Incorporating Quality Talk into the EFL College English Curriculum: Listening to Students' Voices

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Abstract This chapter aims to explore EFL college students' perception of Quality Talk (QT) and examine the factors influencing QT's implementation. The participants were thirty-one EFL freshmen from an English class in a university in northern Taiwan. Data were collected from the students' written reflections, an online questionnaire, and interviews. The results show that most of the participants perceived Quality Talk to be conducive to their English learning, especially in enhancing their English-speaking ability and improving the quality of the discussions. Moreover, they preferred the Quality Talk approach to the traditional approach. Last, they believed that the quality of the Quality Talk discussions is influenced by group dynamics, preparedness, English-speaking ability, and text features.

1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, an increasing number of teachers have started employing small-group discussions in class (Johnson et al., 2000), and many studies in second language acquisition have focused on the effects of classroom discussions on student learning (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Dong et al., 2008; Gorard et al., 2017; Sambolin & Carroll, 2015; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999). These studies are based on a sociocultural perspective, which suggests that learning occurs when a person interacts with an interlocutor within his or her zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Proponents of this belief have done research to examine the effects of different discussion types on learning. For instance, Collaborative Reasoning (Anderson et al., 1998) was found to have a positive influence on students' critical reading and thinking in reading instruction. Questioning the Author (Beck & McKeown, 2006; Beck et al., 1998; Liu & Chu, 2008), which also employs a whole-class discussion approach, was also found to be effective in improving the students' reading comprehension and critical thinking.

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In 2009, Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, and Alexander conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of nine classroom discussion approaches, i.e., Collaborative Reasoning, Paideia Seminar, Philosophy for Children, Instructional Conversations, Junior Great Books Shared Inquiry, Questioning the Author, Book Club, Grand Conversations, and Literature Circles. One of their major findings was that many of these discussion approaches were effective in increasing the students' literal and inferential comprehension, but only a few of these approaches promoted the students' critical thinking, reasoning, and argumentation. Based on the findings of this meta-analysis study, Wilkinson et al. (2010) proposed another discussion approach—Quality Talk (QT)—as a way to foster students' ability to think critically and to provide convincing arguments.

QT features "mini-lessons" that explicitly teach students how to use various discourse elements in text-based discussions (Quality Talk, 2014). The discourse elements in QT refer to the questions and the responses to those questions, including authentic questions, elaborated explanations, exploratory talk, and cumulative talk (Murphy & Firetto, 2018). Several empirical studies have confirmed the positive effects of QT on students' reading comprehension, critical-analytic thinking, and critical-analytical writing skills (Davies & Meissel, 2016; Li et al., 2016; Reninger & Wilkinson, 2010).

So far, most studies on QT have been conducted at the elementary and secondary school levels, where English was the participants' mother tongue. Empirical studies conducted in an English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context have been scarce. Furthermore, although studies have revealed QT's positive effect on critical thinking and writing, little attention has been paid to the viewpoint of students who participated in these studies, especially in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. According to Alvermann et al. (1996), knowing students' perception of using discussions to facilitate learning is essential because it can help teachers to solve the problems that students might encounter during discussion activities. Evans (2002) also emphasized the importance of exploring students' perceptions of group discussions so as to recognize obstacles and provide necessary support. To bridge the research gap, the current study aims to examine EFL college students' perceptions of QT by exploring the following research questions:

1. What are EFL college students' perceptions of integrating Quality Talk into a college general English course?
2. Do EFL college students prefer the Quality Talk approach to more traditional teaching methods? Why or why not?
3. What factors, such as group dynamics and English-speaking ability, influence Quality Talk discussions?

