it:

When I see, in my classroom, there’re some quiet people, when I first start teaching, I cannot help but walking there and talk to them like do you understand this, or how is everything going. Not directly ask that person, but the whole group, to see if that person will talk…After a while, I will not do that. Because that person not going to talk. It’s still the other three people talking, the other one still sitting there. So it does not work if I try to individually stimulate the group, or that person. I tried to talk to that person, but it’s still “yes or no”, no talking at all…so hard, it’s frustrating. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

When Jo recalled her experience, other participants showed their understanding of Jo’s experience or their agreements by echoing her. The other participant that came from Jo’s country kept saying “yeah” to express her same feelings.
Takumi showed his understanding with Jo. He indicated that students’ ineffective participation in group work happened when he was observing this practicum teacher.

There were some pair work in the class and some of the pairs started to talk about what did you do yesterday?...well, she (practicum supervisor) has her teaching philosophy, that whatever the student does, they have to be responsible for what they’re doing. So she did not really intervene because she did not focus on the product of the pair work but experiences itself. I like it. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

During the discussion, Mustafa indicated that such a teaching philosophy may work as an initiation of starting a group work. It might be a good start for the student who did not talk during the group work.

Some participants analyzed the reasons why the students did not actively participate in the group work. According to Rachael, her class has only 50 minutes, “so I think we do not have too many time to let the students do the group work….so a lot of people will not focus on the group discussion. Two minutes will be good, and others talking in Chinese. …it’s a waste of time” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013). The other focus group participants mentioned such situation “is very disappointed to the teacher.”

In this focus group discussion, it could be concluded that group work participation and teachers’ different attitudes dealing with similar phenomenon was related to their teaching philosophies and their daily experience. For Jo, she first tried to get all the students involved in the group work. However, she changed her expectation after failing to help other students to participate in group work. The participants also found that the
reason why students did not actively participate in group work was they did not have enough time to do it in class or that group work was not emphasized enough.

**Group Work Assessment**

The unbalanced participation among students led the focus group discussion to come to the other issue: how to assess students in group work. Three of the MA TESOL cohorts in the focus group 2 indicated that it was difficult to assess the students because sometimes it might be unfair for some students who did much more work than other group members. “Usually there are some people as you guys said, there are some people who do not really cooperate on the whole group, and then we still get the same evaluations” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013).

In fact, nearly every focus group discussion member mentioned that they were familiar with this issue and some of them showed their understanding toward this problem. Jo said she did not care much about it when she was a student. “I personally do not care about those, like people do not do anything because I just do the thing. As long as I do, it’s fine, because I am doing it, I do not care he gets grade or not” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013). However, some participants said it happened that some group members who did less work in the group work got the higher score. Such unbalanced grading caused the whole group members to argue with each other.

It seemed that the whole focus group came to an agreement that grading was difficult in group work and “some of the grade they got depend on luck,” as Takumi said. Takumi also indicated that “group work really depends on what’s the purpose for this. If it depends on evaluation, it’s hard because.....some people do not cooperate.” Jo added that in her country, group work was not graded because there’s a final exam and doing
group work was just for practice. Because students would not be graded, they would probably be less focused on group work and could not be motivated enough to join the group work.

Concerns from Students’ Perspective

The MA TESOL participants in my focus group interview talked about their perspectives on group work including their concerns or challenges when they were doing group work. Basically speaking, there were two reasons which caused their concerns: the pressure from other group members and the students’ worries of their performance. These were very influential aspects in the group work. Moreover, it could be implied that the different past experiences led to the participants’ performance during the group work as well.

Mustafa experienced different group work after coming to the United States. He indicated that the sudden change of the group work forms made him felt uncomfortable and took time to get used to the new one.

I came here it was kind of threatening for me to work with peers, to share my ideas. We just used to read, to memorize stuff, write them down on the paper, for the test, and we just submit to the teacher who is the authority. And now I came here, I’ve to share with my peers, and I’ve to tell about something personal….I was not prepared for this kind of work. So it took me a while to get used to it.

(Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

It could be inferred from Mustafa that starting to share his own ideas with others was something he never experienced before he came to the United States. Such change of group work style cost him some time to get used to.
These focus group students also showed their concerns with self-performance mainly during the group work discussion in the MA TESOL learning experience.

Mustafa showed his worry that the discussion topic would be too academic to him. … Suddenly you start to talk about theory and stuff and you give your opinion, which is really difficult, it’s not just you talk about what you cook last night.

What you’ve done last night, it’s you read an article, and there’s some theoretical perspective, and then you come and critique and share this, not only think about this. I felt it was threatening and we then have to say that in front of the class.

(Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

Mustafa’s self-confession showed his anxiety of showing his academic discovery in a group in front of the whole class while he found his own solution. He later explained “especially I’ve some phobia for presentation, so when I speak to the professor, I just speak, I do not really think that much, much. I just want to practice. And the reaction was not bad.” For him, Mustafa changed his view on presenting as the fruit of group work discussion—to present was not a test while more like practice shared information, any mistakes were acceptable.

