Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context

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Abstract

The use of pair and small group activities in the second language (L2) classroom has been supported by both theoretical and pedagogical arguments. However, L2 researchers and practitioners have expressed concerns about their use in some instructional contexts. This small-scale study explored instructors' and learners' perceptions about the use of pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context, and examined whether the learning opportunities theoretically attributed to pair and small group activities occurred in an intact classroom. It also investigated whether learners who actively participated during the pair and small group activities showed improved production of the target forms. Sixteen Thai EFL learners completed the pair and small group activities as part of their regularly scheduled English classes at a large public university in Northern Thailand. The results indicated that learners who had more participation during the pair and small group activities demonstrated improved production of the target forms, even though they did not perceive the activities as useful for learning language. Issues in the use of pair and small group activities in L2 classrooms are discussed.
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1. Introduction

Pair and small group activities that involve interactions between learners are often used in second language (L2) classrooms for both theoretical and pedagogical reasons. A variety of theoretical approaches to L2 acquisition provide a rationale for the use

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of pair and small group activities. For example, the interaction hypothesis of L2 acquisition (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Mackey, in press; Pica, 1994) states that interaction may facilitate L2 learning by providing learners with negative feedback (information about the ungrammaticality of their utterances), drawing their attention to language form in the context of meaning, and pushing them to produce more complex or accurate target language forms. The output hypothesis of L2 acquisition (Swain, 1995) states that producing language may facilitate acquisition by creating opportunities for learners to notice interlanguage and target language forms, test their hypotheses about the target language, and reflect on their language use. When learners notice a mismatch between their interlanguage and target language forms, they may draw upon their L2 knowledge to modify their previous output, which may lead them to produce more accurate and/or complex language (Swain, 1993, 1995). In short, several theoretical approaches to L2 acquisition state that pair and small group activities generate learning opportunities through various interactional features that occur when learners engage in the communication of meaning.[1]

Pedagogical reasons for using pair and small group activities in L2 classrooms also have been offered. Pair and small group activities provide learners with more time to speak the target language than teacher-fronted activities, promote learner autonomy and self-directed learning, and give instructors opportunities to work with individual learners (Brown, 2001; Crookes and Chaudron, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Long and Porter, 1985). In addition, learners may feel less anxious and more confident when interacting with peers during pair or small group activities than during whole-class discussions (Brown, 2001; Davis, 1997; Willis, 1996).

Even though theoretical and pedagogical arguments in favor of pair and small group activities have been advanced, L2 practitioners may have reservations about their use. Having worked as a lecturer in the English department at a large public university in Northern Thailand for several years, I became familiar with my colleagues' concerns about using pair and small group activities in their EFL classes. When I returned to that university to carry out my dissertation study (McDonough, 2001), I decided to investigate the topic further. My assigned teaching duties included a course that incorporated pair and small group activities into the syllabus, so I decided to analyze whether the learning opportunities attributed to pair and small group interaction occurred when learners carried them out. Before collecting the student data in my classroom, I interviewed six of my colleagues who taught the same course in order to obtain insight into their perceptions about the use of pair and small group activities in that course.[2] The semi-structured interviews, conducted in English or Thai (or both),[3] consisted of questions about the materials used in the course, the implementation of activities, and suggestions for course revisions, and

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[1] For an overview of a rationale for pair and small group activities from other theoretical perspectives, see Ellis, 2000.

[2] Four of the instructors (one native speaker of English and three Thais) were experienced teachers (10+ years) and had taught the course at least eight times. Two of the instructors (one native speaker of English and one Thai) were less experienced (2 years) and had taught the course only twice. The instructors were selected from the pool of instructors assigned to teach the course based on their availability.

[3] The Thai interviews were translated by the researcher, an advanced speaker of Thai.

took 30–45 min to complete. Before presenting the instructors' comments, a brief overview of the English language curriculum at the Thai university where the study was carried out is provided in order to familiarize readers with this specific instructional context.

2. Instructional context

The English Department at this Thai university offered a variety of courses including integrated skills, oral communication, writing, content-based language, linguistics, and literature. The university required that all students complete two integrated-skills courses, but most departments required at least one additional integrated-skills course. The syllabus for the integrated-skills course investigated in this study included structural, functional, and skill-based objectives, and the course assessment consisted of two standardized exams that contained discrete point listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary items. The exams did not include a speaking component due to the logistics involved in the design, administration, and scoring of two speaking tests per semester in each integrated-skills course (each course had approximately 2000 students).

