Patterns of Interaction among Mono-Cultural English as Second Language Learners

Nalini Arumugam, Geraldine de Mello & Indrani Muthusamy

ABSTRACT: *By exploring the educational pedagogies and classroom discourses, it is the aim of the paper to extend theoretical insights into the way ESL (English as Second Language) writing classrooms might help to make over, negotiate, and manage the linguistic, social and learning identities of the mono-cultural learners in the classrooms. The basic premise of social interdependence theory is that the way interdependence among goals is structured determines how individuals interact, which in turn largely determines outcomes. Research, therefore, has focused on student–student interaction in ESL tertiary writing classroom in an institution of higher learning. The results indicated that mono-cultural learners in an ESL classroom juxtaposed two languages (L1 and L2) and appropriated their bilingualism to learn English language. The results also revealed that group discussions in ESL classrooms in institution of higher learning offered experiential learning whereby learners became more skilled to use suitable choice of words (at times with help of their more capable peers), specifically utilising their bilingual expertise. The end results of this study point out a favourable feature of the discourses of the ESL learners striving for mutual benefits to successfully complete the assigned tasks.*
KEY WORDS: *Mono-cultural, English as second language, face-to-face interaction, patterns of interaction, and Malay students.*

Introduction

Language plays a significant role in social interactions. It enables various types of communication. Communication, on the other hand, enables individuals to expand understanding of the world and leads to cognitive development. Several types of communication take place in the classroom: teacher and learners as well as learners and learners, text and learners, and learners and teacher. These communication patterns propose that language is a significant tool that connects the individual with the world beyond the self. So does effective and meaningful communication and interaction takes place in an English as Second Language (ESL henceforth) classrooms?

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L.A. Hirst and C. Slavik (2005) and J. Kreie, R.W. Headrick and R. Steiner (2007) claimed that the use of group activities to provide opportunities for learners to use language in meaningful ways is one the most effective mode of second language instruction. In completing a cooperative task, learners must listen to and negotiate meaning with one another. Although learners' inter-language may not provide perfect models of the target language, there is obvious communication. Obviously, not all the learners in this study are proficient speakers but they still assist one another developing their competence in the target language as suggested by K. Mason (2006). Apparently, the small group learner-learner interactions indicate that such interactions provide conditions that facilitate language acquisition better than teacher-learner interactions (Ellis, 1994). Another note worthy point to consider is the mono-cultural ESL classroom where learners who prefer to work together to accomplish assigned tasks (Mariam, 2004) could result in code-switching, particularly from L1 (first language) to L2 (second language) or vice versa.

A. Iwai (2004) and M. Paramasivam (2005) perceived code switching to be fulfilling the function of language that amounts to effective communication and inter-lingual unity. Code switching is viewed as the medium to convey both social and linguistic meanings. They opined that learners often resorted to using their first language to "help bridge the proficiency gap". A.S. Canagarajah (2005) has also pointed out that code switching in the ESL classroom helps the instructors and learners to manage their classroom interactions efficiently and to negotiate the pedagogical content meaningfully. He argued that even if some code switches are motivated by incompetence, they are loaded with social meaning and rhetorical implications. In fact, "*Code switching can lessen the inhibitions against second language learning and enable learners to accommodate them in their repertoire of English*" (Canagarajah, 2005:592). He has also said that sometimes learners use L1 as the medium for accomplishing the prescribed pedagogical activity such as translating the question into L1, appropriating their attempted sequences, and peer help on difficult words. "*Such collaborative interactions in the vernacular displayed more depth and involvement than the collaborative tasks teachers gave learners to be conducted in English*" (Canagarajah, 2005:138). This explanation on the use of L1 befits well to this present study because the participating learners frequently use L1 to communicate. Thus, they may want to use their L1 to "speak their thoughts."

Meanwhile, D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) stressed the importance of the members meeting face-to-face to work together to complete group tasks and foster one another's success and stressed that the discipline of using group writing was to ensure the group members meet face-to-face, to work cooperatively to complete the assigned tasks and facilitate their peers' success as well. The face-to-face promotive interaction (FFPI henceforth) element encouraged group discussions by creating an environment where the group members assisted one another; exchanged ideas and information and provided feedback to members to improve their ideas and facts (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Therefore, in Malaysia the ESL classrooms have a variety of language to assist a better grasp of the target language.