Takumi’s pressure came from his classmates. He indicated that at the very beginning, he felt all the other classmates were experienced teachers and he just came here right after graduation. “So I’m like I’m not really experienced a lot, so they might be smarter. But I have to contribute something. So I have this pressure, when we had the group work.” Later, he explained how he dealt with such pressure.

Gradually I noticed that group work is a place to share out different ideas, so it’s not about who’s giving us good ideas or not. But it’s about how we can cooperate
on this, or build ideas on the existing ideas we have. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

It could be inferred from Takumi that his concerns during group work came from the worries of his self-performance and changing his view on the group work after his participation made relieved his pressure. Different from Mustafa, it could be indicated from Takumi that the most important thing in group work was participating. Just like the class he observed in his practicum teaching: students’ participation was the final goal for doing a group work and evaluation seemed not that important.

Rachael, the first year MA TESOL student, talked about her suffering experience during her group work with some Ph.D. students after coming to the program.

Rachael: sometimes I am afraid I’ll make too many mistakes or some stupid grammar mistakes in the communication…Because I always want to be prepared well and then present it. But I thought when I prepare well, the question just move on. So I cannot always get it.

Mustafa: You should ask everybody listen to you to say, okay I’ve a point ….okay, wait wait, let me finish.

Jo: You can add something.

Takumi: And then you will learn more from their response. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

It was not hard to tell from this discussion that sometimes participants worried about their self-performance during class and thus they were afraid of speaking out in front of others. Rachael gave herself high expectations while she had no chance to make it. However, as Jo and Takumi mentioned, she should change her opinion on this point.
For Jo and Takumi, participating was more important than the content you were going to say.

Rachael also mentioned that when she was with Ph.D students, they were so talkative that she did not even had a chance to jump into the conversation. However, Takumi shared his experience with her and tried to help her get over this. He talked about his same feeling with Rachael when he first worked with Ph.D. students,

Oh my god, these are Ph.D., I’ve to be silent … hear everything they said. And then I noticed that what they are saying is something we can easily come up with.

You know, so I just said whatever I have that…change my experience as well.

(Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

Jo shared how she dealt with similar situation in group work. “In group work I’ll say whatever I want to say.” She mentioned that she worried about the mistakes the first time she participated in group work. But she changed her perspective to look at such issue and did not care about mistakes.

…is really different when you first hear your voice in a different country, among different people…I felt like… I gonna say something like that heart beats fast, should I say that? And then I decided, I’m gonna say whatever come up to me, in any class. And it just went well. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

According to Jo, it was not difficult to overcome such concerns of making mistakes or low-performance in group work discussion— according to her, just change the view of group work—students should not worry about the mistakes, just saying something was enough.
However, at the same time, Rachael said that the evaluation in group work participation scared her. “What did I say, when I go back and reflected on, what I said in class, I believe that the professor have some formal or informal evaluation for students at some point during the semester” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013).

For Racheal, she worried about her performance in group work because she thought how she behaved would influenced her final scores given by the professors at the end of the class. Mustafa pointed out that students’ behavior in group work might also be affected by the professors. “Maybe it’s about the context of classroom, if you feel encouraged from the professor, from the peers, they do not really pick on you, your mistakes, you’ll just say stuff like…they do not like. They do not mention, they encourage you, you’ll feel encouraged to move on” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013).

According to Mustafa, the environment of the group work was crucial to him in the group discussions. If other members were friendly and encouraging, he would have confidence to move on. This meant that students really cared about other members’ or professors’ opinions of themselves or their answers when they were sharing some information in group work. Also, they needed positive feedback during the group work to help them to continue.

Finally, Rachael told her experience in this MA TESOL program and her feeling about others’ concerns of their teachers’ opinions.

Rachael: I think this program the professor will not care about what the mistake you make. But they care about your ideas,

Jo: whether or not you participate. Actually it turned out to be that the more you participate, the better you get. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)
When Rachael and Jo talked about the group work in their program, they did not mention a lot pressure from their professors. On the contrary, they thought their professors cared much more about the ideas, while not the way students express it. It was interesting that thought Rachael thought that professors did not care so much about students’ performance in group work, she still worried about how her professors would grade her according to her group work performance.

As a conclusion, it could be inferred from the second focus group discussion that teachers and students’ partners could be factors making students nervous. Students kept being worried about their performance and score in front of professors. Also, they might expect some encouragement from professors so that they feel more confident and could continue without feeling nervous. The students would also make sure their partners would not laugh at their comments or performances in group work before they really get involved and continue contributing.

Grouping Students in Group Work

During the focus group discussion, how to group the students in the group work was asked by Mustafa. Jo said that she used to group the students randomly. But sometimes she picked people to be central and not central…I’ll say okay I’ve four volunteers who will do the group and you four will be in these four groups, so other people will join you” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013). She also mentioned a kind of common grouping method back in her country. Sometimes the whole class was divided into two groups according to their seats, and two groups would discuss a certain topic. She also mentioned that that was typical her country’s style.
Mustafa: how many students are you going to have it?