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

Thirty-one college freshmen (29 females and 2 males) from a university in northern Taiwan participated in this study. The participants were recruited from an intact general Freshman English class for non-English majors. Students in that university are required to take three general English classes for three semesters and earn six credits in total. Most of the participants were females (93.5%) from the College of Education (61.3%), whose English proficiency was between B1 and B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).[1] Outside of the classroom, the most common way for the participants to practice their English was watching video clips (61.3%), and the majority of them (61.3%) considered English-speaking the most challenging of the four language skills. The demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

2.2 Design

The study was conducted in the Autumn semester of 2017 for 18 weeks. Over the 18 weeks, nine mini-lessons about discourse elements (six about authentic questions and three about responses[2]) were taught by the instructor with PowerPoint slides shared by Dr. P. Karen Murphy, one of the developers of QT. The students were divided into seven groups of four or five. Throughout the semester, the students in each group took turns to lead the discussions. They stayed in the same group for the discussions of Units one, two, four, and five. For the discussion of Unit three, two students in each group were asked to rotate to a new group.

The five reading materials used in this class were from *Q: Skills for Success Reading and Writing 4* (Daise et al., 2011). Before class, the students were asked to preview the assigned readings and prepare questions that they wanted to discuss with their group members. The schedule of the QT instruction and discussion is shown in Table 2.

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[1] The CEFR divides language proficiency into six levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. Based on CEFR's descriptors, if a student's language proficiency is in B1 level, he/she "has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circum-locutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events." If a student's language proficiency is in B2 level, he/she "has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much con-spicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so" (Council of Europe, n.d.).

[2] Students were only asked to produce oral responses, not written responses, which is a limitation of this study.

Table 1 Demographics of the participants

		Count	%
Gender			
	Female	29	93.5
	Male	2	6.5
College			
	Education	19	61.3
	Management	2	6.5
	International Studies and Social Sciences	7	22.6
	Music	3	9.7
Outside-of-class learning activities			
	Reading (Books, Magazines)	14	45.2
	News	1	3.2
	Video Clips (YouTube, VoiceTube, Movie, TV Series)	19	61.3
	Songs	7	22.6
	Conversation Class	1	3.2
	Listening Practice	1	3.2
English proficiency			
	GSAT[a] (12)	2	6.5
	GSAT (13)	9	29
	GSAT (14)	11	35.5
	AST[b] (< 80)	1	3.2
	AST (>=80)	1	3.2
	GEPT[c] (Intermediate)	12	38.7
	TOEIC[d] (< 800)	4	12.9
	TOEIC (>=800)	6	19.4
	TOEFL[e] (>=90)	1	3.2
Most challenging skill			
	Listening	2	6.5
	Speaking	19	61.3
	Reading	3	9.7
	Writing	7	22.6

Note N = 31
[a]General Scholastic Ability Test
[b]Advanced Subject Test
[c]General English Proficiency Test
[d]Test of English for International Communication
[e]Test of English as a Foreign Language

Table 2 Schedule of the QT instruction and discussion

Week	Date	Topic
1	09/15	Introduction
2	09/22	Small-Group Discussion: Unit 1
3	09/29	Multiculturalism
4	10/06	QT Mini-lesson: Questioning Lesson 1: Test Questions Lesson 2: Authentic Questions Lesson 3: Uptake Questions
5	10/13	QT Mini-lesson: Responses Lesson 1: Introduction to Arguments Lesson 2: Components of Arguments Lesson 3: Practice With Components of Arguments
6	10/20	Talk on Multiculturalism
7	10/27	QT Mini-lesson: Questioning Lesson 4: High-Level Thinking Questions QT Discussion: Unit 2
8	11/03	Midterm Exam
9	11/10	QT Discussion: Unit 3[2 new group members in each group]
10	11/17	Not in session
11	11/24	Group Presentation
12	12/01	QT Mini-lesson: Questioning Lesson 5: Affective Questions
13	12/08	Discussion: Unit 4
14	12/15	QT Mini-lesson: Questioning Lesson 6: Connection Questions
15	12/22	Group Presentation
16	12/29	QT Discussion: Unit 5
17	01/05	Review
18	01/10	Final Exam

2.3   Data Collection and Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to investigate the findings. The data were collected from the following sources.

2.3.1   Worksheet

Before each QT discussion, the participants were asked to preview the assigned article and write down several questions on the first part of the worksheet (Appendix A). After the discussion, they were asked to conduct a self-evaluation and peer-evaluation in the second and third parts of the worksheet. Finally, they completed the last part of

the worksheet by reflecting on what went well and what did not during the discussion, as well as how to improve the discussion next time. After the last discussion on Unit 5, the participants were asked to answer the following questions as to their reflection: (1) What have been the best and worst QT discussion experiences? Why? (2) Do you think QT has been conducive to your English learning? Please explain. (3) Do you prefer QT or the traditional approach? Why?

