

Understanding the Practice of Quality Talk in an English L2 Class Through Exploratory Practice



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Abstract This chapter delineates a university English teacher's journey in applying Quality Talk (QT) to his English class in Taiwan. The students' questions and perceptions of this approach were analyzed to explore the effects of QT on their learning of English. After QT was implemented in the class for two consecutive semesters, the results show that this approach encouraged the students to raise more questions while engaging them in group discussions; it also further broadened their understanding of text-related issues. Moreover, in accordance with the students' feedback in the first semester, the QT approach was further adapted in the second semester, with the teacher preparing a worksheet for QT discussions and drawing students' attention to essential pragmatic markers for communication. The results reveal the students' perceptions of these two strategies. Based on the findings, this article concludes by providing pedagogical suggestions regarding how EFL teachers can better integrate QT into their classes.

1 Introduction

Classroom dialogue is a vital component in second/foreign language (L2) classrooms, and it enables teachers and students to gain an in-depth understanding of the teaching and learning process. For instance, teachers ask students questions for many purposes, such as activating students' knowledge about a certain topic, ascertaining how much they know about it, or simply checking to see if they have done their reading beforehand. As for students, they are often assigned to work in pairs or groups, discussing and brainstorming a class task together. Even in reading activities, classroom dialogue can not only help students collaboratively build up their comprehension of a text, but also enable teachers to draw students' attention to the key issues in the text.

As an L2 education researcher and university English teacher, I have observed that group discussion among university students is sometimes less effective than I

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expect, despite its potential to enhance students' learning. A common phenomenon that has often puzzled me is: Why is it that some students do not participate in group discussions? While most students in my university-level English classes participate actively in discussions with their peers, there are always some students who are quiet and seem reluctant to take part. Their reluctance may be related to their personal characteristics, group features, or the nature of the reading texts (e.g., Murphy et al., 2016); it may also result from the design of instructional activities or the way these activities are carried out in the classroom. To explore how I could increase students' participation in group work and engage them in more in-depth discussions, I joined a school-wide project initiated at our university (National Taiwan Normal University, NTNU hereafter) that set out to foster students' text-based group discussions in freshman English classes using the Quality Talk (QT) approach.

Having received increasing attention over the past decade, QT has motivated many teachers and researchers (e.g., Lightner & Wilkinson, 2016; Murphy et al., 2018) to explore how this approach can promote the quality of classroom conversations. Wilkinson et al. (2010) define QT as "an approach to classroom discussion premised on the belief that talk is a tool for thinking and that certain kinds of talk can contribute to high-level comprehension of text" (p. 147). Murphy et al. (2018) elaborate on the effects of QT in promoting high-level comprehension, stating,

In QT, high-level comprehension is achieved through critical-analytic thinking in discourse, which fosters students' basic comprehension, epistemic cognition, and ability to engage in oral and written argumentation. (p. 1120)

To this end, QT encourages students to raise different types of text-related questions and "to think and talk about, around, and with the text" (Murphy et al., 2018, p. 1120). In other words, QT aims not only to promote students' comprehension of a text, but also to encourage them to think beyond the text and draw a link between the reading material and their own experiences and knowledge.

Although QT has been applied in several disciplines (e.g., language arts and science), the fact that it has rarely been used with English L2 students for the purpose of learning English intrigued me and led me to wonder how this approach would influence my teaching and my students' progress. Like some other teachers who were also involved in this research team, I felt curious about whether QT could effectively promote my students' reading comprehension and enrich their group discussions. What's more, many teachers and I believed that QT might pose potential challenges to English L2 learners when they converse in a foreign language that they have not yet mastered. To investigate the influence of QT on my teaching and my students' learning, I conducted this study through Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003, 2005).

Exploratory Practice (EP) allowed me to deal with the doubt I had as a teacher and a researcher because it is "a form of practitioner research in language education that aims to integrate research, learning and teaching" (Hanks, 2015, p. 612). According to Allwright (2003), EP treats the quality of life in the classroom as more important than any other goals; it also aims to help teachers and students not only better understand the quality of life in the classroom, but also grow through their understanding. As

previously mentioned, I was eager to find approaches that could effectively facilitate my students' group discussions. Although QT seemed to be a promising approach that could make a difference in students' group dynamics, I was uncertain about its actual influence on my teaching and my students' learning outcomes. To this end, I believed EP could enable me to gain an understanding of the effects of QT on my teaching and my students' learning. Therefore, EP was adopted in this study to address three issues that interested me about QT:

1. What are the effects of the QT approach on university students' ability to formulate meaningful questions?
2. How do university students perceive the effects and limitations of the QT approach?
3. How can the QT approach be adapted to the university students in my class?