Jo: the last job I got twenty, twenty-five and then my first job for college English
I’ve 80, 82, 57.

Rachael: yes it’s so big, it’s like the theater. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

Rachael, coming from same country with Jo, said that business students might
have smaller class and group work would be conducted for practicing their oral English
every class. She also mentioned that in the MA TESOL program, they had two and half
hours for one class. But in her country, she just had one hour and 45 minutes. Jo also
agreed with that and they thought they did not have too many time to let the students do
the group discussion in class. So as lot of group projects would be out of class. According
to her assumption, limited class time would lead to the reason why students do not focus
on the group discussion. Takumi commented on such phenomena and he thought “group
work really depends on what’s the purpose for this” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013).

When Jo and Rachael talked about the different settings of classrooms might
cause different implement of group work, Mustafa foresaw his future group work
implementation based on two different scenarios.

I’ve been thinking I’ve two options of teaching. Two kind of population I might
teach in the future. High school, junior or senior high school, which start from 13
to 18. That’s one possible context. The other context is English major. College
English. So of course my job is to teach high school senior, junior high school,
but if I want to teach at college, it’s not my job, I mean I’m not going to get a job
in college, what I am thinking to do is to make, conduct a workshop where I can
get few people, 20 maybe or 25 people, and in this way, I can control the
classroom, or the workshop and I can promote group work activities … but if I still teach in high school, it’s kinda hard to work in this way because we’ve small classroom, we’ve lot of student in a small classroom, it’s different. So I’ll try to do that in my high school, the grantee job, but I’ll also think about I’m thinking of doing the group work in college context. That’s probably my future. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

According to Mustafa, his future group work implementation depended on the size of a class. For him, it was easier to conduct group work in a class of 20 to 25 students in a college, while hard to do it in high schools with a large density of students.

It could be implicated from those discussions that according to the participants’ experience and understanding, group work was changed according to different background settings including the size of classroom, students’ age, class length and many other aspects. Maybe in China, just grouping the students to two groups and doing a debate was an accessible choice compared with other kinds of group work according to their own situation.

**Stimulation Factors and Role Playing in Group Work**

One of the ideas coming from the second focus group discussion was the importance of interactions among students during group work. As Takumi said in the beginning part of the focus group discussion, he pointed out such collaboration was beneficial to the students in the ways of stimulating others’ ideas.

Takumi: there are some benefits of doing this group work like… you listen to somebody else’s ideas…somebody just throw a totally different idea. And I’m like wow, that’s a new one! And that really stimulates group
work and the whole efficiency of the work. I think that’s the beauty of creativity and cooperation.

Jo: I agree with you. I think I benefit a lot from our group work in this program. Because sometimes before we start, like four of us get in this group, I do not have any idea. Before we start talking about it. So like when I start talking, maybe for one minute, I have an idea because A said something…Because that’s the way… I do not have to think about the mistakes I’m gonna make. Because I’ve something to say, I’ll just say it. When I do not know how to say it, I just go “eee,” and then Dr. X will be “what is that that you mean?” Or anybody else there will just say that word, what I wanted to say. So people will help you out. You just need to open your mouth. So that helped me a lot. Actually that’s why I am not silent. I need to talk. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

It could be indicated that during the group work, collaboration contributed a lot in pushing group work moving forward. Students could benefit from others’ ideas. Some focus group members also mentioned that when the discussing topic was firstly given, she had no ideas about that. However, when they started group discussion, she was immediately stimulated and got some new ideas. For Jo, the interactions among students, or listening to what other students said, helped her come out more ideas.

During the discussion, participants talked about their role in the group work including some interactions among the group members. As Jo described,

When I was divided into a group to certain people, that I know he was a good note taker, he is a good …stimulator, or idea motivation that kind of thing, I just feel
so good…. When I got into a group of people like they all count on me…it’s like OMG, what do you think…So in many case, like each person’s role is relatively stable, so in that sense, maybe that still stimulate group work. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

According to Jo, she would have a brief idea of what her group members were good at. In group work discussions, she loved to add more information after other group members sharing their ideas. It took time for her to consider for a while if other group members were waiting for her to be the first one to open the mouth and work on the discuss questions. For Jo, she already knew how the group work would process or who would start to talk at the beginning of the group discussion because she had known each other. However, Mustafa proposed the other situation when the group members do not know each other in advance.

So this depends on the background. If we first talk about the students who know each other, it’s totally different. If the group work is the first time for them all, the first semester maybe. Now we are talking about …people that we know. But if its’ not, I think it would be negotiated. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

Mustafa later explicitly explained this idea on this issue. “During the first group work itself, if the teacher is not allocating each…students’ kind of role, like you do ….you are the leader, you are the…something like that. It depends on the level, as well” (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013). So Mustafa indicated that it was better to set students’ different role in the beginning of group work. Also, different levels of students would rate the difficulty of the group work differently.
When talking about the roles, the participants also mentioned the role of the leader in the group work.