The course textbook, created by the English department faculty, contained six theme-based units (romance, social problems, entertainment, environment, politics, and health/sports). Each unit had five to six lessons, and each lesson was designed to be completed within a 50-min class period. The first three or four lessons in each unit began with skill-building listening activities based on passages that were related to the unit theme and contained the target structures, followed by grammar instruction about the form and function of the target structures, such as inductive and deductive exercises, metalinguistic explanation and example sentences. The grammar section was followed by pair and small group activities that provided opportunities for the learners to express their opinions about the unit themes while generating contexts for the target structures. These lessons ended with short, sentence-level writing activities that were generally assigned as homework. The final two lessons of the unit focused on reading skills such as skimming, scanning, predicting, guessing meaning from context and differentiating between fact and opinion. Short, non-graded quizzes with grammar and vocabulary items were administered periodically, generally at the end of one or two units. The instructors' opinions about the use of pair and small group activities in this course were the focus of the interviews, and the concerns they emphasized during those interviews are described in the following section.

3. Instructors' concerns

Several of the EFL instructors believed that there was a gap between the purpose of the pair and small group activities and the learners' implementation of those activities. Researchers have pointed out that learners often have their own ideas about how to carry out an activity, and their ideas may diverge from those of their

instructors (Breen, 1989; Davis, 1997). In this context, the instructors believed that the learners should attend to language form when carrying out the pair and small group activities because the goal was to reinforce the structural and functional objectives of the course.[4] For example, Anyaporn[5] stated that the purpose of the activities was to "practice with the grammar point," but she admitted that the learners did not "pay attention to structure much."

The instructors believed that the learners oriented toward the achievement of communicative goals rather than language form. Learners who orient toward the communicative goal of activities may produce less target language output and use only the language forms necessary to accomplish that goal (Seedhouse, 1999). Consequently, the language-learning opportunities attributed to pair and small group activities, such as those provided by negative feedback and modified output, may not occur. As Veronica explained, "you do a presentation, you do this inductive grammar stuff, then you give a pair activity and you listen to them and they're using it completely incorrectly." Suphot reported that the learners "weren't really getting into the game or the pair work the way it was really set up" because they preferred to "just talk on their own agendas." In this context, creating opportunities for learners to "talk on their own agendas" was not perceived as beneficial because the pair and small group activities had a specific language-learning purpose.

A related concern voiced by the instructors was the difficulty they experienced when monitoring learners' interaction during pair and small group activities. Previous research has suggested that instructors may not be able to provide feedback or assistance to every pair or small group, particularly in large classes (Fotos, 1998). All six instructors mentioned that environmental conditions, such as the number of students, the size of classrooms, and the position of student desks, made them unable to reach all of their students during the activities. As a result, they were unable to check whether the students were "learning" anything. For example, Warunee explained that "if I just give them the pair work sometimes they escape me or avoid me and we don't know whether they learn or not." Similarly, Benjamas reported that "the teachers can't check" if the learners were using the target language appropriately.

The instructors also expressed doubts about whether the pair and small group activities helped learners prepare for the course exams. The department expected the instructors to prepare the students for the standardized examinations, which did not include a speaking component. Even though the course textbook allotted approximately one-quarter of the class time to oral activities, some instructors chose to spend more time on activities that they believed would have a greater positive impact on the students' exam performance (such as grammar explanation and practice) than the pair and group activities. As Betsy explained, "the games are what I had to give up. . . I think oral is important but it's got so much to cover and you have to cover what they're going to be tested on." Similarly, Benjamas reported that

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[4] Designing pair and small group activities to target specific language forms is controversial (see Long and Robinson, 1998 and Nunan, 1989 for differing opinions).

[5] All names have been changed.

she usually had to "cut the pair work activities...I just don't have enough time and I need to get through the stuff they will see on the exams." These instructors were not convinced that the pair and small group activities helped learners achieve the unit objectives that were tested on the course examinations, even though the pair and small group activities reinforced the functional and structural objectives of each unit.