In the following paper, I will delineate my journey of integrating QT into my freshman English class at NTNU from the perspective of a teacher and researcher.

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

This study was carried out in a freshman English class offered at NTNU. This course lasted for two semesters, and the class met for two hours weekly for 18 weeks in each semester. Enrolled in this course were 25 non-English majors (3 males and 22 females) from several departments, including Chinese Studies, Geography, Graphic Arts, and Teaching Chinese as a Second Language. Three of the students were international students from Vietnam, Indonesia, and Japan. As the university mainly placed all the freshmen into four levels of English classes (i.e., Elementary, Pre-intermediate, High-intermediate, and Advanced levels) based on their proficiency as measured by the college entrance examination, all of the students in this class were ranked as advanced English learners. My observations of these students as well as my experiences in working with them further confirmed that most of the students were fluent English speakers despite some errors in their speech.

2.2 Design

2.2.1 Course Planning for the Freshman English Class

The first stage of this study was to understand the students' needs and organize the course content accordingly. Yet, because all course planning needed to be finalized before the school year started, it was difficult to reach out to the students

and survey their learning needs and interests prior to the beginning of this English class. Therefore, with five years of experience in teaching freshmen students, I planned the syllabus and selected a textbook for this course based mainly on my own understanding of what advanced-level English learners should learn in a university-level English class and what kinds of course content would best benefit their communication skills in English.

At the time of this study, multicultural education had already been receiving increased pedagogical attention in tertiary education in Taiwan, and many universities were implementing a school-wide multicultural English education project with financial support from Taiwan's Ministry of Education. NTNU was among those universities attempting to improve their previous English learning curricula by instilling multicultural education into their freshman English classes. Therefore, besides its call for more QT in freshman English classes, NTNU was also striving to host different multicultural activities (e.g., the annual International Cultural Festival, field trips, and cultural workshops) to foster students' cross-cultural understanding. Freshman English teachers were also encouraged to integrate more cross-cultural issues into their classroom activities so as to enhance freshmen's understanding of diverse cultural issues and promote their cross-cultural communication skills.

While planning the syllabus for my freshman English class, I took the university's dual focus on multicultural education and QT into consideration. Specifically, I selected a textbook (Blass et al., 2016) which features diverse cultural issues such as gender equality, technology, and remote education. Also inspired by the idea of the cultural portfolio project in Su's (2011) study, I asked the students to complete a cultural portfolio project in small groups as the final term project. As a requirement of this project, they worked collaboratively to clarify their understanding of an unfamiliar culture in a foreign country by following the procedure proposed in Su (2011). All in all, I hoped that this work could expand and deepen the students' understanding of different cultural issues.

2.2.2 Implementation of the QT Approach in This Course

After the preliminary syllabus was formed, I started to consider what data to collect and how to use it to document this QT journey and examine the students' learning outcomes. To this end, I decided to follow a pretest-posttest design and adopt course evaluation surveys for both quantitative and qualitative investigations. Table 1 displays a brief overview of the teaching plan and relevant research activities. To be more specific, a pretest and a posttest were scheduled at the beginning and end of the first semester so as to probe the students' progress in their question strategies. For the pretest, I chose a short news report entitled *From Refugee Camp to Runway, Hijab-wearing Model Breaks Barriers* (Park, 2017), which describes how a young Muslim woman in the USA broke from tradition by joining a beauty pageant contest while wearing a hijab and later started a modeling career. Another article, *Arrests in the Shooting of a Pakistani Schoolgirl* (Ember, 2012), was selected for the posttest. This article describes Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl and Nobel Peace Prize

Table 1 Teaching plans for the fall semester

Time	Content
I. First semester (September 2017–January 2018)	
Week 2	Pretest: <i>From Refugee Camp to Runway, Hijab-wearing Model Breaks Barriers</i> (Park, 2017)
Week 4	Workshop on question strategies QT Discussion 1: <i>The School in the Cloud</i> (Blass et al., 2016)
Week 9	QT Discussion 2: <i>Power Shifts</i> (Blass et al., 2016)
Week 13	QT Discussion 3: <i>Creative Sparks</i> (Blass et al., 2016)
Week 16	QT Discussion 4: <i>Hope and Equality</i> (Blass et al., 2016)
Week 17	Posttest: <i>Arrests in the Shooting of a Pakistani Schoolgirl</i> (Ember, 2012)
II. Second semester (February 2018–June 2018)	
Week 1	Online Evaluation Survey I
III. Summer vacation	
	Online Evaluation Survey II

winner who condemned the Taliban and was later nearly killed by gunmen due to her fearless remarks. This article was considered comparable to the first, as both of them delineate a young, courageous girl's story of making a difference in the world.