Rachael: I do not want to be a group leader because a lot of group members will not let you to control the…not control, just they do not agree with you. And if you assign them to do something, they will not be that happy. So I do not want to be a group leader.

Takumi: Yeah, group work is not a hierarchy. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

According to Rachael, a group leader was to control the whole group and assign some works to others. It was difficult to be a group leader because other group members would probably not listen to you. Takumi explained that group work was not to control anybody. It could be implied from the following Takumi’s experience that the leader in group work was more like the one who was pushing the group to achieve the final goal.

Takumi: that reminded me of something. Before I came here, when I was in Japan doing the undergraduate, we had some group work task. But I was the person who’s leading at that time. And now I came here and I’m not leading. I was more like a adding some ideas, and I think that’s because our way of thinking was diverse people talk different things.

Jo: you’re very organized person, so you’re more like the organizer of the whole ideas. People come up with, and you also contribute to, like how can we make this whole thing…

Takumi: maybe

Jo: yeah you’re more organized, that’s why …

Takumi: I do not know this before (laugh)
Jo: Yea but you’re. So you think you’re showing more roles on this aspect

But back home, of course because you’ve great ideas, you’re the leader

Back there you did not show it because you did not get the chance

Takumi: wow that’s you analyzed me [laugh]. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

From the conversation above it could be inferred that the participants played different roles in various situations For Takumi, the role he played back in his country was different from the one he was in the United States. Also, it could be inferred from the following discussions between him and Jo that the role group members played in group work depended on their own personality, self-preference and their group members in group work. Also, such role playing stimulated the flow of the group work. As a result, the group work was context-specific and depended on who was in the group.

Participants’ View on Pair Work

Focus group participants did intense discussion on the pair work and peer review and showed their different ideas toward pair work.

Takumi firstly indicated that pair work was “a totally different thing” compared with group work. Both Jo and Rachael later expressed their dislike of pair work. According to Jo, she felt lonely when she worked in pairs with another person because there would not be much different information provided from just one partner.

Jo: Just feel…so isolated…like we are the….

Rachael: The only members of in the group.

Jo: yeah. Like what are we gonna do…it’s more like I count on other people’s stimulation. If it’s only one person, although he/she can give me ideas, but…I want more people to be in there….I want more people to either
give me trouble, or just help me solve trouble. (Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

So for Jo, she liked more students to get involved in group discussions because she wanted to hear more from others. Working in pairs meant less resources from Jo. Rachael showed her agreement with Jo and talked about her pair work on translation in an undergraduate program. She recalled that she would feel “so disappointed” if she had a partner whose level lower than her because the partner would not give her the good ideas about the translation work.

Takumi followed and said that might create pressure for him because he might not do the work well and might be looked down upon by his partner. For him, the role he played in pair work depended on his partner.

If this person is really talkative and start putting ideas he has, and then I think I’m more good at elaborating on it, assisting the idea. So in that way, really works, smooth…but sometimes you know, my pair is more like giving ideas after I say something, in that case, I have to start …that sometimes…makes me feel like…okay, you have to do something…I have to work...(Focus group 2, February 5, 2013)

However, for Mustafa, he stated that he would like to do pair work. Jo analyzed his personality and they two came to a conclusion that Mustafa liked group work because he was someone who wanted to control the situation so that they could all prepare something good. Mustafa agreed with that point and thought if he worked with one person, it would be easier for him because if there was a conflict, they can quickly solve it with the other person. On the other side, if there were more people in the group, it
would be challenging. Mustafa also mentioned one of his successful experiences concerning group work. During that group work, they worked separately, both of them got their own roles and they also provided some advice to each other. When they have some different ideas, it was easier to negotiate in pair than with a lot of other group members. The successful experience also stimulated his thesis topic.

It could be analyzed from this section that different focus group participants had different views towards pair work according to their personalities (Jo and Mustafa) and expectations for their partners. According to Jo, she thought she would benefit more from group work than pair work. For Takumi and Rachael, their role might change with different partners. Maybe Rachael had higher expectations than her partner. As for Mustafa, he liked pair work because it was easier to handle and made everything clear.

**Brief Summary of Focus Group 2**

In focus group 2, there were mainly six categories discussed by the participants to illustrate their understandings of and perspectives on group work. According to the participants, there might be challenges in conducting group work. For instance, the participants, as teachers, had to deal with students not participating and think about how to implement group work in different contexts. As students, it was not easy to participate in group work because students might have many concerns including being worried about their performance and if they were inferior to their group members. However, focus group interviewees also provided some solutions to solve these challenging issues.

**Summary of the Chapter**

In this section, the data from two focus group discussions were analyzed according to different topics in each focus group discussion. The first focus group
discussion mainly talked about group work implementation, cultural factors in group work, giving feedback, and issues of language, timing and understanding. The second focus group participants mostly discussed students’ participation in group work, group work assessment, the background settings of the group work and some of their concerns in group work as students. They also talked about the participants view on pair work.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, themes emerging from the data of focus groups 1 and 2 are discussed. Based on my research question of the study, exploring multilingual MA TESOL students’ experiences with and perspectives in group work, five findings of the study are listed below. According to the participants, group work was contextual and requires long-term cultivation. Also, the interactions among students and the communication between students and teachers played important roles in group work. Moreover, participants had different preferences towards group work and their partners.