Statement of the Problem

The "mono-cultural" background of students to share the same mother tongue and often it is said that they use L1 (first language), the Malay language to learn L2 (second language), the English language. It is our view that the bilingual interaction found in these classrooms, particularly the way that the participants spontaneously and purposely juxtapose Malay language and English in order to create learning/ teaching opportunities offers a useful example of "bilingual complementarity" at learning institutions. By this we mean the way that the two languages are used together in the classrooms, and how this plays an important part in the negotiation and management of the linguistic, social, and learning identities of the classroom participants. Through talk, interaction is made and classroom atmosphere is established.

Darrell M. Hull and Terrill F. Saxon (2009) opine that talking serves to structure and control our behaviour as well as being a means of communicating with others and influencing them. In this context, how the learners share their ideas and experiences with those involved will be observed. As learners naturally interact in small groups, there is a strong support for establishing interpersonal skills, to help their peers to achieve the group goal. The language skills used by the learners; especially how the learners exchange ideas to complete their assigned task using the characteristics of the Social Interdependence Theory to write the drafts of the essays will be taken into consideration.

Knowledge is constructed through joint activity (Vygotsky, 1978); and therefore, learning is mediated by different learners within the group. Knowledge is commonly said to be socially constructed through cooperative efforts toward shared objectives, or by discussions and challenges brought about by the interaction among learners (Barnes, 1995). According to D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson's Social Interdependence Theory, characteristics of group discussion encompass positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills, and group processing. Positive interdependence is said to result in promotive interaction, and at times, negative interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1991 and 1999). This creates unity and trustworthiness in the group where learners become aware that they could optimise theirs as well as their peers' learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; and Iwai, 2004) and strive for mutual benefits (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994). However, to date little has been done to show how beneficial is this approach at a higher learning institution, especially at mono-cultural ESL (English as Second Language) learning environment. Hence, the present study aimed to examine how learners in an ESL classroom shared their ideas and experiences in the process of discussion and negotiations.

Research Questions, Scope of the Study and Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

The present research employed FFPI (Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction) which is claimed to encourage a more effective language learning process in the ESL (English as Second Language) writing classroom. As the FFPI in small groups provides multiple opportunities for students to interact and assist each other, the use of this approach can serve to overcome distressed and de-motivated ESL learners. Furthermore, group discussions also promote positive social interactions (Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Iwai, 2004; Mason, 2006; and Depaz & Moni, 2008) which can enhance students' learning experiences.

As such, this research attempted to answer the following questions: (1) What are the ESL learners' patterns of interaction in the mono-cultural ESL learning settings?; and (2) How do ESL learners' patterns of interaction in the writing classes facilitate learning?

This study included patterns of interaction based on Johnson and Johnson's Social Interdependence Theory, FFPI. FFPI takes place when group members encourage and facilitate one another's progress by assisting group members to accomplish the assigned tasks, achieving group goals. Knowledge is constructed through joint activity (Vygotsky, 1978); and therefore, learning is mediated by different learners within the group. To experience the optimal effects of FFPI the members should render assistance such as exchanging needed resources, information and materials, processing information more efficiently and effectively, providing one another with valuable feedback to improve their efficiency, and getting greater insight into the problems being considered (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

A case study approach was chosen for this study. A total of sixty-three (63) learners, who are pursuing their diploma in Business Studies, participated in this study. In this context, qualitative method included observations and audio-recording of students' discussions in naturalistic learning contexts. The discussions were audio-taped and transcribed by the researchers. The checklist was adapted from D.W. Johnson, R.T. Johnson and E.J. Holubec (1994) to elicit data from a group of mono-ethnic students at a public institution of higher learning in Malaysia. The checklist consisted of elements like correcting peers, repeating ideas, integrating ideas, explanation, reinforcing, challenging, reasoning, influencing, questioning, probing, clarifying, paraphrasing, encouraging, criticising ideas, criticising members, and approving members' ideas (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

The checklist was deemed sufficient in eliciting information on students' patterns of interaction employing FFPI. Later, group semi-structured interviews were conducted at the institution to elicit qualitative data about the issues under study, i.e. the efficacy of FFIP and observed their attitudes and ability to be fully engaged in tasks assigned in classroom.