Table 2 shows the comparison between the two reading passages in their readability levels. As the table shows, both passages were about the same length. Although the pretest reading was a bit more difficult than the posttest article as indicated by its lower Flesch Reading Ease level and higher Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, the difference in their readability levels seemed to be negligible. Therefore, these two reading passages were considered to be comparable. For both tests, the students read the passage for 15 minutes and brainstormed as many questions as possible within another 10 minutes.

Between the pretest and the posttest, one workshop was arranged in Week 4 to familiarize the students with the idea of QT. In this workshop, I introduced the students to the concept of QT and different types of question strategies (all the question types on Table 3 except extended questions were introduced). A number of example questions were also provided to help them better understand how to apply these strategies to develop questions based on a text. Following the workshop, four discussion activities took place between Weeks 4 and 16. Every time we began a new unit, I would ask the class to preview the reading passage and raise as many questions as possible before their group discussion.

Table 2 Readability levels of both reading passages

Criteria	Pretest reading	Posttest reading
Word count	440	464
Number of sentences	20	24
Flesch reading ease	43.5	51.0
Flesch-Kincaid grade level	12.0	10.7

Table 3 Classification and definition of question types adopted in this study^a

Code	Category	Definition
1	Authentic questions	Questions that ask students to use advanced thinking to produce predetermined answers
1-1	Generalization questions	Questions that ask students to integrate or synthesize details in the text
1-2	Speculation questions	Questions that ask students to consider other possibilities
1-3	Analysis questions	Questions that ask students to break down the text and analyze it critically
1-4	Affective questions	Questions that ask students about their feelings in relation to the text
1-5	Connection questions	Questions that ask students to relate the text to their prior experiences, knowledge, or other textual materials
1-6	Extended questions	Questions that are related to but largely go beyond the issues discussed in the text
2	Test questions	Questions that only required basic understanding of the text; correct answers are predetermined

^aBased on Murphy and Firetto (2018) and Davies et al. (2017)

In discussing the text, they worked in a group of five people, and had approximately 20 minutes for group discussion. They were fully responsible for their own discussions, and I would only join them for a while as a listener. All QT discussions were implemented in the classroom by considering the four major components of QT introduced in the first chapter of this book: *instructional frame*, *discourse elements*, *teacher scaffolding*, and *pedagogical principles* (Murphy & The Quality Talk Team, 2021). For example, the students chose their group members for discussion and had control over what topics they would like to discuss as a group as well as how to run their discussions (instructional frame). Prior to each group discussion, the question strategies of QT were reviewed to remind the students of the importance to raise questions about the text from different angles (discourse elements). Sometimes, I would also orally give a few sample questions about a given text to encourage students to reflect upon a text in depth (teacher modeling). In addition, I also attempted to build a classroom environment that welcomed different ideas and encouraged students to share their insights without fear by avoiding correcting students' grammatical errors in their speech when the errors did not hinder communication (pedagogical principles). Overall, these four components lay an essential groundwork for all the group discussions in this course.

After these discussions ended, we looked at the text together as a class, reviewed the essential vocabulary, and went through the reading comprehension exercises at the end of the unit. Moreover, one thing worth noting here is that this workshop did not teach the students about how to respond to text-related questions. As the idea and application of QT was still very new to the students, it was considered more manageable for the students to focus on the issue of how to generate diverse

text-related questions first before they moved on to learn about different response types.