4. Purpose of the study

Despite theoretical and pedagogical reasons for using pair and small group activities, instructors in this context questioned whether they helped learners achieve language-related course objectives. Unfortunately, relatively little research has identified the learning outcomes associated with pair and small group activities in intact classrooms, even though this type of research could help L2 practitioners design and implement pair and small group activities in ways that support context-specific course objectives (Foster, 1998; Kasanga, 1996; Mackey, 2000; Nunan, 1991). While descriptive research carried out in both laboratory contexts (de Assis, 1997; Garcia Mayo and Pica, 2000; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, and Linnell, 1996; Varonis and Gass, 1985) and classroom contexts (Doughty and Pica, 1986; Foster, 1998; Kasanga, 1996; Rulon and McCreary, 1986) has provided L2 practitioners with important information about the variables that affect the amount and type of interactional features that occur when learners work together (such as gender, L1, and task types), it has not addressed the relationship between those interactional features and curricular objectives. While lab-based research has demonstrated that active participation in interaction is beneficial for L2 learning (Mackey, 1999), classroom-based studies have not investigated this issue systematically.

In order to address this gap in the literature, the current study examined the conversations among Thai EFL learners as they carried out pair and small group activities in an intact classroom to determine whether the interactional features that occurred were related to curricular objectives. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether learners who participated in interactional features during pair and small group activities showed improved production of the target language forms. The research question was "Do learners who participate in interactional features during pair and small group activities demonstrate improved production of target forms?"

5. Method

5.1. Participants

The participants were 16 Thai EFL learners, 12 women and 4 men, at the university described in the previous section.[6] They had been admitted to the following

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[6] The initial participant pool consisted of 20 learners, but four learners were removed from the data set because they did not complete all three oral tests.

bachelor degree programs based on their national university entrance examination scores: business administration (4), English (3), public administration (2), Thai (2), mass communications (1), French (1), economics (1), psychology (1) and geography (1). Their average age was 19.0 years (range 18–20 years). They had studied English in primary and secondary schools for an average of 10.3 years (range 8–14 years), and the department considered them to be intermediate-level learners.[7] Only one learner had travelled to a country where English is spoken as a native language (to visit a family member in the U.S. for two weeks), and none of the learners had ever used English as a medium for communication while travelling in other countries. They reported infrequent use of English for communication outside class and limited exposure to English through mass media, such as music, movies and the internet.

5.2. Instructional focus

As described previously, the participants were enrolled in an integrated-skills EFL course taught by the researcher, who followed the syllabus, lesson plans, and materials provided by the department. The study was carried out while the learners were completing the fourth unit in the textbook, which was the first unit after the midterm examination. The unit theme was "the environment", and the functional objectives were describing scientific and natural facts, expressing cause and effect relationships, and making predictions and suggestions about environmental problems. The target language forms were conditional clauses. The form-function information about conditional clauses that was presented in the course textbook is summarized in Fig. 1.

6. Materials

6.1. Pair and small group activities

Unit four in the course textbook contained six lessons, four of which included oral pair and small group activities. The activities generated contexts for learners to use conditional clauses while talking about the causes of environmental problems in Thailand, such as traffic congestion, deforestation, and illegal logging, and making predictions about the effectiveness of different solutions. As illustrated in Fig. 2, these information gap and opinion exchange activities varied according to whether (a) the exchange of information was required or optional and (b) the use of conditional clauses was necessary to complete the activity. Activities with required exchange of information could not be completed unless the learners shared their information. In contrast, activities with optional exchange of information could be completed without the participation of every learner.

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[7] A formal measure of the learners' proficiency level was not available because they had never taken any standardized examinations (such as TOEFL or TOEIC), and the university did not administer placement exams.

Type	Function	Example	If-clause	Main-clause
Real, factual	To state scientific or natural facts describing cause-effect relationships	If fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas burn, they release carbon dioxide.	Present simple	Present simple
Real, predictive	To make cause-effect predictions about probable conditions in the future	If the present killing rate continues, nearly all of Africa's elephants will be gone in 20 years.	Present simple	Will + verb
Unreal, non-past	To talk about unreal or improbable conditions now or in the future	If people didn't leave water running while brushing their teeth, they would save an estimated 5-10 gallons each time.	Past simple	Would + verb

Fig. 1. Information about conditional clauses in course textbook.

