A Study into the Pyramid Discussion Approach with Pre-Service English Teachers in Japan

Takaaki Hiratsuka

Ryukoku University, Japan

Abstract: *The main concern of this article is the nature and the role of an EFL classroom speaking activity known as 'pyramid discussion', whereby learners form progressively larger groups as they carry out a series of discussions on specific topics. This research interest stemmed from my personal experience as an English language teacher in Japan, where the majority of teachers still regard the act of teaching English as the presentation of compartmentalised knowledge, as opposed to the promotion of communication abilities. In this article, I introduce an action research study into the employment of the pyramid discussion approach in an English Teaching Methods course at a Japanese university, and illuminate the effectiveness of the approach for the students, who are pre-service English teachers. Data will detail how the approach could notably assist participants in seizing communication opportunities in English, and in developing positive attitudes toward their teacher, classmates, and themselves as learners and future teachers of English. Implications are explored in the conclusion.*

Keywords: *Pyramid discussion; Pre-service English teachers; Action research; Narrative frames*

INTRODUCTION

The contention that foreign languages should be learned through meaningful and authentic communication and interaction has been popular since the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the creation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). TBLT is known to be an 'extension' of the CLT movement (Richards, 2006), and both methods centre primarily around the belief that students should be involved in meaning-focused communicative tasks. In this approach, language learning will take care of itself through the use of the target language, as the purpose of language is fundamentally for communication (Harmer, 2015; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Within the realms of CLT and TBLT, teachers are thus encouraged to move beyond teacher-dominated classrooms – in which the teacher provides a one-way stream of a specific body of knowledge (e.g., structural rules of the target language) – to student-centred classrooms, in which students are provided ample opportunities to participate in genuine interaction in the language

(Brown, 2001; Dörnyei, 2013; Harmer, 2015). Larsen-Freeman (2000), among other scholars (e.g., Holt, 1993; Jacobs & Goh, 2007), affirms that such interaction is helpful, and in fact imperative, for language acquisition to take place because it requires learners to express their own thoughts in the target language, to understand what is presented in the language, and to cooperate with other learners of the language. This communicative practice is therefore believed to have become a principal tenet of foreign language teaching methodology.

Despite the mounting empirical evidence of the benefits of, and a large number of advocates for, CLT and TBLT methods, teachers and learners in Asia are often said to prefer and need fixed lesson structure and sequential progression in their lessons (Jin & Yoo, 2019; Raymond & Choon, 2017). Crucially, learners in Asia often feel comfortable in considering their teacher to be an authority figure, as the classrooms in their contexts have not traditionally espoused independent learning or learner autonomy (Butler, 2011). All of these practices are incongruent with the chief principles of CLT and TBLT (Ellis, 2017; Richards, 2006). Against this backdrop, confirmed by my personal experiences as an English language teacher at secondary and university levels in Japan, I felt the need to launch an action research project in which I evaluate the effectiveness of communicative approaches in my lessons. Therefore, I have included in the action research project an adapted version of an EFL classroom speaking activity, known as pyramid discussion, in an English Teaching Methods course at a Japanese university. The specific aim of the single-semester project was twofold. The first objective was to seek more and better opportunities for English production for Japanese learners of English in the classroom, so that they could perhaps improve their fluency and confidence in English communication. The second was to guide those students towards discovering (or rediscovering) their desire to engage in communication in English while developing their understanding – as pre-service English teachers – about the language teaching technique of pyramid discussion. Data derived from the action research project highlighted how the discussion could notably assist the participants in seizing communication opportunities in English and in holding positive attitudes toward their teacher, classmates, and themselves, as learners and future teachers of English.

PYRAMID DISCUSSION

Jordan (1990) defines pyramid discussion as "a problem-solving activity that involves students making choices from a list of items within a given theme or subject" (p. 48). For example, students are first given a list of items (e.g., knife, fishing net, sunblock, flashlight, bug spray, and hammock) and individually asked what (three items) they would take on to a deserted island. After individual students have made their choices, they then would pair up and negotiate, trying to persuade one another in order to agree on new choices as a pair. They would afterwards repeat the same procedure in groups of four, then groups of six, and so on, depending on

the class size and the students' level of engagement with the discussions. Finally, the whole class, including the teacher, would engage in a discussion to agree on a single set of choices. According to Jordan (1990), most pyramid discussions encourage students to use appropriate language forms involving, for instance, suasion, argument, logical inquiry, and rational exposition. The discussions can be contained within 45 to 50 minutes, including the explanation of the procedure and examples of the communicative functions given by the teacher at the beginning of the activity. The pyramid discussion approach offers, at least, the following three advantages:

1. It is stimulating, involves the students, and gives the language practice a real purpose.
2. Even the weakest students can contribute something in a pair. As one of the purposes is to develop self-confidence in the use of language, and to help fluency, total accuracy can be ignored.
3. All students are practising listening and speaking all the time; in other words, maximum practice is being obtained, with a wide variety of language being generated. (Jordan, 1990, pp. 53-54)

Although there is a plethora of position papers and empirical research on pair discussion and group discussion in the classroom (e.g., Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Parker & Hess, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Slavin, 2005), as far as I am aware there are only three empirical studies that specifically investigate the influence that pyramid discussions have on students in the field of English language teaching and learning. Esfandiari and Knight (2013) conducted a case study in the UK into the use of the pyramid discussion approach within a ten-week English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. All the students in the course were Chinese and had upper-intermediate English proficiency. Data collected at different stages of the course showed that the inclusion of pyramid discussions significantly helped to increase student communication opportunities, in comparison to more traditional teacher-fronted approaches. This study, however, neither examined adequately the effects of pyramid discussions as a pedagogic activity, nor assessed properly the impact of them on student learning; the study measured simply the amount of student talking time and provided no additional data. It is no surprise that the amount of student talking time is longer when students are involved in discussions with others – pyramid or otherwise – than when they are engaged in individual activities or when they listen to explanations given by their teacher. In another study, Buhari (2019) recruited 18 eighth-grade students in Indonesia in order to investigate the impact of pyramid discussion on their speaking performance and classroom interaction. Judging from the research design and procedures described, as well as the absence of feedback from the students, however, the study provided little insight into the effectiveness of pyramid discussion for student English language learning. The objective of Hasan's (2021) study was to explore the influence of pyramid discussion on speaking abilities of 11th grade students. Since

the descriptions of the research design and the presentation of research findings were neither clear nor substantial, however, the study provided only a little insight into the extent to which pyramid discussion assisted student English language learning. In order to fill the gap in the literature, therefore, in the present inquiry I decided to carry out an action research project, with special attention paid to the effectiveness of pyramid discussions on students' perceptions and practices, by gathering qualitative data through classroom observation and narrative frames. This research was thus guided by the following question: What are the impacts pyramid discussions have on university students in an English Teaching Methods course in Japan?

METHODOLOGY

The context for this study was an English Teaching Methods course that I taught to 28 second- and third-year students at a national university in a southern prefecture in Japan. The course was compulsory for those who want to receive, upon graduation, an English teaching licence for secondary schools. In attempting to answer the research question related to the implementation of pyramid discussions, I embarked on an action research project within the course. Action research seemed to me an appropriate means by which to achieve the goal of this study, because it allows the practitioner-researcher to understand the experiences of all the participants in the classroom and elucidate the events of the classroom on a micro level. In the field of English language teaching and learning, the term 'action research' refers generally to empirical research initiated by practitioners to solve immediate problems, or explore puzzles, in their lessons (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Borg, 2013; Burns, 2010). It involves thoroughly understanding all the people concerned in the practice of teaching and learning by conducting a practical investigation via a spiral of actions (i.e., constructing a research plan, acting according to the plan, observing outcomes of the action, and reflecting on the result for further cycles). As a result, it proposes solutions or guidelines for better practice in the future (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Borg, 2013; Burns, 2010). In the present study, I made sure to include pyramid discussions (or more open-ended free conversations) for at least 30 out of the 90 minutes in all 15 of the lessons in the semester-long course. Some topics for pyramid discussions were: "What are important characteristics of an effective English teacher?" "What are the crucial motivating factors for learning English in the context of Japan?" and "What are some possible outcomes of introducing English classes into elementary schools in Japan?" Some prompts for free conversation were: "Why would you like to become an English teacher?" "What were your English learning experiences like when you were a high-school student?" and "What is your opinion of English education in Japan?"