Results and Discussion

On the Research Question 1: Patterns of Interaction. L.S. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that learning is a social enterprise and students learn through interaction; while D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) claimed that students learn better by helping one another. These claims were observed by the researchers during discussions held among learners in this study. The learners assisted one another and engaged themselves in the tasks by explaining the question. These results show that the learners have practised FFPI (Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction) taught by the researchers to complete the designated tasks. They found FFPI traits to be beneficial, which was demonstrated in the structured interview. A learner said, "*When we meet to discuss with friends in the group, we learn better. If I don't know anything, I can ask my friends who are clever*". Another learner revealed that "*We can always check when we discuss. I feel it is easier to ask my friend and not shy to ask them*".

These confessions also proved that FFPI had played a significant role in processing information more efficiently and effectively; providing one another with valuable feedback to improve their efficiency and getting greater insights into the problems being considered which was also observed in D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999), A. Iwai (2004), and M.N. Mariam (2004). Although there are 16 characteristics suggested by D.W. Johnson, R.T. Johnson and E.J. Holubec (1994), the researchers found 6 (six) apparent features utilised by learners during their group discussions. The details of the common features are discussed below.

First, **Correcting Peers**. The "correcting peers" element is an essential skill in the FFPI context (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; and Iwai, 2004) and the researchers noted that it was an obvious sub skill practised by all the groups in both cases at almost the same frequency. It was also observed that peer correction reduced as the learners got more involved in the discussions and this could be ascribed to the fact that the learners gradually became more confident in their writing ability. D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) and M.N. Mariam (2004) posited that correcting peers in group discussion is often used among learners to facilitate a fruitful discussion.

The following are excerpts from the transcriptions of the students' interactions demonstrating this sub skill.

Excerpt 1:
Group Writing Session 1, Lines 1 to 2

1.	Noor Hanini,	"*Carbo* will give us energy to work. Learner must have and *banyak* (a lot of) he ... he ... he ... much *tenaga*, power *ya*?" (looking at Fauziana Asman for approval).
2.	Fauzina,	"Not power *lah*, Energy" (then Noor Hanini continued).

Excerpt 2:
Group Writing Session I, Lines 3 to 5

3.	Irma Suriani,	"*Tugas* means responsibility and *harian* means every day. So, responsibility every day, *tak sedap lah* maybe everyday responsibility, what you say Fauziana?"
4.	Fauziana,	"No *lah.* Better to say 'daily work' or 'daily responsibility'".
5.	Noor Hanini,	"Okay, we take daily work in our life".

The excerpts (1 & 2, appendix A) clearly illustrate the commitment of the members in correcting their peers to improve in writing. In the ESL (English as Second Language) classroom, Fauziana, a learner, who scored the highest grade in the pre-test assessment, corrected her peer who seemed to be a less proficient group member, Irma Suriani's error "*everyday responsibility*" (lines 2) by providing the appropriate word to "*daily responsibility*" (line 4) to describe their task.

The correcting peer element was remarkable in all groups. This clearly showed that this group writing session not only had encouraged the learners to engage actively in class work and employ the learnt FFPI skills but also encouraged the learners to support and facilitate their peers' involvement. These findings concur with the findings of M.N. Mariam (2004) and K. Mason (2006) who disclosed that group work would facilitate talk in the process of completing their task by creating a model for some learners to imitate and improve themselves. It was clear that when a learner was corrected by another, it created an avenue for all the learners in the group to generate better ideas and use more appropriate words such as in lines 2 and 4. During the group reflection, a group leader admitted, "*We are very happy having group writing because some of our friends are good in English and they help us. We are more confident now and can write better*". Another member said, "*Now we know how to check our own work. Before we just write and 'pass up' but now we check before 'passing up'*".

These acknowledgements in fact provide a clearer picture of the learners and the extent to which they had learned from the group-learning experience as also observed in previous study of J. Kreie, R.W. Headrick and R. Steiner (2007).

Second, **Approving**. D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) and M.N. Mariam (2004) put forward that the approving element is another important characteristic among the CLL (Cooperative Language Learning)-based group work and this skill was also commonly observed among the learners in both cases. This showed the members' approval of their group peers' ideas and views. It was a noteworthy observation that the group members accepted their peers' contribution in completing their group tasks together. Mostly, they accepted peers' views after discussing and assessing if they were suitable and relevant. Below are some excerpts demonstrating the approval trait.