2.3.2 Overall Reflection

At the end of the semester, the participants were asked to reflect on the overall experience of QT, and provide some comments and suggestions for future implementation.

2.3.3 Online Anonymous Perception Questionnaire

To explore students' perceptions of QT implementation, an online anonymous questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester. The questionnaire consisted of four parts, namely demographic information, English learning experience, perceptions of QT, and overall feedback and suggestions for future QT implementation. The third part, which investigated the respondents' perceptions of QT, contained 13 question items with a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 representing "strongly disagree" to 5 being "strongly agree." A multi-multiple choice question was also used to explore factors influencing QT discussions. The last part consisted of four open-ended questions to solicit students' opinions on the design of the worksheet, instruction of the mini-lessons, logistics of the QT discussions, and other suggestions.

2.3.4 Semi-Structured Interview

Four students, two who were positive about QT and two who had some reservations about QT, were selected via purposeful sampling to participate in semi-structured interviews at the end of the Spring 2018 semester. Each interview lasted for about 20–25 min. Students were asked to share their past English learning experiences and compare them with the QT approach. They were also asked to identify the most suitable article for discussion and provide their reasons. At the end of the interviews, they were asked to share any additional comments or suggestions about the implementation of QT.

SPSS was employed to calculate descriptive statistics for the quantitative data. In terms of the qualitative data, the general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) was adopted for the analysis. Specifically, the researchers started with cleaning the data files and then read the text closely to gain an understanding of the events covered in the text. During this close reading, labels were assigned to the segments that were related to the research questions. Finally, categories and themes were developed to address the research objectives.

3   Findings and Discussion

Drawing from the quantitative and qualitative data, the researchers generated three themes to correspond to the three research questions. A discussion is provided at the end of this section to describe how the findings of the present study relate to previous studies.

3.1   Findings

Theme 1: EFL college students perceived Quality Talk (QT) to be conducive to English learning.
    The results of the anonymous online questionnaire, as shown in Table 3, reveal that most of the participants perceived that incorporating QT into the college English class was beneficial in a number of ways: for their speaking skill (90.3%); quality of discussions (87.1%); peer learning (87.1%); overall English proficiency (77.4%); critical thinking (77.4%); listening skill (74.2%); English learning motivation (61.3%); learner autonomy (61.3%); and reading comprehension (58.1%). Comparatively, fewer participants thought that QT could help to lower their English learning anxiety (48.4%) and improve their writing skills (35.3%). In general, 64.5% of the participants indicated that they liked the QT approach, and 51.6% of them hoped that QT could be continued in the second semester.
    The qualitative data also supported the positive effects of QT on English learning. In the interviews and worksheets, many students strongly acknowledged the positive influences of QT on their speaking, reading comprehension, questioning, and thinking skills. What follows are some examples:

- *Through different question types, I can see things with different angles. They inspire me to think more and generate more perspectives* (Student #29, Worksheet 4).
- *Through the discussion with my classmates, I often hear many different opinions or gain the perspectives that I have never thought of. I have learned more through discussions. Through the process of discussion or generate questions, I not only gain a deeper understanding of the required reading, but learn to think deeply to comprehend the content of the outside reading* (Student #25, Worksheet 5).

In terms of how English learning was supported by incorporating the QT approach, the students indicated that the worksheet was a useful tool in helping them to preview and prepare for the discussions. As one student said:

- *The worksheets are quite helpful, although it takes some time to complete them at home every week. If you want to generate a worksheet with a high quality, you need to read the article thoroughly…If you are serious about improving your English proficiency, by first previewing the articles with the help of the worksheets and*