This action research project delved into the students' intricate experiences with respect to pyramid discussions; the two qualitative data collection methods I chose were as follows:

Classroom Observation

The crux of qualitative research such as I outline here, is to endeavour to "understand what teachers and children do in the settings in which they work" (Eisner, 1998, p. 11). After gaining permission from my students, therefore, I videotaped three of my classes (at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester) in order to objectively see, feel, and comprehend what was really happening. I did so because I wished to investigate classroom practices, in particular those concerning pyramid discussions, based not on what I thought my students or I did, but rather on how we *actually* acted. Each entire class was recorded with a video camera on a tripod at the back of the classroom to capture what was happening from moment to moment. At the same time, I jotted down students' utterances or details of any kind of event or incident that I noticed when I was not communicating with my students in class.

Narrative Frames

The main data collection method for this study was a qualitative instrument known as 'narrative frames'. Narrative frames are written story templates that consist of "a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths" and are "structured as a story in skeletal form" (Barkhuizen, 2015, p. 107). Since narrative frames are said to give guidance and support concerning structure and content, the instrument was particularly suitable for the student participants in this study, because they lacked experience in giving detailed feedback on a particular course at the university. From my viewpoint as a practitioner-researcher, the frames were appropriate because I could to some degree control the data so it would be pertinent and convenient for the study in terms of both content and length. I could also expect the data analysis to be more or less smooth due to the structured feature of the frames (and this was indeed the case with this study) (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008).

At the end of the final class of the course, I asked all 28 students to complete narrative frames, while explaining that their participation, including what they wrote in the frames, would not in any way affect their grades. In the end, 26 students took up the invitation and composed narrative frames within an hour. The frames were designed by me with reference to previous studies (e.g., Author, 2016; Barkhuizen, 2014; Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Mehrani, 2017; Moodie, 2016). The frames ensured that the participants could express, for example, their feelings and thoughts about the course as well as about potential convergences and divergences between the course and other courses at the university. They could write as much

as they wished for each space of the narrative frames on a separate sheet. The first four frames in this study comprised: "I took this course because ①. I expected this course to be ② and ③ because ④" (see Appendix). In fact, I constructed both English and Japanese frames (the contents were the same) and asked the participants to fill in the two together. The reasons for this were that (a) I presumed the activity of completing English narrative frames would serve as a fruitful opportunity for the participants to use English with a clear purpose, and (b) I anticipated the participants would be less threatened and more comfortable writing Japanese narrative frames when given an unfamiliar task for the first time (see also Author, 2014, 2018). As expected, they wrote richer descriptions in their Japanese frames than they did in English; thus, the Japanese data became the focus of this study.

After collecting all the frames, I first translated all the Japanese data into English whilst making every effort to keep the meaning of the participants' original responses. In the first phase of the data analysis, I read each narrative frame as a complete story (as below), made analytic notes in the margin, and built an understanding of the participants' perspectives on the course.

Example 1: (a complete Japanese narrative story translated by me) I took this course because I wanted to receive a teaching licence. I expected this course to be scholastic and difficult because the title of the course was English Teaching Methods. I imagined that I could learn from this course a variety of English teaching methods and thoughts. In fact, I learned in this course that it is important to be able to speak English well as an English teacher. I was excited during the course when we engaged in discussions with other students and the teacher. On the other hand, I was bored with reading the textbook. In the course, I remember my teacher asking us many questions. For me, it was stimulating because it motivated me to think hard about how I could convey my message to the teacher well. I also remember that some of my classmates were really good at speaking English and others were not. I thought it was encouraging because I could assess my current English abilities. At the same time, I remember that I used Japanese from time to time in class. It was not preferable because that meant that my classmates and I lost precious opportunities to speak in English. Now, thinking back, I wish my teacher could ask us even more questions so that we could speak up more. I also wish my classmates made more effort to use English even if it might have been difficult to do so, and at the same time I wish I had studied more and prepared more for the lessons during the course. In comparison to other teachers, the teacher was very passionate and valued students' autonomy. Overall, this course gave me courage to speak English. And I kept being motivated to study

English after class every week. Finally, I would like to say thank you for the course. This is the end of my story.

During the second phase of the data analysis, I uploaded the narrative frame data into qualitative analysis software called NVivo 11 and read the data thematically according to different spaces, from 1 to 24 (see Appendix), in order that I could identify similarities and differences amongst the participants for each space. In other words, the data analysis concurrently employed features of a qualitative content analysis approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) as well as a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This constant and comparative strategy helped me to discover, integrate, and refine major codes and categories. As a consequence, the data analysis that focused on the students' perceptions and experiences regarding pyramid discussions ended up in two interconnected categories. They were (a) Sheer Joy: Benefits of Pyramid Discussions and (b) Poignant Frustration: Challenges of Pyramid Discussions.