Activity	Type	Exchange of information	Target structure
Environmental facts	Information gap	Required	Necessary
Bangkok traffic	Information gap followed by opinion exchange	Required for info gap, then optional	Necessary for info gap, then optional
Changing habits	Information gap followed by opinion exchange	Required for info gap, then optional	Necessary for info gap, then optional
Prioritizing problems	Opinion exchange	Optional	Optional

Fig. 2. Features of the pair and small group activities.

6.2. Testing materials

Three oral tests that elicited the target structures in context of the unit theme were created by the researcher. Each test began with three to five warm-up questions about the learners' interests (such as hobbies, sports, music) and recent activities (such as weekend plans, midterm examinations, semester break).[8] The first target

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[8] The warm-up questions were included so that the learners had an opportunity to become comfortable with the recording equipment.

item involved matching 12 conditional clauses that expressed causes with 12 main clauses that stated effects or predictions. The other two target items presented specific environmental problems and asked the learners to describe how they would solve those problems. Three versions of each test were created by manipulating the order of the target activities, and the tests were randomly presented. The target items were pilot tested with Thai learners from a similar population, and the question prompts were revised based on the results of the pilot tests.

6.3. Questionnaire

A final questionnaire containing open-ended, multiple-choice, and scalar response items was created by the researcher to elicit the learners' opinions about the usefulness of various course materials and activities. It consisted of four target items and six distracters. The target items included two open-ended questions about pair and small group activities, one open-ended question about learning grammar, and one multiple-choice item about their satisfaction with the amount of class time spent on specific activities. The distracter items included five scalar response items and one open-ended question about the course textbook themes and grammar topics, the helpfulness of the course for learning different aspects of English, and suggestions for course revisions.

6.4. Procedure

The learners carried out four pair and small group activities and completed three oral tests over an eight-week period, as illustrated in Fig. 3. The pair and small group activities were carried out during regularly-scheduled classes following the

Day	Activity
1	Pretest
4-8	No class: Midterm examination week
11	Lesson 1: Environmental facts
13	Lesson 2: Bangkok traffic
15	Lesson 3: Protecting nature
18	No class: National holiday
20	Lesson 4: Changing habits
22	Lesson 5: Reading lesson, no pair/group activities
25	Lesson 6: Reading lesson and Post-test 1
56	Post-test 2 and questionnaire

Fig. 3. Schedule of data collection.

procedure outlined in the course guidelines. After the learners completed the listening and grammar components of the lessons, they were given the relevant materials and instructed how to complete the activities. They self-selected partners, typically choosing friends who were studying in the same degree program or students who were seated nearby.[9] The researcher circulated among the pairs or groups while they were carrying out the activities to provide assistance and answer questions when needed, as she had throughout the semester. Each activity required 10–15 min to complete. When the learners finished the activities, the researcher either continued with the next activity in the lesson or assigned homework. The learners' interaction while carrying out the activities was audio-taped using portable audiocassette recorders. The learners were instructed to start recording as soon as they began the activities, and to continue recording without pausing or stopping until they had completely finished. Their use of the recorders was monitored, and they were reminded not to pause, rewind, or stop the tapes.[10]

The tests were administered in a language laboratory equipped with individual carrels with boom microphones. The learners completed the pretest on the last instructional day prior to the midterm examination break, and completed the post-tests in weeks four and eight. Each test required approximately 20 min to finish. They completed the questionnaire immediately following the second post-test.

7. Analysis

7.1. Interaction data

The learners' interaction while carrying out the pair and small group activities was transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were examined for interactional features believed to provide opportunities for L2 learning, specifically negative feedback and modified output. Descriptions of the coding categories with examples from data collected for the current study follow.

7.2. Negative feedback[11]

Recast: A learner provided a more target-like reformulation of her interlocutor's previously NTL utterance. Both partial and complete reformulations of the interlocutor's utterance were included.

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[9] The researcher did not manipulate the composition of the pairs and small groups, but allowed the learners to self-select partners as they usually did for interactive activities.

[10] Despite these instructions, some learners briefly stopped recording while they were carrying out the activities, generally when they were speaking Thai.

[11] Learners' responses to negative feedback were coded separately in the modified output category.

Example 1
        L15: if oil mix with water
→   L10: mixes

Clarification request: A learner attempted to elicit information from an interlocutor by using a non-specified request for clarification, such as *huh*, *what*, or *pardon*. Clarification requests in both English and Thai were included.

