Students' Perceptions Toward Dyads and Triads in the English Classroom
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Abstract

Collaborative learning such as pair work and group work, has been widely discussed and proven to be an effective tool for teaching English. This study exclusively focuses on a dyad (a pair) and a triad (a group of three) and the students' perceptions toward these collaborative interactions. 57 Japanese second year university students majoring in Engineering, were asked to introduce themselves in dyads and in triads at the beginning of each lesson. The questionnaires were administered to collect the data and the characteristics found in each interaction were categorized respectively. The research results indicated that how they experienced both dyads and triads differed, although they had a positive attitude toward both of them. While participating in dyads is the preferred format for conversational practice as the students could converse quite easily and contribute to the conversation, adopting triad interactions in English lessons may provide a double advantage to students: learning English, and learning communication skills and social skills. This could have some implication when teachers use pair work and group work in English lessons.

Background

➤ Exclusively focus on **a dyad (a pair)** and **a triad (a group of three)** in an English classroom setting.
  <Reasons>
1 Many studies have investigated a pair, a group and individual work.
  (Fernandez, 2012; Fernandez & Blum, 2013; Sakamoto, 2016; Tsumura, 2013; Williams, 2001)
2 Triads are considered as a basic unit of a group which creates a sense of being public. This could have a unique effect on students' feelings.

➤ Exclusively focus on students' **perceptions** toward dyads and triads in an English classroom setting.
  <Reasons>
1 Few studies have investigated the difference of students' perceptions between dyads and triads in an English classroom setting.
2 Psychological aspects could play an important role in promoting a student's learning English and motivation.
  (Sakamoto, 2016; Tsumura, 2013)

Research Questions

RQ1 : Which of the two interactions, a dyad or a triad, do the students prefer?
RQ2: What views do the students have of dyad and triad interactions?

References

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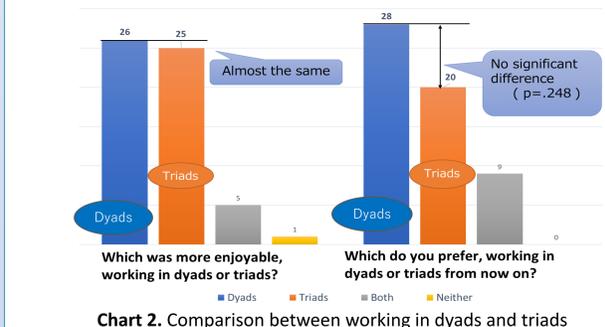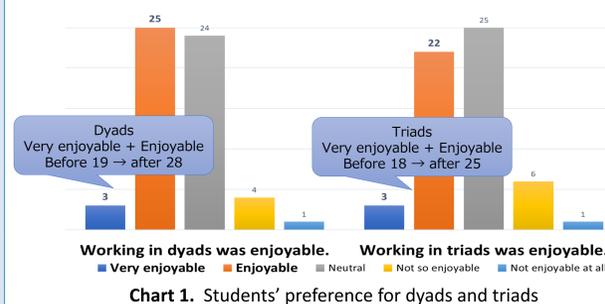
Methods

➤ Participants   57 second year students in "English for Engineering" class at an Engineering university in Japan
➤ Dyad and triad interactions   Dyad and triad members -- randomly selected by computer
                An icebreaker -- self introduction + follow up questions at the beginning of each lesson
➤ Questionnaires   Lesson 1 -- the first questionnaire
                Lesson 14 (the final lesson)   -- the second questionnaire
➤ Procedure   from lesson 2 to 6 -- dyad interactions / from lesson 8 to 11 -- triad interactions
                in lesson 12 -- dyad interaction
➤ Categorization   Nagayama (2018)'s categorization of students' perceptions toward dyad and triad interactions in *ordinary face to face communication scenes* was used.
                <Students' perceptions toward *dyad interactions*>
                1 concentrated   2 straight and direct   3 close and intense   4 enjoyable
                5 secure and relaxed   6 tired   7 open
                <Students' perceptions toward *triad interactions*>
                1 easy 2 spread and complicated 3 unstable and uncomfortable 4 caring and considerate
                5 adapting to the situation   6 being   public   7 superficial   8 objective
                9 unintentionally focused on one member only

Results

➤ **Research Question 1**
  Which of the two interactions, a dyad or a triad, do the students prefer? (see Chart 1 & 2)

Chart 1. Students' preference for dyads and triads

Chart 2. Comparison between working in dyads and triads

• Chart 1 - positive images of dyads and triads:
      before the interactions < after the interactions
• Chart 2 - which was more enjoyable: dyads = triads
      for future lessons: dyads > triads
                    (The difference is minimal.)
• Reasons for the students' preference:
dyads – close relationship with a partner
      frequent turn-takings and a sense of responsibility
triads – communicate with more people as in a real-life
      setting   eg.) conversation becomes lively
                content becomes richer
                communication flows better

➤ **Research question 2**
  What views do the students have of dyad and triad interactions?

<Students' perceptions toward *dyad interactions*>
  1 concentrated ┐   one-on-one conversation,
  2 straight and direct ┤ good eye contact
  3 close and intense ┘
  4 **bonded –** made new friends
  5 **secure and relaxed vs nervous and pressured**
    – felt at ease vs pressure to keep the conversation
  6 **time rushed vs satisfied** – limited time but
    comparing to triads, they felt satisfied with time
  7 open – talked more positively and deeply
  8 **repetitive and monotonous** – could not expand
    their conversation because of just two people

<Students' perceptions toward *triad interactions*>
  1 easy – didn't need to talk all the time
  2 spread and complicated – topics got mixed up &
    taking turns was not clear
  3 unstable and uncomfortable – if one person only
    gave limited answers, the conversation did not
    flow smoothly
  4 caring and considerate ┐   thought about social
  5 adapting to the situation ┤ harmony
  6 being public ┘
  7 superficial ┐ felt some distance
  8 objective ┘
  9 **paying attention to the other members** –
    when the other two members knew each other,
    they felt isolated and became passive
  10 **enjoyable** – fun talking in three people

*Items in bold are different from Nagayama's categorization.

Discussion and Conclusions

Dyad interactions and triad interactions in an English classroom setting.
➤ RQ 1: Most of the students enjoyed the conversation in both dyads and triads. However, they had a slight preference toward dyad interactions.
➤ RQ 2: Students' perceptions were placed into eight categorizations for dyads and ten for triads.
• **Participating in dyads is the preferred format for conversational practice.** Dyad interactions having only two people, led to a close relationship. However, this also resulted in the students experiencing some pressure, in that they felt a sense of responsibility for actively taking part in the interaction, which could actually force an improvement in their English learning.
• **Adopting triad interactions in English lessons may provide a double advantage to students.** Triad interactions are more complicated for the students because having three people in a group, brings upon the realization that they need to take care to be inclusive of all participants. This can result in feeling uncomfortable and confused. On the other hand, this negative aspect presents them with an opportunity to learn communication skills and social skills.

Given these beneficial impacts, both dyad and triad interactions could boost students' motivation and promote English language learning. In order for students to become more actively involved in the English lessons, teachers should incorporate dyad and triad interactions more frequently and keep in mind the psychological factors when planning their lesson.

Limitations

• Other ways of making dyads and triads are possible.
• The number of participants was small.
• The use of multiple data analysis such as triangulation should be incorporated.
• A different framework should be explored and applied.
• Quantitative data should also be included.
• Different task types should be employed.

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