Table 3 Survey results of EFL college students' perceptions of Quality Talk

Survey ratings		1–2	3	4–5	Mean	SD
		Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)		
1	I think Quality Talk can increase my motivation of English learning	6.5	32.3	61.3	3.68	.79
2	I think Quality Talk can lower my anxiety of English learning	6.5	45.2	48.4	3.58	.85
3	I think Quality Talk can improve my English listening skill	6.5	19.4	74.2	3.87	.81
4	I think Quality Talk can improve my English-speaking skill	0.0	9.7	90.3	4.32	.65
5	I think Quality Talk can improve my English reading comprehension	6.5	35.5	58.1	3.65	.80
6	I think Quality Talk can improve my English writing skill	16.1	48.4	35.5	3.16	.78
7	I think Quality Talk can improve my overall English proficiency	0.0	22.6	77.4	4.0	.68
8	I think Quality Talk can improve my ability of autonomous learning	0.0	38.7	61.3	3.87	.81
9	I think Quality Talk can enhance peer learning	3.2	12.9	83.9	4.26	.82
10	I think Quality Talk can improve the quality of discussions	3.2	9.7	87.1	4.48	.81
11	I think Quality Talk can improve my critical thinking ability	3.2	19.4	77.4	4.13	.85
12	Overall, I like Quality Talk approach	6.5	29.0	64.5	3.8	.90
13	I hope the teacher can continue to incorporate Quality Talk in the English class	6.5	41.9	51.6	3.7	.90
	Average				3.88	.80

Note $N = 31$

then participating in the classroom discussions, you can feel the obvious progress (Student #24, Interview, 2018/06/27).

Moreover, the students reported that participating in small-group discussions was an enjoyable way to learn English. The non-threatening environment had been helpful in boosting their confidence in speaking. The questioning and responding skills they had learned from the QT mini-lessons were practical and could be used in their daily lives, as some students wrote:

- *In terms of speaking ability, we did not dare to speak English at first, but now everyone is able to finish what they want to talk about in English confidently and happily. Learning a language should be like this: natural and pleasant* (Student #4, Worksheet 5).
- *I have a lot of fun in this semester's English class. I have learned many things, such as Quality Talk, which is very helpful to me. Learning to identify different types of questions enables me to read articles more carefully. By raising various questions, I am able to have deeper discussions with others. Besides, these question types also help me a lot in the interaction with people. They help me to maintain a longer conversation with people. Compared with the traditional "cramming" education, I prefer this kind of teaching approach, namely Quality Talk discussion. The autonomous learning motivates people to understand more new things* (Student #10, Final Reflection).

To conclude, most of the participants in this study believed that Quality Talk was conducive to their English learning, especially in improving their speaking skills and the quality of discussion. They said their learning had been scaffolded by the worksheet that helped them to preview the article, as well as by the mini-lessons that provided guidance in questioning and responding, and the non-threatening atmosphere of working in small groups.

Theme 2: EFL college students preferred the Quality Talk approach to the traditional teaching method.

After the last QT discussion, the students were asked on the worksheet to answer "Do you prefer to learn English via the QT approach or the traditional approach?" A majority, 76.9% of the participants, indicated that they preferred the QT approach, and the reasons were threefold. First, QT provided students with ample opportunities to speak in English. As mentioned earlier, speaking was identified by the majority of participants (61.3%) as the most challenging skill among listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Thus, they appreciated the chance to use English to communicate with others. Second, the QT approach was more interactive and engaging. According to the participants, English learning was no longer stuffy, boring, and sleep-inducing. Third, through Quality Talk discussions, the participants learned different perspectives that they had never thought of. In their own words, they wrote:

- *Interacting with the teacher and classmates can improve our listening and speaking skills. It is more interesting* (Student #8, Worksheet 5).

- *I prefer Quality Talk because I like to have discussions with people and enjoy asking questions of each other. In contrast to the traditional teaching method, Quality Talk is not dull but more "interactive"* (Student #18, Worksheet 5).
- *Through the discussions with my classmates, I can often hear different opinions or views that I have never thought about, which helps me to learn more* (Student #25, Worksheet 5).