RESULTS

Sheer Joy: Benefits of Pyramid Discussions

Table 1. Sheer Joy: Benefits of pyramid discussions (N=26)

Themes	Frequency
Having fun -Discussion opportunities with the teacher and classmates	(25)
Gaining alternative views	(17)
-Views about teaching and learning	10
-Views about the teacher, classmates, and themselves	7
Using English -Use of English in a meaningful way	(8)
Building confidence -Confidence in English abilities and communication skills	(4)

Note: There were responses that could contain more than one theme with respect to this category, so the total of frequencies exceeds 26.

The first key category among the findings concerns the students' joy with regard to taking part in pyramid discussions. The overwhelming majority of them saw the benefits of the discussions and said, for example, that they had fun gaining discussion opportunities with the teacher and the classmates (25 references). Some of the salient responses within this theme included: "The discussions were fun because there were many students in the course who had similar levels of English and shared similar values and interests"; "It was just fun to talk about topics we liked with other classmates"; and "The conversation opportunity was fascinating

because we could communicate with each other successfully, although not perfectly, in English". It seemed that the students' levels of English, their interests, and the topics chosen played a pivotal role in the success of the discussions and conversations on the course (see Harmer, 2015; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). In addition, the level of comfort in the classroom was an essential prerequisite for the students to have fun speaking English during the semester (see also Buhari, 2019); as one student aptly put it:

> The ways in which the conversation activities were organised enabled
> me to have fun and say whatever I wanted to say without any pressure.
> In other courses, I can see that the pressure gradually builds up and, as
> a result, both the teachers and students become nervous speaking in
> English.

Another confessed: "The classes on the course were fun and comfortable because the teacher and my classmates were always cheerful, happy, and smiling. It was helpful for me especially because I suffer from anthropophobia". Although the pressure and anxiety that learners often feel when speaking in the target language is viewed to be one of the most, if not *the* most, deep-seated problems – especially in Asia (Brown & Iyobe, 2014; Butler, 2011; Koosha & Yakhabi, 2013; Liao, 2004; Littlewood, 2007) – the participants in this study appeared to have genuinely enjoyed conversing in English with all the people in the classroom, relatively free from those psychological struggles. The lessons in the course, therefore, reflected some of the core principles of CLT and TBLT (Ellis, 2017; Richards, 2006), thereby embodying what I had always wanted in English classes: the combination of a comfortable atmosphere and a natural environment for using the target language.

Unsurprisingly, one of the consequences of engaging in lengthy and in-depth discussions with others was the opportunity to be exposed to alternative perspectives. Ten participants believed that their views about English teaching and learning had broadened. Remembering the numerous discussions held on the course, one student stated: "I was often exposed to opinions presented by other classmates and the teacher, which were different from mine. It was good and informative in order for me to acquire new knowledge and beliefs about English teaching and learning". Another noted: "The discussions gave me the opportunity to concentrate on what others had to say and enhance my thinking about teaching from different points of view". Not only did the students see alternative views on teaching and learning issues, they were also able to observe different aspects of their teacher, classmates, and themselves (seven references). For instance, one student wrote: "The teacher was confident and funny. I was impressed with him because he always responded quickly to the students' questions in English". Another relayed his/her thoughts as follows: "I came to realise that my classmates are hard-working and competent. They also have big hearts". One student described

his/her determination for the future: "I have usually depended on others, but the exchanges we had on the course changed my thinking. I now feel the need to stop being shy and be more positive and even aggressive so as to express my thoughts more". The discussions therefore became an invaluable platform from which students could recognise a rich array of alternative perspectives about English language teaching and learning, their teacher, their classmates, and themselves. This is illustrative of student-centred classrooms in which students are offered many opportunities to participate in authentic interaction in English (Brown, 2001; Dörnyei, 2013; Harmer, 2015).

Eight participants attested to the meaningful use of English in the discussions (see also Buhari, 2019; Esfandiari & Knight, 2013; Jordan, 1990). They felt that the opportunity was "rare" and "useful". One student elaborated on this point:

> The English conversations we had with the teacher and classmates about English education in Japan led me to think more seriously about the topic. I had never spoken English in a meaningful way for an extended period of time like that before.