Excerpt 3:
Group Writing Session 2, Lines 6 to 8

6.	Siti Fairuza,	"We go point by point. First, we compare point one in hypermarkets with the first point in the sundry shop".
7.	Maimunah,	"*Ya lah*. Hypermarkets are very convenient because it is one-stop for shopping. We can buy a lot of things at one place. We no need to go to many shops".
8.	Siti Fairuza,	"Yes, good. Now can talk about sundry shop *lah*".

When Siti Fairuza suggested that they could compare and contrast the characteristics of hypermarkets to sundry shops (line 6), the leader approved (line 7) her idea by saying "*Ya lah*". Likewise, Siti Fairuza (line 8) also appreciated and readily accepted, Maimunah's idea by acknowledging "*Yes, good*".

A learner said, "*Sometimes, we do talk other stories but our members will remind us of the time and task. Then we will come back to our work. We also talk about the grammar rules which helped us to check our work*". A group leader from institution A said, "*The group members were very helpful. When we made mistakes, they corrected us. We did not call the instructor to help us*". The researchers obviously noted the social talk present in the groups but perceived it as an essential element to strengthen their rapport as well as to stimulate the learners to acquire new knowledge based on their prior experience (Mason, 2006; and Doymus, 2008).

Third, **Explaining**. D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) highlighted that the explaining element in CLL (Cooperative Language Learning) stimulates learners' ability and willingness to assist their less capable friends to "swim along" to achieve the goals. Undoubtedly this trait was always practised in both cases. This could be interpreted that the members explained the tasks clearly to their peers whenever the group members did not understand. When the members explained the task, most of the times their peers managed to follow the discussion and participated actively in the group tasks. Below are some excerpts.

Excerpt 4:
Group Writing Session 2, Lines 9 to 11

9.	Maimunah,	"Can *lah* madam. We can do. Come let's start the first point. Hypermarkets *itu macam* (are like) big supermarkets. So, we talk about the good *isi* (point) first. Hypermarkets are better because it is air conditioned and can buy many things".
10.	Siti Fairuza,	"I don't know about grocery shops or sundry shops. No experience *lah*".
11.	Adila Talip,	"*Tak apa (*nevermind). It is *kedai runcit lah* (grocery shop)".

One of the members did not know the meaning of "*hypermarkets*". Maimunah, the leader patiently, explained the term in their mother tongue (line 9). Moreover, she was optimistic and confident on performing the assigned task. In addition, when Siti Fairuza revealed that she did not have any experience (line 10) in dealing with sundry or grocery shops, Adila Talip accepted the fact without frowning. Besides,

she also "*explained*" the meaning in Malay, their mother tongue (line 11) ensuring her peer understood the task.

A limited proficient learner admitted that she was often assisted by her more capable group members. She said, "*Some of my group members are very good in English. So they will 'explain' the question if I do not know or understand the question. Then I can join the group discussion*". It was clear that the explanation was effective and it went across to the other members. These results are in line with that of K.J. Chapman *et al*. (2006); K. Mason (2006); and J. Kreie, R.W. Headrick and R. Steiner (2007) who pointed that explanation would heighten learning, especially the average and limited proficient learners.

Fourth, **Extending Ideas**. The "extending ideas" feature is a vital skill in the FFPI context (Mariam, 2004; and Mason, 2006). This feature was noticed during the group writing sessions in both institution A and B. The observation check list in institution A showed that this sub skill was utilised throughout the discussions. It was also observed that extending peers' ideas increased as they got more involved in the discussions and this could be described to the fact that the learners gradually became more confident and adept in their writing ability (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994; and Depaz & Moni, 2008).

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Excerpt 5:
Group Writing Session 2, Lines 12 to 15
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12.	Siti Fairuza,	"Hypermarkets are air-conditioned and very comfortable. They have a lot of things and more choices. On the other hand, sundry shops are usually not air conditioned and very small. They also got not much of things to sell. They are very boring. So, I prefer to go to hypermarkets".
13.	Adila Talip,	"Must use the word one-stop shopping. Ida thinks it is good word".
14.	Aida Suhana,	"*Tambah* (add) the 'one-stop shopping'".
15.	Maimunah,	"Okay. Like this. Hypermarkets are one-stop shopping. They are air-conditioned and very comfortable. They have a lot of things and more choices. Then *sambung* (continue) with what Siti said".