Finding 1: Group Work is Contextual

During the focus group discussion, participants in both groups indicated that group work implementation was contextual based on many factors including culture, course and classroom settings. For example, how students performed were influenced by their culture believes, and teachers would be challenged if they wanted to conduct group work in classrooms of more students, like about 40 students in Jo and Rachael’s case. Also, the aims of doing group work were various according to different teachers and their teaching philosophies.

Baines, Blatchford, Galton and Kutnick (2003) argued that a proper approach to the contextual and group based nature of classroom learning had been overlooked. In this study, focus group participants showed their opinions on doing group work in different situations.
Tetche mentioned that his culture of competition might influence students’ participation during group work because they were afraid of making mistakes and being mocked by others. However, when he came to design group work back in his country, he used such culture of competition to stimulate students’ motivation by designing a competition among different groups.

Jo and Rachael talked about the length and the size of a class might be the reason why group work in their country was different from what they experienced in the MA TEOSL program. But according to them, there were still some forms of group work back in their country like debates held between different groups. In that case, that form could be seen as a form of contextualized group work.

**Finding 2: Interactions Among Students Are Crucial in the Group Work**

Besides the contextual considerations of group work, both focus groups also discussed the interactions among students in group work. Some participants believed that the interactions could be the purpose of doing group work as teachers, while another participants regarded the interactions as the sources of her thoughts as students in group work. For Jo, for instance such interactions among students were like an engine pushing the whole group work forward to reach a goal. That is to say, the interactions between students were the main part of the group work.

At the same time, many teachers might regard the interactions among students as the final goal to doing group work. Just like the practicum supervisor in Takumi’s case, he thought no matter what the students did in the group work, as long as they talked, it was fine. What is more, such free communications, according to Mustafa, could be regarded as an initiation to let students start to know and join group work.
Finding 3: Group Work is a Long-Term Cultivation

In the past conversations, many of the participants indicated that they couldn’t get used to the group work in the MA TESOL program. Mustafa never spoke out his views in front of group work before he came to the United States, Takumi changed his role from leading the group to solve the question to giving additional information after someone saying it first. However, during the consistent participation during the program, they revealed their improvement during the group work participation.

For instance, in Takumi’s case, he first had the concern of not being as experienced as other TESOL cohort members in the very beginning, but later when he realized the opinions from Ph.D. student were not that difficult, he started getting involved in group work. Other students like Jo who worried about her mistakes during the first time, realized that the important thing in the group work was participation. And in that case, she “just say it, and others will help you to fix the rest of the …” “I don’t care about the mistakes”.

It could be inferred that the students got to more involved in their academic life and tried to overcome their fears. Most of the participants in the focus group discussions mentioned their reflections on, changed views or performance in the group work. After they experienced more group work, they got more used to it and found their way to deal with group work.

Those participants from the MA TESOL program indicated that though they had different cultural backgrounds and met many problems during the group work discussion, most of the issues could be solved and they started to gain knowledge from the group work.
In the case of Hassan and Tetche facing the problem of a grounded cultured idea, competition, they got used to and thought Tetche couldn’t understand the students’ accent, he still took time to understand. And for the Hassan who experienced the training before coming to the program, he had already gotten used to it.

**Finding 4: MA TESOL Students’ Preferences to Group Work Forms and Partners**

Balghizadeh (2011), a study on the interactions between students and their choices of partners, showed that most students prefer to work in pairs and with more familiar students. In the contrast, MA TESOL participants in this study implied that they prefer to do different kinds of group work including in class, after class or pair work according to their own personalities and the role they could play in different types of group work.

For instance, according to Mustafa, he preferred pair work because it was easier for him to control the procedure during the implementation. However, for Jo, she liked to work with more people because in that way she could be stimulated better and grasp the ideas or the themes teachers wanted to talk.

Moreover, Balghizadeh (2011) mentioned that students would like to choose familiar students as their group work members. Such preference was not clearly expressed in this study while a more stable role among participants did make it easier for the students to cooperate during group work.

**Finding 5: The Importance of Communication between Students and Teachers**

Most of the past literature like Chang (2010) and Baines et al. (2003) emphasized teachers’ role by how to design the group work in the beginning and how to do instructions in group work. For instance, Baines et al. (2003) emphasized the role of
teachers in class and pointed out that the teachers’ role was preparing group work and sensitive to wider classroom issues.

However, according to focus group participants’ past experience and understanding, it was indicated that the missing part of the past literature was the less emphasize on the communication among students and teacher during the process of teachers’ group work designing and group work implication.

There was much evidence indicating the missing communication among teachers and students in group work. In the first focus group discussion, this lack of communication was indicated in Hassan’s pre-class small group work preparation for the group work in an MA TESOL students’ class, and in their confusion about the strategy dealing with the discuss questions in group work.