By taking part in various types of conversations in English for a prolonged time throughout the course, the participants seem to have experienced the importance and joy of meaningful opinion exchanges in the target language. The final theme in this category was associated with the increase in their confidence in their English abilities and communication skills (four references) (see also Buhari, 2019; Esfandiari & Knight, 2013; Jordan, 1990). This theme was not detailed so much in the data in terms of how and why it took place; nonetheless, some participants seemed to have been certain that this happened. For example, one student asserted: "I could continue speaking in English at length. I knew my English was improving and what I said was making sense more and more". Another stated decidedly: "I could build up my confidence in communicating with others during the discussions".

The participants thereby had an impression that they experienced sheer joy through exchanging ideas and thoughts on topics in which they were interested as English users, not necessarily as English learners. This was obvious in the video clips of the lessons, too, in that the lessons were filled with constant laughter and broad smiles, with students continuing to talk to each other vigorously for at least a few minutes after I told them repeatedly to stop and form new groups, or to look at the front of the classroom.

Poignant Frustration: Challenges of Pyramid Discussions

Table 2. Poignant Frustration: Challenges of Pyramid Discussions (N=26)

Themes	Frequency
Lacking preparation	(6)
-Students' lack of preparedness	4
-Teacher's lack of preparedness	2
Lacking engagement	(5)
-Lack of willingness to talk	3
-Use of Japanese	2

The second category was connected to the students' frustration involving the challenges deriving from the pyramid discussions. The most frequently cited theme in this category was the lack of preparation (six references). Firstly, four participants were acutely aware that they were not ready for the approach because the nature of the discussion topics presented did not quite match the current level of their English competence. For example, one student wrote: "The conversation sometimes stalled, and we became inactive because we did not have anything else to say on the topic". Another did not hesitate to express his/her dissatisfaction: "I wanted to kick myself when I remained silent due to the lack of my speaking skills. Whenever I was just nodding in class, not speaking but just listening to others, I wanted to cry". The lack of knowledge of both the topics covered, and of English (speaking) skills became a principal source for their frustration during the discussions. These comments might in turn illustrate that this issue is perhaps the main challenge facing the pyramid discussion approach, and thus is worthy of further investigation. Of note in this particular study is also that the participants openly admitted and regretted the lack of knowledge and of English ability in the narrative frames. This might be an indicator that they built up fresh motivation for, and developed increased commitment to, English language learning during the course. Furthermore, it suggests that they participated in this research with honesty and sincerity, comfortably showing their vulnerability.

Secondly, two participants were cognisant of the lack of preparation on my part. One student voiced his/her frustration in this regard: "There was no sense of direction from the teacher. There was no reflection on or expansion of the topic presented after the discussions or conversations in the lessons". This theme points to the urgent need for teachers to explore effective procedures and follow-up activities for pyramid discussions that they could implement in each context when using the discussions. Some of the questions relating to this issue that practitioner-researchers may be able to address are: "How controlled and structured do teachers want the discussion to be at different stages of the pyramid discussion approach?" and "In what way and to what extent should the teacher introduce his/her opinions and/or extra (reading) materials before and after the discussions for students to prepare for and reflect on the activity?"

Some participants became unwilling to talk (three references) and some used Japanese (two references) in the discussions, despite their best intentions. One student manifested his/her difficulty by saying: "It was often difficult to organise

my thoughts and thus I became unwilling to convey them to my conversation partners". Another summed up the frustration in the following way: "It was boring and frustrating when I could not make myself understood in English, so I used Japanese instead of English". Given the comments, I wondered whether I should have given the students planning time before the discussions and/or whether I should have walked around the classroom to impose more strictly an English-only rule. These matters should be carefully considered by taking into account several essential issues such as what it truly means to have authentic communication in English, and what student-centred lessons actually entail.

About a dozen references in the narrative frames hence signalled some participants' frustration with the pyramid discussions. Although even a close look at the video clips of classroom observation did not provide me with any apparent example of the related themes in this category, the narrative frames shed some light on the lack of preparation and engagement involving the pyramid discussions, on the part of both the teacher and the students on the course. No doubt, this frustration should be more deeply investigated and unpacked in the future in order to establish an optimal atmosphere for successful pyramid discussions in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