Example 2
        L9: if the city build more bicycle lane
→   L11: again please

Explicit correction: A learner explicitly stated that her interlocutor's utterance was incorrect. Explicit corrections (a) with or without a metalinguistic explanation and (b) in English or Thai were included.

Example 3
        L8: topsoil washes away
→   L10: no it's passive

Modified output: A learner reformulated her previous utterance, resulting in a more accurate or complex form. Instances of modified output that were in response to an interlocutor's feedback (Example 4) or were self-initiated (Example 5) were included.

Example 4		Example 5
L1: if they stopped	→	L5: the earth warm up uh warms up
L3: turned off		
→ L1: if they turned off yeah		

An independent scorer coded a subset of the data (20%) for the coding categories, and inter-scorer reliability was calculated using simple percentage agreement. Instances that were missed by one scorer were not counted as disagreements, and were added to the data set. Agreement was 100% for the negative feedback categories and 93% for modified output.

7.3. Test data

The learners' oral tests were transcribed by a paid research assistant, and approximately half of the transcripts were checked by the researcher. Conditional and main clauses were scored by giving one point for each verb with contextually appropriate tense and agreement features. However, no points were given if the learner inserted a conjunction, such as *so*, *and*, or *because*, between the two clauses. In addition, no points were given if the learners combined clauses that were semantically inappropriate. The scoring procedure is illustrated in Fig. 4.
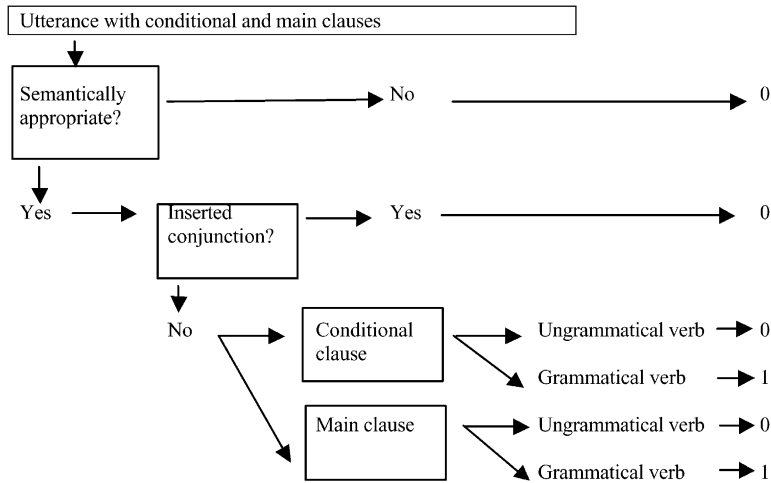
Fig. 4. Scoring procedure.

8. Results

8.1. Interaction during pair and small group activities

The data consisted of the audio-recordings and transcriptions of 25 pair and small group activities.[12] The amount of learner-learner interaction ranged from 7–15 min for each activity, with an average of 12 min. Thus, the data set consisted of approximately 300 min of learner-learner interaction. As shown in Table 1, clarification requests were the most frequent form of negative feedback (34), and the majority of the clarification requests (28/34 or 82%) occurred in response to target clauses. Recasts were less frequent (12), and one-quarter (3/12 or 25%) of the recasts involved verbs in the target clauses. Explicit correction rarely occurred in the data

Table 1
Frequency of interactional features

	All forms	Conditional and main clauses			
Interactional features	Sum	Sum	Percent	Mdn	IQR
Recast	12	3	25	0.00	0.00
Clarification request	34	28	82	1.50	2.80
Explicit correction	3	3	100	0.00	0.00
Modified output	77	41	53	2.00	3.00
Total	126	75	60	4.00	5.00

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[12] One learner was absent for two lessons, and three learners missed one lesson. In addition, the data from two dyads was lost due to technical problems.

(three instances), but all three instances involved verb forms in the target clauses. The learners produced modified output 77 times, and over half (41/77 or 53%) of their modified output involved the target clauses.