For Hassan, doing the preparation was helpful for him in the in class group work conducted by is professors. However, as Conrad remarked, it was possible such a well-prepared performance during the in class group work could cause the misunderstanding to his teachers, and give the teachers an illusion that their group work was very suitable and effective for their students in terms of difficulty and instructions given. In this case, the teachers might design more challenging questions for the students and therefore, while other students who did not do the group work might face a great difficulty in this case.

It should be noticed that no matter what roles teachers were playing, there was an expectation existing in the group work they designed. Everything the teacher did for the group work contained their understandings to the group work and their target goals for doing group work in their classes. No matter their choice to be a guide on the side or a
sage on the stage, their decision contained their own understanding or their teaching philosophy as what Takumi talked about with his practicum supervisor—his practicum supervisor did not do anything to the students when they did free talking during his class was because his practicum supervisor regarded the communication and the interactions among group work as his goal to do the group work. He did not care what the students talking about as long as they were participating.

As in Hassan’s case, such teachers’ needs or prospective goals was very vague for Hassan. So for Hassan, he was making an assumption that his teachers’ goal in conducting group work was to let the MA TESOL students show and understanding of reading assignments when he did the pre-class free group work discussion. However, he didn’t know what his teachers’ real intentions. It could be possible that his teacher’s intention was just to ask the students to participate in group work and the question was just a way to get students involved in that group work.

From another angle, even though Hassan’s teacher aimed at helping students to understand the reading assignment, she would also have her expectations on students after they did their assignments before the next class. This expectation could be a strict requirement on students’ ability such as being able to answer her questions after reading the assignments, or can be flexible based on students’ proficiencies. It was possible that when the teacher realized her students had to do large amount of extra work to perform well in her in class group work, she would like to change the discussion questions to easier ones, or just start to asking easier discuss questions. Also, there was another possibility that the teacher thought the students must be able to answer the questions in her group work. If they could not, they should do the extra work before class to catch up
with other students. There might be many other possibilities while the students might never know without proper communication.

Such misunderstanding could also be seen when the focus group participants talked about their expectations of the students as teachers and their concerns as students. Many of the participants, like Takumi, showed their views on group work and they thought they use group work was just to get students involved and gain some communication skills in the group work. However, when they were students, they had the concern about making mistakes in front of the class. Actually, as students, they did not have to worry about that or whether the teacher would assess them based on how many questions they answered correctly. For the students, they might have less concerns and do group work better if they knew professors’ real purpose of conducting group work.

**Pedagogical Implications**

Based on the five findings of the study above, there were some practical pedagogical implications for the participants and the group work they had experienced. First, group work should be implicated after considering the real context of the class. Choosing to use in class group work or after class group work should be used after thinking about the size or the schedule of the class.

Second, the communication among students and teachers should be made before, during and after the group work. Professors are expected to state their goal of group work, make sure students understand what to do in group work, check if their designed activities worked and even revise group work after conducting it. By observing students’ other former group work, professors could design group work based on students’ preferences and make the purpose and the goal of group work clear. For example, if work
group is designed to stimulate students’ ideas and encourage them to participate, it could be clearly stated that the goal of group work is to participate, while not checking students’ language proficiency or saying their answers are right or wrong. Students would probably be more relaxed in that way and contribute more valuable ideas.

**Limitations of the Present Study**

There were some limitations in the study including the small number of participants, fewer voices form English native speakers and first MA TESOL program students. Moreover, the outcome of group work could have been influenced by many factors and participants’ views towards group work were dynamic. Also, since this study used focus group discussion to collect data and explore the participants’ views on group work, the results might be impacted by the influential factors summarized from this study. For instance, some participants might not fully express their opinions during the focus group discussion. As a result, the data of the study might be biased.

The small number of volunteers in this study reduced the power of the study results. The conclusions in this study mostly aimed at helping more group work in the TESOL field to implement group work effectively and fluently. The other limitation of the study is that there was only one first year student who participated in the focus group discussions. In that case, there was a possibility that the first year students’ concerns and perspectives to the group work were not fully included. Moreover, since there was only one English native speaker who joined the focus group discussions, non-native English speakers’ opinions with group work and the final conclusion of the study might be inclined to their opinions while neglecting the perspectives of the English native speakers’.
Suggestions for Future Research

Future research concerning group work can concentrate more on the negotiations among students and teachers. Also, a larger sample of participants is expected with more English native speakers involved. The comparison among group work in the field could be compared with the implementation of group work in other fields. The negotiations among students and teachers including how to give instructions or design a suitable group work for target students could be further investigated. Students’ awareness of role playing during the group work could also be investigated. Finally, individual interviews as a data collection method could be conducted to make a contrast to the current study.

Final Reflections

In this study of exploring multilingual MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work, the current trend of group work implementation was first introduced. Later, past literatures on group work was reviewed and related themes including current group work in teaching and learning context, students’ perceptions in group work, the relationships in group work, and some existing problems and tentative solutions were introduced. This study appeals for the conversation between the group work designer, teachers, the students to achieve the best effect of group work.
References


Kinsella, K. (1996). Designing group work that supports and enhances diverse classroom


MacCallum, J. (1994, November-December). University students” perceptions of collaborative learning and assessment. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), University of
Liscastle, Australia.


goals in the regulation strategies of students with positive and negative appraisals.