Two important issues arose on the basis of this action research that looked into the effectiveness of pyramid discussions for Japanese university students on an English Teaching Methods course. The first issue is that the participants' positive reaction to the course confirmed to me that Japanese learners of English can and do enjoy lessons that employ communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching methods (Ellis, 2017; Richards, 2006). Although heavily promoted and steadily growing, there have been numerous reservations and caveats regarding the inclusion of communication-based teaching methods in Asian countries, including Japan, where it is believed that the learners of English do not necessarily possess high intrinsic motivation to communicate in English; moreover, their cultural values are bound to make them treat the teacher as being the central figure in the classroom. These ingrained beliefs are considered to prevent genuine communication from occurring in general, let alone in English, among learners in the classroom (Brown & Iyobe, 2014; Butler, 2011; Koosha &Yakhabi, 2013; Liao, 2004; Littlewood, 2007). As this study has shown, however, when certain conditions are met – including the level of comfort in the classroom and confidence of the students, the English abilities of the teacher and students, students' willingness to communicate in English, and types of discussion topics and activities, to name a few – communicative classroom activities, such as the pyramid discussion approach, can be fully and properly implemented (even) in Asian contexts.

The second issue, related to the first and particularly to the participants in this study, concerns the phenomenon of apprenticeship of observation, a notion that teachers' accumulated prior experiences in the classroom as learners have a profound influence on their pedagogy as teachers (Lortie, 1975). Since the course addressed in this present inquiry was for students on their way to becoming English teachers, I was keenly aware of the fact that the ways in which the course was structured and demonstrated – as well as everything I said and did – would likely affect, at least to some degree, the students' perceptions of and practices in English language teaching and learning. The title of the course, English Teaching Methods, is quite self-explanatory in this regard, and throughout the course I, as a teacher educator, strove to provide motivating and practicable lessons tailored to my students as pre-service teachers. When the students were asked about the course, both directly by me in class, and after the course through narrative frames, the students' reaction and responses to the course were categorically positive. In particular, the large number of positive comments on the benefits of the pyramid discussions I used in the course were humbling, and I feel as though I could achieve one of my missions on the course, which was to present to the students how they might be able to practically implement communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching methods in the future. In other words, I might have been at least partly successful in displaying how we as Japanese teachers of English could adopt pyramid discussions in a personalised and contextualised way for Japanese students. Hence, I might have been able to demonstrate the "pro-apprenticeship of observation" in which students' prior language learning experiences have positive impacts on their (future) teaching beliefs and practices, as opposed to "anti-apprenticeship of observation" (Moodie, 2016, p. 29) in which students' prior language learning experiences negatively influence their teaching.

CONCLUSION

The present action research project provided me with concrete answers for the research question pertaining to the effectiveness of pyramid discussions for the Japanese university students on my English Teaching Methods course. I underscored in this article that the student participants exhibited sheer joy and perceived myriad benefits through taking part in the pyramid discussions during the course. Some benefits they emphasised were: feeling excited, obtaining different perspectives, gaining speaking opportunities in English, and boosting their confidence in the use of English. Overall, therefore, the pyramid discussion approach could notably assist the participants in seizing communication time in English and in adopting favourable attitudes toward their teacher, classmates, and themselves. In a few cases, however, the participants felt discouraged by the discussion activities on the course, particularly because of lack of preparation and of English competence. Nevertheless, I still consider that the action research was 'successful' because, as a practitioner, my understanding of the students'

experiences was greatly enhanced over the course of the research, and also because I, as a practitioner-researcher, could elucidate students' experiences and several classroom events with appropriate data on a micro level (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Borg, 2013; Burns, 2010). Without doubt, the findings of this research will instil changes in me when I seek better teaching practices in similar (or even different) university courses in the future.

In conclusion, I would like to put forward implications for future research. Firstly, more detailed descriptions of students' interaction during pyramid discussions from the viewpoint of fluency, complexity, and accuracy, using rigorous measurement techniques, are much needed (cf. Buhari, 2019; Esfandiari & Knight, 2013). Only with discourse analysis of second-by-second transcripts of students' interaction during the discussions will we be able to have more ideas as to how to make the approach more productive and worthwhile. Along similar lines, many types of pyramid discussion with slight changes in procedures, teacher instructions, topics, timeframes, and the use of students' first language should be carried out and examined with the same students, in order to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of each condition. Finally, I suggest that practitioner-researchers should strive to implement the pyramid discussion approach as often as possible, and evaluate the effectiveness of it with different students in diverse courses, as it goes without saying that the timing of the implementation of the approach, as well as the idiosyncrasies of each student and course, will determine the ultimate outcome of the approach.