When Siti Fairuza explained her views (line 12), Adila Talip highlighted the importance of the word "*one-stop shopping*", which is very relevant to their discussion (line 13). This was followed by Maimunah (line 15) who appropriated the suggestion given by Adila Talip and Aida Suhana which clearly demonstrated the feature of extending ideas.

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Excerpt 6:
Group Writing Session 3, Lines 16 to 20
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16.	Khatijah,	"*Ya lah.* We must talk about the passive smoking. Can we start like this, 'Sometimes, women who sit with their husband or their friends who smoke are called passive smokers', okay *keh*?"
17.	Khairul,	"This innocent people also tend to become the victim of smoking by getting cervical cancer. Finish writing?"

18.	Firdaus,	"We can add a bit more. Smoking can also cause heart attack. We smoke for fun but this fun can *musnah … ah* destroy our whole life if we get heart attack. Anybody want to say anything?"
19.	Khatijah,	"The conclusion? Start with 'hence', and give one advice *lah*".
20.	Khairul,	"*Ya lah*. What about the miscarriage? That point also can go with health risks. We must talk about all the points. Madam said we must use all the points in the book".

Firdaus (line 18) extended Khatijah (line 16) and Khairul's (line 17) idea. When Khairul stressed that the innocent passive smokers become victim to cervical cancer, Firdaus extended the outcome to heart disease. This is an obvious extension of ideas. Thus, it can be interpreted that extending and integrating of ideas are very commonly used by learners. This result concurs with the findings of A. Iwai (2004) and M.N. Mariam (2004).

Fifth, **Integrating Ideas**. Learners integrate ideas of members to write a better piece of writing. However, integration of ideas can be done only once the learners understand and work in groups. D.W. Johnson, R.T. Johnson and E.J. Holubec (1994) and D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) claimed that while learners are engaged in task-focused discussion, they integrate ideas of their peers. As a result, they are able to generate a better piece of writing.

Excerpt 7:
Group Writing Session 4, Institution A, Lines 21 to 24

21.	Aida Suhana,	"Clever girl *lah* you. At grocery shops, we cannot get the nice things there". (Maimunah laughed a little. The others joined her too).
22.	Siti Fairuza,	"Yes, good point but write clearly point by point. First, we compare point one in hypermarkets with the first point in the sundry shop".
23.	Maimunah,	"*Ya lah*. Hypermarkets are very convenient because it is one-stop for shopping. We can buy a lot of things at one place. We no need to go to many shops".
24.	Siti Fairuza,	"Yes, good. Now can talk about sundry shop *lah*".

In a CLL-based group discussion, members attempt to integrate ideas of group members to put their thoughts into words (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994; and Johnson & Johnson, 1999). The researchers in this study also observed this characteristic as the learners discussed and planned their tasks. For instance, when Aida Suhana said that "*At grocery shops, we cannot get the nice things there*"; Siti Fairuza (line 22) integrated her idea to go further on their discussion. Then Maimunah contributed and integrated with her idea to touch on the point "*one-stop for shopping*". Maimunah integrated further her ideas with Siti Fairuza's (line 23).

Excerpt 8:
Group Writing Session 4, Institution A, Lines 25 to 27

25.	Maimunah,	"Okay. Like this. Hypermarkets are one-stop shopping. They are air-conditioned and very comfortable. They have a lot of things and more choices. Then *sambung* (continue) with what Siti Fairuza said".
26.	Adila Talip,	"Show Madam *lah*".
27.	Aida Suhana,	"Wait first. Must write properly *cantik* (beautiful) then only show madam. I'll write now. Munah, Munah (Maimunah) check the *para* (paragraph) first. See we have followed the guidelines or not".

Suhaimi (line 29) integrated his strength to help Firman to put forward his idea clearly. Hazwan too came into the discussion to make the point clearer to the readers. It was apparent when Syahrul Nizam extended and integrated his idea to avoid being a victim of AIDS.