APPENDIX A

Informed Consent: A Voluntary Consent

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

**Involvement:** The investigator will be Meng Shao, a MA TESOL student studying at IUP. There are no funding or sponsoring organizations for this study. IUP is the responsible institution for this study.

You are eligible to participate because you are a multilingual MA TESOL student.

**Overview:** The purpose of this study is to explore multilingual MA TESOL students’ perspectives on and experiences with group work. The study also serves an educational purpose in trying to make valuable and practical suggestions to the implementation of group work in the field of MA TESOL. Participants in this study will attend a 45-minute discussion related to their understandings and experiences with group work after reading a scenario as a prompt. Participants are free to talk about the theme, and I will not interfere with the discussion unless there are interesting topics which need follow-up, or irrelevant topics appear in the discussion. This discussion will be audio recorded.

**Confidentiality:** The discussion will be digitally audio recorded and saved in a laptop with password protection. It will also be transferred to in a flash drive with password protection, and the flash drive will be kept in a locked office on campus. The data will be transcribed and analyzed. Those files will be kept on the previous password protected laptop. In the transcription, the participants will be assigned pseudonyms instead of their real names being revealed. The interview data will be retained for three years in a secure setting. For the participants who want to drop out of the study, their recordings will not be transcribed and the transcription concerning their part will be destroyed.

**Potential Risks and Solutions:** Some participants may feel uncomfortable when they come across different opinions or their opinions are in conflict with others during the discussion. I can remind them of the appropriate words that are supposed to be used in the very beginning of the discussion, and stop the discussion if there is any sign of conflict. Any participant can ask to change the topic during the discussion if they feel uncomfortable with it. Any participants can leave at any time as they want.

**Compensation:** Should you choose to participate, no monetary compensation is offered.

**Potential Benefits:** There are benefits for the MA TESOL students who can gain additional understanding of group work by listening to and discussing with other colleagues. Also as prospective teachers, we will know more about group work strategies by understanding students’ opinions. This can help to implement better strategies in future learning and teaching contexts.
For more information: Please contact me at nhgs@iup.edu if you need more information about this study.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study, ask the topic to change if you become uncomfortable with it, or to leave the room at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or the institutions where you study. You may also choose to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw, please write me an e-mail, and upon your request to withdraw, the transcription and further data analysis pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence as stated above, and you may leave at any time during the discussion.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

Thank you,

Meng Shao, Gloria Park, PH, D.
MA TESOL student Department of English
M.Shao@iup.com gloria.park@iup.edu
Department of English Graduate Studies in Composition and TESOL
Indiana University of Pennsylvania Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705-1094 Indiana, PA 15705-1094
Phone: 724-357-3095

This project is supervised by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730).
VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)

Signature

Date

Phone number or location where you can be reached

Best days and times to reach you:

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the name and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date Investigator’s Signature
APPENDIX B

Scenarios

Focusing exercise

Objective 1: Understand MA TESOL students’ experience and understandings of group work in learning context.

Scenario 1: This is an example of a students’ experience of group work in her academic class. It illustrates her feeling during the group work. Now please think about group work you have been involved in, and tell one another what it was like.

My MA TESOL colleges and I were separated into 4 groups of three to have group discussion in Dr. X’s class. Discussion questions were based on the former reading assignment, and were presented on the screen. Since I was a little confused about the question, and could not find the answers right away, I was expecting my group members could provide some productive answers. However, the other members were also silent at the very beginning of the discussion. After a few minutes, I felt that someone needed to say something. So I started to read the questions, and some relevant paragraphs in the reading. Later, the other group member started to talk about his idea. It was a relief when I heard somebody else started to say something because in that case, we finally could present something as a group later. When other group members shared their answers, I recorded the responds. Sometimes I couldn’t understand my group members’ points, so I had to ask for clarification. Or, when we had some disagreements need to negotiate, I felt that we’d better leave the disagreement there and solve the remaining question first. If all the students in my group couldn’t answer the question, we were expecting the professor to clarify the question. When the professor reminded us there were only 2 minutes left, we summarized answers, and decided who would go for the first during the presentation later.

Scenario 2: Yang (2010) discovered negotiations and challenges experienced by five Chinese ESL students of Commerce through their engagement in an academic presentation in a regular content course at a Canadian university. Read the case below and think about: have any of you been involved in group work in another country? Can you tell others how do you feel about group work?

These five students employed group discussions and email exchanges to clarify the task requirements and other preparatory activities outside the classroom, and seven hours in group discussions reading a consensus on how to make the presentation. In spite of their prolonged preparation, they appeared to give “slide talks” in class, and the last presenter didn’t have time to present because someone asked questions to the previous presenter, who forgot his words and in that case lengthened the speech. “They also decided to restrict the possibility of having open questions from the class.”
Objective 2: MA TESOL students’ understandings of group work in teaching context.