In order to address the research question, the learners were divided into high-participation and low-participation groups based on their participation in the negative feedback and modified output episodes involving the target clauses. The division of learners into groups, for real and unreal conditionals separately, was based on the median. As shown in the first row of Table 2, the median number of negative feedback and modified output episodes involving real conditionals was 3.50 and the median for unreal conditionals was 0.50. Learners above the median were classified as high-participation and learners below the median were classified as low-participation. The high-participation learners participated in 43 instances of negative feedback and modified output (median 5.50) involving real conditionals while the low-participation group participated in only 12 instances (median 1.50). The high-participation group participated in 20 instances of negative feedback and modified output involving unreal conditionals (median 2.00), but the low-participation group did not participate in any instances.

9. Subsequent production of target forms

The test performance by learners in the high-participation and low-participation groups was examined for evidence of improved production of conditional clauses, which was operationalized as increased target-like usage. In terms of real conditionals, the scores for the high-participation group increased from 2.00 at the pretest to 11.50 at post-test 1, and 10.50 at post-test 2, as shown in Table 3. Wilcoxon signed-ranks

Table 2
Interactional features involving target forms by group

	Real conditionals				Unreal conditionals			
	Sum	Mdn	Rng	IQR	Sum	Mdn	Rng	IQR
All learners ($N = 16$)	55	3.50	0–7	3.75	20	0.50	0–6	2.00
High-participation ($n = 8$)	43	5.50	4–7	1.75	20	2.00	2–6	3.25
Low-participation ($n = 8$)	12	1.50	0–3	1.75	0	0.00	0	0.00

Table 3
Group scores for real conditionals

	Pretest		Post 1		Post 2		Pre-Post 1			Pre-Post 2		
	Mdn	ICQ	Mdn	ICQ	Mdn	ICQ	Z	p	η^2	Z	P	η^2
High-participation learners ($n = 8$)	2.00	13.75	11.50	10.25	10.50	8.50	−2.04	0.04	0.59	−1.19	0.23	0.20
Low-participation learners ($n = 8$)	3.00	10.75	7.00	17.50	6.00	15.00	−1.19	0.24	0.20	−1.02	0.31	0.15

tests[13] indicated that the increase from pretest to post-test 1 was significant, but the increase from pretest to post-test 2 was not significant.

The scores for the low-participation group improved from 3.00 at the pretest to 7.00 at post-test 1 and 6.00 at post-test 2, but neither increase reached statistical significance. The group scores for real conditionals are illustrated in Fig. 5.

In terms of unreal conditionals, the scores for high-participation group increased from a median of 0.50 at the pretest to 4.00 at post-test 1, but decreased to 1.50 at post-test 2, as shown in Table 4. Both of these gain scores were significant. The scores for the low-participation group showed a similar pattern, increasing from a median of 1.00 at the pretest to 4.50 at post-test 1, but decreasing to 2.00 at post-test 2. While the increase from pretest to post-test 1 was significant, the increase from pretest to post-test 2 was not significant. The group scores for unreal conditionals are illustrated in Fig. 6.

In summary, learners with more participation in the negative feedback and modified output episodes during pair and small group activities showed significant improvement
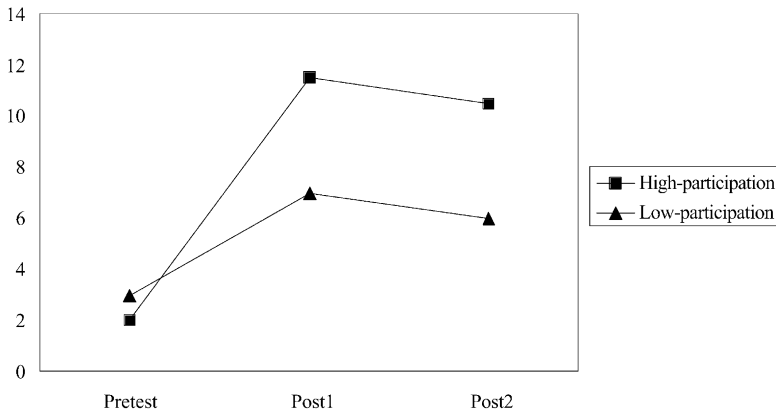

Fig. 5. Real conditional scores over time by group.