Excerpt 9:
Group Writing Session 5, Institution A, Lines 28 to 34

28.	Firman,	"It is proven that the main cause of AIDS is homosexual activities. All have to be very careful of their own *apa, apa*, sexual activities".
29.	Shuhaimi,	"Why not we use the word desire".
30.	Firman,	"Desire can be anything like desire to have a car, new shirt like that. Here, we have to talk about sexual activities".
31.	Hazwan,	We can say one's sexual desire.
32.	Syahrul Nizam,	"Yes, it's better. Everyone should have good moral conduct so that they do not have same gender as their sexual partner".
33.	Hazwan,	"If one learns Islam, then you don't have to worry about his moral. Islam teaches all the good things and good moral. So, the best way is to go for religious class. The parents also must teach their children about religion. So, they will not get into undesirable activity".
34.	Syahrul Nizam,	"Yes, I truly agree with you. The religious class is important. If we go for *agama* (religious) class, we don't have worry about the AIDS. We have to say the important role of Islam".

Hazwan shared his idea that knowledge of religion would prevent one from engaging in immoral activities. Based on one point, all the members joined and integrated their ideas to accomplish their tasks.

And finally, *the sixth*, **Reasoning**. D.W. Johnson, R.T. Johnson and E.J. Holubec (1994) and D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) explained in their theory that "reasoning" element in CLL-based activities enhances learning. As the learners were engaged in group writing, it was noted that the learners at both sites applied the "reasoning" trait in their discussions. When they change the words or ideas presented by other members, reasons were expressed for their ideas or change of words etcetera.

Excerpt 10:
Group Writing Session 3, Lines 35 to 39

35.	Khairul,	"We must read all the facts given. Then select the suitable example to support our main idea".
36.	Nurasyikin,	"It is very difficult to explain *lah*. Why we must put here?"
37.	Khairul,	"*Allah,* no problem. The question asking how smoking *menjejas* our health. So, we must say the health problem we can get if we smoke".
38.	Firdaus,	"Don't worry. We can take the point from the text book. See here, the example is written, 'It increased heart beat and blood pressure' and 'It also cause thickening of arteries'. So, we can start like this, 'Smoking deteriorates our health and brings risks to our health'. Then, we can put all the examples from the book".
39.	Khatijah,	"Use the linkers *lah*. Then we can get more marks. Besides that, smoking also can cause lung cancer and heart attack".

When Khairul suggested that they should take the examples given in the book and then explain the relevant fact (line 37), Nurasyikin felt that it was difficult and not necessary to add that. Then Khairul just reasoned out why they should include the given point of view and the relevant examples. Firdaus gave reasons (line 38) and supported the need to include the specific point in their task. Another point of view was highlighted by Khatijah (line 39) and told the reason to include the point. She felt that they should include the consequences of passive smoking. Otherwise the paragraph seemed hanging, without a proper conclusion. This interaction shows clearly the element of reasoning.

Excerpt 11:
Group Writing Session 3, Lines 40 to 42

40.	Khatijah,	"I think we must write about cervical cancer. If not, we are not showing the *akibat*, the consequences. Then the paragraph likes *bergantung*".
41.	Firdaus,	"I agree with her. We must add a bit more to show the results of passive smoking".
42.	Khatijah,	"Smoking can also cause heart attack. We smoke for fun but this fun can *musnah … ah* destroy our whole life if we get heart attack. Anybody want to say anything?"

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, FFPI (Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction) approach requires a lot of effort and time on the instructors and students' part. This will not take place in the classroom unless and until instructors and students are prepared to make use of innovative styles of teaching and learning. It is crucial for both instructors and students to be trained for CLL (Cooperative Language Learning) activities to bring about effective outcomes. Furthermore, ESL (English as Second Language) instructors need to understand their students' language competence and individual differences to enjoy the optimal fruits of the approach. It is obvious that some

students prefer to seek help from the instructor instead of peers. In such cases, FFPI will not yield much positive outcomes.

However, it was also noted that given sufficient explanation and guidance these learners will gradually adapt and accommodate peer feedback. D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1999) emphasised on the importance of learners discussing face-to-face to complete a task. They also elaborated that these face-to-face interactions will promote learners' success and facilitate their peers' success as well. In this study, it was observed that D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson's claim was proven right as the researchers witnessed the learners encouraging group discussions by assisting one another, exchanging ideas and information, and providing feedback to members to improve their ideas.