REFERENCES

Allwright, D., & Hanks, J. (2009). *The developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Barkhuizen, G. (2014). Revisiting narrative frames: An instrument for investigating language teaching and learning. *System,* 47, 12-27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.09.014

Barkhuizen, G. (2015). Narrative knowleding in second language teaching and learning contexts. In A. De Fina & A. Georgakopoulou (Eds.), *The handbook of narrative analysis (pp. 97-115).* Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Barkhuizen, G., & Wette, R. (2008). Narrative frames for investigating the experience of language teachers. *System*, 36, 372-387. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.02.002

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods (5th ed.).* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Borg, S. (2013). *Teacher research in language teaching: A critical analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles – An interactive approach to language pedagogy (2nd ed.).* London: Pearson Education.

Brown, H., & Iyobe, B. (2014). The growth of English medium instruction in Japan. In N. Sonda& A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2013 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 9-19). Tokyo: JALT.

Buhari., B. (2019). Practicing discussion in the form of pyramid to improve students' speaking performance and classroom interaction. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching,* 7(2), 108-116. https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v7i2.1958

Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners.* New York: Routledge.

Butler, Y. G. (2011). The implementation of communicative and task-based language teaching in the Asia-pacific region. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics,* 31, 36-57. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190511000122

Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (2014). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom (3rd ed).* New York: Teachers College Press.

Dörnyei, Z. (2013). Communicative language teaching in the twenty-first century: The 'principled communicative approach'. In J. Arnold & T. Murphey (Eds.), *Meaningful action Earl Stevick's influence on language teaching* (pp. 161-171). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eisner, E. W. (1998). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Ellis, R. (2017). Task-based language teaching. In S. Lowen & M. Sato (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of instructed second language acquisition (pp. 108-125).* New York: Routledge.

Esfandiari, M., & Knight, P. (2013). Using pyramid discussions in the task-based classroom to extend student talking time. *World Journal of English language,* 3(3), 20-26. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v3n3p20

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Rutgers, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

Harmer, J. (2015). *The practice of English language teaching (5th ed.).* London: Pearson Education.

Hasan, S. (2021). The influence of pyramid discussion towards students' speaking ability. *Journal of English teaching, applied linguistics and literatures,* 4(1), 33-38.

Hiratsuka, T. (2014). A study into how high school students learn using narrative frames. *ELT Journal,* 68(2), 169-178.

Hiratsuka, T. (2016). Employing narrative frames for needs analysis: The case of a newly-hired teacher. *OTB Forum,* 7(2), 57-63.

Hiratsuka, T. (2018). Narrative frames as a course evaluation instrument. *The Language Teacher,* 42(1), 3-7.

Holt, D. D. (Ed.). (1993). *Cooperative learning: A response to linguistic and cultural diversity.* McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Howatt, A. P. R., & Widdowson, H. G. (2004). *A history of English language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jacobs, G. M., & Goh, C. C. (2007). *Cooperative learning in the language classroom.* Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Center.

Jin, Y., & Yoo, I. (2019). Why communicative language teaching has yet to work in Korea: Exploring teachers' viewpoints. *The Journal of Asia TEFL,* 16(4), 1332-1347. https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2019.16.4.17.1332

Jordan, R. R. (1990). Pyramid discussions. *ELT Journal,* 44(1), 46-54. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/44.1.46

Koosha, M., & Yakhabi, M. (2013). Problems associated with the use of communicative language teaching in EFL contexts and possible solutions. *International journal of foreign language teaching and research,* 1(2), 63-76.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Liao, X. (2004). The need for communicative language teaching in China. *ELT Journal,* 58(3), 270-273. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.3.270

Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching,* 40, 243-249. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444807004363

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Mehrani, M. B. (2017). A narrative study of Iranian EFL teachers' experiences of doing action research. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research,* 5(1), 93-112.

Moodie, I. (2016). The anti-apprenticeship of observation: How negative prior language learning experience influences English language teachers' beliefs and practices. *System,* 60, 29-41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.05.011

Parker, W. C., & Hess, D. (2001). Teaching with and for discussion. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 17(3), 273-289. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x(00)00057-3

Raymond, L., & Choon, T. (2017). Understanding Asian students learning styles, cultural influence and learning. *Journal of Education & Social Policy,* 7 (1), 194-210.

Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Slavin, R. E. (2005). *Cooperative learning: Theory, research and practice.* London: Allyn and Bacon.