Table 4
Group scores for unreal conditionals

	Pretest		Post 1		Post 2		Pre-Post 1			Pre-Post 2		
	Mdn	ICQ	Mdn	ICQ	Mdn	ICQ	Z	p	η²	Z	p	η²
High-participation learners (n = 8)	0.50	1.00	4.00	6.50	1.50	11.00	−2.02	0.04	0.58	−2.03	0.04	0.59
Low-participation learners (n = 8)	1.00	1.00	4.50	3.00	2.00	6.00	−2.37	0.02	0.80	−1.71	0.09	0.42

[13] Wilcoxon signed ranks test, a nonparametric paired t-test, was used because the distribution was not normal, the variance was not equal, the scales were not truly continuous, and the sample size was small.
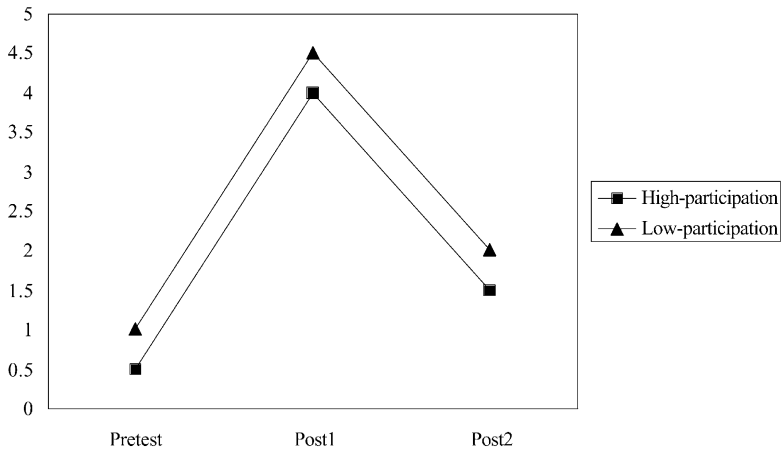
Fig. 6. Unreal conditional scores over time by group.

in terms of their immediate production of real conditionals, and their immediate and delayed production of unreal conditionals. In contrast, learners with less participation showed significant improvement in terms of their immediate production of unreal conditionals only.

10. Discussion

The results revealed that learners who had more involvement with negative feedback and modified output during pair and small group activities demonstrated improved production of both real and unreal conditionals. The learning opportunities provided through these interactional features can be illustrated through the data from Jenjira, a learner in the high-participation group for real conditionals. Jenjira received negative feedback and produced modified output involving real conditionals during the pair and small group activities, as shown in the following examples.

Example 6
Interactional features involving real conditionals
    a. Lesson 1 Suphan: if carbon dioxide build up in the atmosphere
                  Chaiyawat: build up in the atmosphere uh
                  Suphan: yeah
                  Jenjira: it trap heat
                  Chaiyawat: what?
      →   Jenjira: it traps heat
    b. Lesson 2 Tipada: if the government supports a sky train
      →   Jenjira: I think it help-it will help the traffic problem

In Example 6a, Jenjira had an opportunity to modify her nontarget-like verb form "trap" in response to Chaiyawat's clarification request. Her modified output contained the target-like form "traps." In Example 6b, Jenjira independently modified her verb form, changing the nontarget-like form "help" to "will help." Jenjira participated in six interactional features involving verb forms in conditional and main clauses while carrying out the pair and small group activities, and her test scores for real conditionals improved from zero at the pretest to six at post-test 1 and to five at post-test 2.

As illustrated in Examples 6a and b, the learners produced modified output when responding to negative feedback from their peers (other-initiated) and when independently reformulating their utterances (self-initiated). In a post-hoc analysis, the learners' modified output was further classified as either other-initiated or self-initiated. As shown previously in Table 1, the learners produced 41 instances of modified output involving conditional and main clauses. The post-hoc classification indicated that the majority (34/41 or 83%) of the learners' modified output involving the target clauses was self-initiated. Only 17% (7/41) of their modified output was other-initiated, despite the fact that the learners did receive negative feedback from their peers. Although the learners provided each other with 34 instances of negative feedback, they responded to that feedback by modifying their output only 7/34 times (21%). In sum, the learners produced self-initiated modified output more often than other-initiated modified output, and rarely took opportunities to respond to peer feedback by modifying their output. The production of self-initiated modified output may benefit learners by helping expand their language resources (Shonerd, 1994), or by promoting L2 learning (Shehadeh, 2001), but further empirical research is necessary to clarify the relationship between self-initiated modified output and L2 learning.