Scenario 3: This is an observation of an English composition class for sophomores, how do you feel about this the observed class and talk about how do you define the success of the group work?

...the teacher started to count students. Later, she reinforced some key points in writing, and drew out the main topic for this particular class—how to do quoting. She told the student to do the group work “as before” (which was forming two big groups and discuss a question first, and then find their teammate, go back and exchange each other’s information).

The students went to two sides of the classroom quickly, and the teacher began to deliver the handout. The first group was assigned to find out “what” kind of material the authors of previous readings directly quoted or paraphrased. And the second group was supposed to figure out “what” the authors used others’ material.

The first group students seldom moved their chairs, and they formed a “square” rather than a circle. And there were about 3 vacant chairs in the middle of the square, nobody chose to seat there. However, for the second group, they formed like a circle, and there was no chair in the middle of the circle. At eight forty-four, group one was still dead silent and everyone just looked at his book quietly. The teacher went to the first group, and asked “are you stuck with the questions?”, and then with no reply, she went back to the front desk, looking at the group, without giving any instructions. After a minute, the students in group one started to talk.

At eight forty-seven, there were about 1 to 3 students talking in group one, and the teacher still stood at the front desk, looking at students of both group. Three minutes later, more students began to talk, and discuss the questions. However, three-fourths of the students were still working independently.

Voices went down at eight fifty three, and the teacher didn’t take any action. At eight fifty-seven, she encouraged the students and talked to them that they seemed to be so quiet, and told them they could talk.

At 9:04 a.m., the teacher asked the students to change groups. This time there was a really heated discussion. The voice was much louder than before, and it seemed that the students had lots to say.

At nine o nine, the teacher asked the students’ discussion result starting from the group. Some students answered actively, and the teacher responded with words like “Mmm..., yeah.....so good statistics....what else?”. Two minutes later, the teacher asked the second group, which discussed the “how” part. Students answered the question by reading their handouts. The teacher later asked, “So what do you think?”, and the students raised her voice a little to answer this question. Later the teacher inducted students’ answer by asking questions like “How they set up things? So what are their tools?” Being asked a series of introductory questions, the students tried their best to answer. Finally, the teacher started to summarize the whole discussion result. The results which came out from students’ answers were really informative.
APPENDIX C

An Invitation to the Study of Group Work

Hi MA TESOL students,

I am Meng Shao, a MA TESOL student studying at IUP. You are invited to participate in my MA thesis research study of “Multilingual MA TESOL students' perspectives on and experiences with group work”. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email me.

The purpose of my study is to extend knowledge about group work in the field of Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL).

Your participation will consist of attending a focus group discussion at a particular meeting time. In the meeting, you are asked to sign the consent form (see the attachment) and to have a 45 to 60 minute small focus group discussion related to your understandings of and experiences with group work. The discussion will be audio recorded, and the file will be left in the mp3 with password protection. It will also be transferred to in a flash drive with password protection, and the flash drive will be kept in a locked office on campus. The data will be transcribed and analyzed. Those files will be kept on the password protected laptop. In the transcription, you will be assigned a pseudonym instead of real name revealed. The interview data will be retained for three years in a secure setting, and will be destroyed as per the federal law requirement.

Should you choose to participate, no monetary compensation is offered. However, during the discussion, you may gain many interesting opinions, which may expand your understanding of group work.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or the institution where you study. Upon your request to withdraw, the transcription related to your participation will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence.

Please email me if you are interested in this study. You will be assigned to one of three different meeting times if you agree to participate. Thank you for your help.

Best wishes,
Meng Shao
MA TESOL Program
English Department
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
APPENDIX D

Focus Group 1 Interview Schedule

Hello fellow MA TESOL students in Group 1,

Thank you for joining my focus group discussion and helping me to finish my thesis. You are assigned to the following meeting time:

Thursday 5:00p.m.-6:00p.m.

Please let me know if you cannot come or if the meeting time doesn’t fit your schedule. We're going to meet in the front of the library and the discussion is going to be held in the study room.

Attached to the email will be a copy of the consent form for you to read to help you decide if you would like to participate. You will be provided with a consent form at your assigned meeting to sign. Once I receive your conformation, I will remind you of the meeting time before the group discussion.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Meng Shao
MA TESOL Program
English Department
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Hello fellow MATESOL students in Group 2,
Hello fellow MA TESOL students in Group 2,

Thank you for joining my focus group discussion and helping me to finish my thesis. You are assigned to the following meeting time:

Tuesday (Feb. 5th) 11:15 a.m. -12:15 p.m.

Please let me know if you cannot come and when you are available in the following three days. We're going to meet in front of the library and the discussion is going to be held in the study room.

Attached to the email will be a copy of the consent form for you to read to help you decide if you would like to participate. You will be provided with a consent form at your assigned meeting to sign. Once I receive your conformation, I will remind you of the meeting time before the group discussion.

Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,
Meng Shao
MA TESOL Program
English Department
Indiana University of Pennsylvania