Generally, it is believed that FFPI leads to a reasonably high quality of positive interdependence which appears to be in line with some researchers (Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Iwai, 2004; Mariam, 2004; and Depaz & Moni, 2008) and establish a strong platform, both at the individual and at group level, to proceed with interactive group work initiatives. When a member was "stranded" or "seemed lost", the group members often came to their aid. The learners explained and corrected their peers' mistake. When members came up with rational and logical ideas and opinions, they approved and acknowledged their peers' talents. In fact, all the groups actively practised FFPI. Looking at the benefits of the FFPI skills and how this skill had encouraged learners to engage in the writing task, ESL instructors could capitalise the small group-learning approach by adopting this FFPI approach in their writing classrooms to positive interdependence characteristics among learners.

It was noticeable that the group members practised the elements of interdependence whereby they witnessed the strength of their peers and shared the joy of satisfaction where they congratulated one another: "*Clever girl*", "*I think it is a good start*", "*Fantastic*", "*Well done*", "*You are very clever*", "*I know you can do it*", and so on to acknowledge the group members' capabilities. Here, it must be acknowledged that they have modelled the researcher who often praised the learners to encourage them to speak up. The positive comments were an important feature of encouragement (Ghaith, 2002; and Doymous, 2008) which positively correlates with a supportive L2 (Second Language) climate. There was definitely a newfound camaraderie exhibited by the learners.

Moreover, time constraints could prevent the full implementation of group-discussion. Some learners and instructors are also anxious that they might not be in complete control of the learning experience and learners may not abide by the classroom rules and go off-task. If the characteristics of interdependence are not cultivated, one may not witness a fruitful outcome (Iwai, 2004). It takes a worse scenario if students and instructors do not understand the principles of FFPI and do not construct their groups with extra care; a free-rider effect may exist followed by shirking of responsibility (Chapman *et al.*, 2006).

Thus, instructors need to structure the groups very carefully so as to avoid any free-loaders. Group-discussion, when understood and implemented under certain

conditions like FFPI (Depaz & Moni, 2008), undoubtedly would bring about a positive impact. Whilst it is an effective language learning approach, it also creates opportunities for students to shirk responsibility. In short, FFPI-based group discussion should be implemented whenever possible, but with discretion as time constraints often prevent its full and meaningful implementation.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Institutional Research

The study was conducted with a sample size of 63 learners in a public institution of higher learning which comprised predominantly Malay learners. It is acknowledged that the learning style and preference of one ethnic group of students may vary from another ethnic group of students, hence does not reflect all ESL (English as Second Language) learners' patterns of interaction, in general. The small sample size (n=63) too does not make allowance for any generalisations to the general population of ESL learners in Malaysia or anywhere else.

Moreover, the study investigates only one ethnic group of students, Malay students, and does not probe the other ethnic groups in Malaysia and other part of the world. This is seen as a limitation of the study as it provides data on the efficacy of group discussions from the students' perspective per se. Learners' interactions are measured based on the researchers' viewpoints and does not take into account the viewpoints recorded by the learners, as the direct recipients of the pedagogical approach.

The researchers recommend that more studies be carried out to provide further insights into ESL teaching and learning environments so as to encourage ESL proficiency at institutions of higher learning. The learners should also be taught strategies to think, to ask questions, to reason, and to structure their writing on paper.

Further research is required to carry out such case study in different higher learning institutions to study the efficacy of FFPI (Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction) among different ethnic groups of students. In order to enhance fruitful group discussions in ESL classrooms at tertiary levels, specific input is necessary in order to provide adequate training facilities to learners and instructors to enhance their performance by having them participate in relevant professional development programmes of institutional scale. ESL instructors are hereby invited to contribute their experiences on the efficacy of CLL (Cooperative Language Learning) to further reinforce the current vein of institutional research in the domain of ESL teaching and learning environment. Since the teacher and learner factor is an important factor to contend with in determining the extent of success of the use of FFPI, formal training in the area should be intensified.

Administrators should appreciate that the uses of CLL approach although it is a time-consuming one and perhaps try to lessen workloads. This would take the toll off teachers who have to shoulder heavy workloads besides planning and preparing

CLL lessons. In addition, the decision to reconsider the workload of instructors may bring about a commitment to higher levels of involvement.

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Generally, it is believed that FFPI leads to a reasonably high quality of positive interdependence which appears to be in line with some researchers and establish a strong platform, both at the individual and at group level, to proceed with interactive group work initiatives.