When asked "Do you think QT should be incorporated into the senior high school English curriculum? Why or why not?", 80% of the participants believed that QT should indeed be integrated into the senior high school English curriculum. The senior high school English curriculum in Taiwan has long been notorious for its teacher-centered and teach-to-the-test approach (Lo, 2014). In the interviews, a student said, "*In senior high school, all you need to do is focus on what the teacher taught. Students did not have chances to speak in English*" (Student #6, Interview, 2018/06/27). Another student asserted that her English learning experience in senior high school was "*bitter, super-boring, and making people couldn't help but fall into sleep*" (Student #27, Interview, 2018/06/27).

In contrast to the traditional teaching method, the QT approach is more student-centered. With QT, in order to have more effective discussions, students have to preview the lessons and prepare some questions before class. Moreover, instead of merely listening to the teacher's lecture, students learn from each other by asking authentic questions and exchanging ideas and perspectives. Overall, the QT approach provides students with chances to practice listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills. What follows are some direct quotes abstracted from the first open-ended question in the questionnaire and the final reflection.

- *Yes, many high school English courses are mainly taught by the teachers on the stages; therefore, students seldom have discussions. I think Quality Talk can make students preview before class, and the discussions during the class can stir up various thoughts and thus help them to learn from each other. I believe this can help students to retain what they learn in class better* (Anonymous, Online Questionnaire).
- *It's very suitable. It provides senior high school students with opportunities to practice thinking in English, English listening, and speaking. What's more, it can spur students to do the preview before they come to class* (Anonymous, Online Questionnaire).
- *The most memorable part in this course is the related knowledge of Quality Talk. In my senior high school, most of the English learning revolved around grammar and reading. There was few chance to practice speaking. Quality Talk is not only about having conversation with our classmates in English but also about learning the skills of how to ask questions. These skills help us to grab the main points very fast during English conversation. In addition, after several practices of Quality Talk, I find myself with better conversation quality, which is unlike before when I didn't know how to express my ideas* (Student #5, Final Reflection).

To sum up, most of the participants in this study preferred the QT approach to the traditional teaching method. Different from teacher-centered senior high English classes, the QT approach provided these participants with many opportunities to interact with their group members, and contributed to their English listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills.

Theme 3: EFL college students perceived that the quality of QT discussions was influenced by such factors as group dynamics, preparedness, English-speaking ability, and text features.

Throughout the semester, the participants engaged in five small-group discussions with the same group members, except for the third discussion. In the questionnaire, when asked to identify the factors that influenced the quality of these small-group discussions, most of the participants reported that group dynamics (80.6%), preparedness (71%), and English-speaking ability (58.1%) were the major factors. Nearly half of the participants (48.4%) also thought that text features might influence the quality of their discussions.

Group Dynamics. The participants chose their own group members at the beginning of the semester. It was found that they tended to stay with classmates who shared the same background, be it from the same department or the same country. The positive aspect of this grouping method was that it helped to lower their affective filter of learning, as a student shared in the interview:

- *Most of my group members are from the same department with me. Although there are two classes in my department, it seems faster for us to blend in with each other. That's why we did not feel stressed when doing QT in class. We were not afraid of our poor speaking skills. On the contrary, it was more embarrassing at first to talk with the classmates from the other departments. After all, we did not know each other well and it was English-speaking that we had to practice. Speaking is the part we were very anxious about* (Student #6, Interview, 2018/06/27).

Moreover, letting students stay in the same group proved more effective than alternating group members for each discussion. As a student indicated:

- *There seemed to be a tacit agreement developed in the same group. I mean everyone took turn helping each other, and something like that. However, if we have to change our group members, we have to adapt ourselves to the new members' every time; besides, we also have to get used to new members' language skills* (Student #6, Interview, 2018/06/27).

Preparedness. Seventy-one percent of the participants believed that preparedness would affect the quality of small-group discussions. As one student indicated, "*You have to preview first so that you have something to say in the discussion…I think it is important to preview beforehand*" (Student #27, Interview, 2018/06/27). A student revealed that her worst experience in the Quality Talk discussions was that "*I was kind of nervous during today's discussion because I did not prepare much and I did not bring the questions that I had prepared. The teaching assistant was sitting beside me*" (Student #16, Worksheet 4). If students did not preview thoroughly before the

discussion, chances were that the discussion would remain at a superficial level. As a student said:

- *When we were busy with other schoolwork and not able to spend enough time watching the videos, we would not have deep understanding of the video and thus the discussion became superficial. In other words, we would not be able to discuss the messages that the speakers wanted to convey to us* (Student #6, Interview, 2018/06/27).