Even though the learners provided each other with learning opportunities during the pair and small group activities, their responses on the questionnaire suggest that they did not perceive them as useful for learning English. Researchers have pointed out that learners may not consider their peers to be useful resources for language learning, and may prefer to rely upon their teachers for L2 knowledge (Davis, 1997; Fotos, 1994; Jones, 1992; Mackey, McDonough, Fuji, and Tatsumi, 2001; Williams, 1999). In response to an open-ended questionnaire item about whether talking to their classmates helped them learn English, 5/16 learners reported that it was helpful because their friends could clarify what the teacher had said, and 4/16 learners reported that it was useful for practicing oral skills. Only 4/16 learners stated that talking to classmates was useful for learning language (vocabulary and grammar), while 3/16 claimed that it was not helpful at all. For example, Piyaporn wrote that talking to classmates was not helpful because "many of my classmates know very little English." Similarly, Wanwisa reported that talking to classmates "doesn't help much because sometimes they use the wrong grammar."

The learners had similar responses to an open-ended question about whether the pair and small group activities in the textbook were helpful for learning English. Eleven out of sixteen learners wrote that they were useful for practicing speaking and listening skills. Only three learners replied that the activities were useful for obtaining any type of L2 knowledge (one response each for grammar, vocabulary,

and pronunciation), while the remaining two learners stated that the activities were not useful at all. Even though the learners did not perceive the pair and small group activities as useful for learning language, they were satisfied with the amount of class time spent on oral activities. In response to a multiple-choice item about the amount of class time spent doing speaking activities in pair and small groups, 14/16 learners replied that it was ''OK'', while only one learner felt that it was ''Too much'' and one learner believed that it was ''Not enough.''

When asked specifically about what kind of activities helped them learn grammar, only one learner responded that conversation was helpful for learning grammar. In contrast, 11/16 learners mentioned explicit instruction with examples from the teacher or the textbook as being helpful for learning grammar. The learners' preference for explicit instruction and practice activities for learning grammar was also evident in their responses to the multiple-choice question about the amount of class time spent on various class activities. Almost half (7/16) of the learners reported that the amount of class time spent doing grammar activities was ''Not enough.''

In sum, the learners believed that peer interaction through pair and small group activities was useful for practicing oral communication skills, but less useful for learning English grammar. Instead, they believed that explicit instruction and practice activities were helpful for learning grammar. The learners' responses to the questionnaire items shared several similarities with the instructors' concerns that were expressed during the interviews. For example, the instructors believed that the learners oriented toward the communicative goals of the activities, rather than to language form. In addition, they similarly felt that additional explicit grammar activities were necessary in order to prepare the learners for the course examinations.

Despite the positive findings for pair and small group activities in this Thai EFL context, implementing pair and group activities can present challenges for L2 teachers. As mentioned in the introduction, learners may not take advantage of language learning opportunities if they become focused on achieving the goal of the activity. For example, when a learner in the current study questioned her partner's use of past tense in conditional clauses, her partner ignored the question and continued working toward the goal of matching all the cause and effect clauses. If learners become exclusively oriented to goal achievement, L2 teachers may need to redirect their attention to language during the activity, or emphasize important form-meaning connections during a follow-up activity (see Lynch, 1997 and Samuda, 2001 for discussion of teacher roles during learner-learner interaction). In addition, L2 teachers may find it useful to discuss learners' beliefs about language learning and their opinions about classroom activities. Such discussions may raise the learners' awareness about how pair and small group activities can help them achieve course objectives, particularly in instructional contexts that include structural objectives.

11. Conclusion

This small-scale investigation found that Thai EFL learners who had more participation in pair and small group activities showed improved production of

target forms. However, the findings may be applicable only to instructional contexts that resemble the EFL learning environment described here. Future research might explore the learner-learner interaction between Thai EFL learners enrolled in different English courses, such as oral communication or content-based courses, to explore whether similar interactional features occur in courses that have less explicit structural objectives. Certainly, additional research might examine the use of pair and small group activities in different EFL contexts, as well as in ESL environments. Empirical studies might also investigate learners' perceptions about the usefulness of pair and small group activities for L2 learning, and explore whether their perceptions affect immediate performance and/or subsequent learning. Hopefully these issues can be addressed in future studies so that L2 teachers have access to classroom-based research that may help answer questions about when, how, and why to use pair and small group activities in different kinds of L2 classrooms.

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