English-Speaking Ability. As previously mentioned, the participants in this study felt that QT was conducive to their English-speaking ability, and this ability was also found to be a factor influencing the quality of the small-group discussions. The qualitative data provided further evidence of the relationship between the students' English-speaking ability and QT discussions. As the students maintained:

- *I was in the same group with some foreign students from Southeast Asian countries. I found that it was difficult for them to speak English accurately. They could only use English words instead of complete English sentences to express their opinions, which made our talk unlike a discussion. Actually some of them did have something to share, but were stopped due to their speaking ability. It seemed that they felt awkward and uncomfortable when speaking English. So, I think the effect of Quality Talk is limited because of the two reasons: they did not dare to speak English and did not know how to express their views in English. In fact, sometimes I did not dare to speak English, either. I was worried whether my grammar was correct or not, so I chose to shut my mouth, not willing to talk* (Student #3, Interview, 2018/06/27).
- *I think the worst one is this time (the fifth discussion) because my group members are from Macau. They sometimes spoke Cantonese and I could not understand what they were talking about, which made me feel desperate and helpless* (Student #27, Worksheet 5).

These two quotes confirm that the students' weak listening and speaking ability tended to result in poor discussions. For students with higher English proficiencies, their willingness to participate in the discussion might, nevertheless, be influenced by concerns about the accuracy of their English. One approach to easing their worry and enhancing their discussion skills is to provide explicit teaching and modeling. As a student suggested,

- *In my opinion, teachers should incorporate Quality Talk into English classes gradually. I mean, in the beginning, the teacher should not give students so much time (30 min) to do the discussion. The teacher can first ask some classmates to express their opinions to share with the whole class rather than start from the group discussion. The teacher can select the ones who know how to speak English and how to answer the questions. In this way, the other classmates will know how to answer the questions. After this, the teacher can divide students into groups to do the discussion* (Student #3, Interview, 2018/06/27).

Text Features. Text features, such as the topic/theme and genre of the texts, were found to be related to the quality of the discussions. The five articles selected for the small-group discussions were: "We All Need a Hero," "So Much Dead Space," "Bird by Bird," "Can Climate Make Us Sicker?" and "What Does It Take to Be a Successful Artist?" Although most of the students indicated that they enjoyed the discussions, their perceptions and preferences toward the articles varied greatly. For instance, after discussing the article, "Can Climate Make Us Sicker?" three students wrote,

- *I found it more difficult to do the discussion today because the issues about environment are more professional and serious* (Student #13, Worksheet 4).
- *Today's discussion was enjoyable because everyone had many ideas about climate change* (Student #2, Worksheet 4).
- *Today's discussion was great. Most of us join [participated in] the discussion actively. Since the issue is very close to our daily lives, we have [had] so many ideas to share with one another* (Student #1, Worksheet 4).

A possible way to solve this problem is to select topics centered around current news. In the interviews, three students offered suggestions for how to select topics. One of them said the topics should be more international or difficult (Student #27, Interview, 2018/06/27). The others asserted that issues about current news would be of more interest to the students (Students #3 & #24, Interview, 2018/06/27).

In conclusion, the participants in this study perceived that such factors as group dynamics, preparedness, English-speaking ability, and text features would influence the quality of small-group discussions. EFL college teachers who want to employ QT in class can consider letting students find their own group members and using worksheets to help students to preview the texts and prepare authentic questions beforehand. Additionally, providing explicit teaching and modeling to scaffold learning, as well as selecting topics that are related to the current world/social issues will contribute to better QT discussions.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of the present study reveal that EFL college students believed QT is conducive to their English learning and is a better approach than the traditional teaching method. In contrast to previous QT studies, most of which were conducted in an L1 context with participants from elementary and secondary schools, the current study was carried out in an EFL college setting. In line with Certo et al.'s (2010) study examining American elementary school students' perceptions of small-group discussions (Literature Circles), the participants in this study also revealed a positive attitude toward small-group discussions (Quality Talk). In terms of QT's effect on English learning, most of the participants agreed that the more salient benefits were for their speaking skill (90.3%) and the improvement of discussion quality (87.1%). A possible reason why speaking skill was identified by most of the participants

might be that English is a foreign language in Taiwan and is thus seldom used for communication in their daily lives. For most of the students, English classes were the only occasion to listen, speak, read, and write in English. Additionally, speaking is the only skill that is excluded from the college entrance exams in Taiwan, so it has long been neglected by most English teachers. Compared to the traditional teacher-centered, lecture-based English class, a QT approach to discussions in English class indeed provides students with ample opportunities to speak.

In terms of how QT contributes to the quality of discussions, QT mini-lessons and worksheets are essential. In the delivery of the QT mini-lessons, discourse elements, such as asking the six types of authentic questions and making arguments by incorporating claims, reasons and evidence, were explicitly taught and practiced in class. Evans (2002) asserted that in order to lead to a better discussion, students need to read the text, write the literature journal, and participate in the discussion. In this study, the instructor emphasized all three of these aspects. In addition to the "pre-discussion" and "during-discussion" tasks proposed by Evans, the instructor employed self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and reflection as the "post-discussion" tasks. These post-discussion tasks not only can provide students with chances to reflect on their learning, but also serve as pointers for the instructor to improve her teaching.

Furthermore, Evans (2002) found that the make-up of the groups and the level of participation can influence the success of group discussions. Li (2018) argued that the functioning and productivity of classroom discussions can be affected by factors such as group type (e.g., size and composition), learner characteristics (e.g., ability, gender, or prior knowledge), and text features (e.g., genre, structure, or topic). Corresponding to the aforementioned research findings, the present study confirms that group dynamics, preparedness, English-speaking ability, and text features will affect the quality of small-group discussions.

4   Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated EFL college students' perceptions of incorporating QT in the college English curriculum. The findings show that EFL college students had a positive attitude toward QT. They perceived that QT contributed to their English-speaking skill and the quality of small-group discussions. Moreover, they believed that QT is a better approach than the traditional English teaching methods. Lastly, such factors as group dynamics, preparedness, English-speaking ability, and text features were found to influence the quality of discussions. The authors suggest that college EFL teachers consider employing QT in their English curriculum. With the explicit teaching of QT mini-lessons and careful selection of texts to be discussed, as well as requiring students to preview the texts with the help of a worksheet and conducting self-evaluations and peer-evaluations, teachers can use the QT approach—a student-centered approach that focuses on small-group discussions—to enhance the quality of learning. The main points of the chapter can be summarized as follows:

- EFL college students had a positive attitude toward QT.
- EFL college students believed QT is conducive to their English learning and is a better approach than the traditional teaching method.
- EFL college students perceived that QT contributed to their English-speaking skills and the quality of small-group discussions.
- Group dynamics, preparedness, English-speaking ability, and text features affect the quality of small-group discussions.
- The mini-lessons are helpful in training students on how to ask questions and make responses before the implementation of QT discussions.
- Asking students to preview the assigned reading and prepare some questions for the QT discussion is essential to the success of QT implementation.

Appendix A: Worksheet

Department:
Number in this Class:
Name:
Unit:

List all the questions you want to ask during the discussion:	Question Type
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

Self-Evaluation

	Level One	Level Two	Level Three
Article: Read the Article	☐ I did not read the article.	☐ I read some of the article.	☐ I read all of the article.
Prepared: Prepare questions for discussion	☐ I was not prepared.	☐ I was partly prepared.	☐ I was prepared.
Materials: Brought the article and prepared questions	☐ I brought no materials.	☐ I brought some materials.	☐ I brought all materials.
Preparation: Participated in group discussion	☐ I did not participate in the discussion.	☐ I participated at least once in the discussion.	☐ I participated in the discussion actively.

Peer-Evaluation

Member	Number	Name	Preparation	Participation	Note
1			1 2 3	1 2 3	
2			1 2 3	1 2 3	
3			1 2 3	1 2 3	
4			1 2 3	1 2 3	
5			1 2 3	1 2 3	

Reflection

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