In addition to comparing the students' question strategies between the pretest and the posttest, I also asked the class to fill out two online evaluation surveys to explore their perceptions of QT. The first survey (see Appendix A) contained three questions that aimed to determine how the students felt about the course and QT in the first semester, while the second one (see Appendix B) set out to explore their evaluation of the course in the second semester with six questions. More specifically, on the second survey, while Questions 1, 2, and 5 were mainly retained from the first survey, Questions 3, 4, and 6 were added to explore how the students felt about the handouts, the English expressions they learned in each unit, and the QT approach as a whole. Thus, both surveys contained several open-ended questions, and the students' responses were later analyzed to ascertain the strengths and limitations of QT in both semesters. More importantly, as this study examined the effects of QT through Exploratory Practice (EP), both surveys enabled the students to gain a greater understanding of their own learning by reflecting upon the instructor's teaching, the classroom materials, and their own learning progress. Understanding the students' opinions also allowed me to look at my own teaching closely and consider the students' needs more; some proper pedagogical adjustments could thus be made to facilitate group discussion in this class.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data analyzed in this study were collected mainly from the students' pretest and posttest and the two evaluation surveys they completed at the end of the first semester and the second semester, respectively. Specifically, the students' questions on the pretest and posttest were analyzed at two levels. Based on Murphy and Firetto (2018) and Davies et al. (2017), all of the questions were initially classified as either authentic questions or test questions. Authentic questions were further sorted into six subcategories, namely, generalization questions, speculation questions, analysis questions, affective questions, connection questions, and extended questions. Among the six subcategories of authentic questions, extended questions were added to the original classification framework as a new question type because many questions in the data pool showed that the students extended a certain issue in the text and discussed it on a different level or from a different perspective. For example, after reading the article, *From Refugee Camp to Runway, Hijab-wearing Model Breaks Barriers*, one student asked, "Do you think people really can achieve race equality?" and "What kind of helps or assistances that American can give to the refugees?" (grammatical errors in the students' output are retained throughout the article). Both questions show that this student went beyond the text to discuss the achievability of race equality and refugees' needs on the societal level. Although these questions require high-level thinking skills, they did not fit in the category of high-level

thinking questions, which mainly consists of generalization, analysis, and speculation questions, according to Murphy and Firetto (2018). The subcategory of extended questions was thus added to the coding scheme. On the other hand, I did not include uptake questions in this coding scheme because the pretest and the posttest collected only the students' individual written work for analysis, which did not allow this study to delve into students' question strategies during group discussions. The definitions of the question types are shown in Table 3.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Effects of the QT Approach on the Students' Question Strategies

To probe the change in the students' use of question strategies, I compared the types of questions they proposed between the pretest and posttest conditions. Specifically, a research assistant and I first analyzed all of the responses individually; after our initial analysis, we then discussed all the data again to solve any disagreements in the classification of the questions. Table 4 displays the classification of these questions. On the pretest, a total of 99 questions was proposed by 24 students in relation to the reading, *From Refugee Camp to Runway, Hijab-wearing Model Breaks Barriers*, with each participant asking 4.13 questions on average. On the posttest, 146 questions were collected from 22 students who were present in class on that day, with each of them raising approximately 6.64 questions based on the article, *Arrests in the Shooting of a Pakistani Schoolgirl*.

Based on Table 4, several findings are particularly noteworthy. First, in general, the students raised more questions at the end of the course. Second, most of the

Table 4 Classification of the participants' questions

Code	Question type	Pretest ($n = 24$)		Posttest ($n = 22$)	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	Authentic question	91	91.92	108	73.97
1-1	Generalization question	7	(7.69)	7	(6.48)
1-2	Speculation question	22	(24.17)	32	(29.63)
1-3	Analysis question	12	(13.19)	7	(6.48)
1-4	Affective question	15	(16.48)	12	(11.11)
1-5	Connection question	7	(7.69)	25	(23.15)
1-6	Extended question	28	(30.77)	25	(23.15)
2	Test question	8	8.08	38	26.03
Total		99	100%	146	100%

questions raised by the students in both the pretest and posttest conditions were authentic questions (pretest: 91.92%; posttest: 73.97%). However, the decrease in the percentages of authentic questions may be due to the different topics of the reading materials. On the other hand, this table also shows a noticeable increase in the test questions. Moreover, in the pretest condition, most of the authentic questions were extended questions (30.77%), speculation questions (24.17%), and affective questions (16.48%), with the other three question types being used only minimally. In the posttest condition, most of the authentic questions were speculation questions (29.63%), connection questions (23.15%), and extended questions (23.15%). Taken together, these results suggest that the students became more capable of generating questions for group discussion through the process of participating in QT discussions during the semester. On both test conditions, they generally proposed more speculation questions and extended questions, and the percentages of connection questions increased from 7.69 to 23.15% after the training. Example questions collected from the students are shown in Table 5.

3.1.2 Students' Perceptions of the QT Approach

Of the 25 students enrolled in this class, 12 students completed the first online evaluation survey that asked them about the strengths and limitations of the QT approach, with the response rate being 48%. As for the benefits of QT, results of the analysis show that students favored QT for two main reasons. First, by prompting the students to produce a wide range of questions relevant to the text, QT encouraged them to think about the text from diverse perspectives, which stimulated their thinking skills. At the same time, it also allowed the students to hear their classmates' insights as well as obtain feedback from them. For example, several students commented on these advantages by stating:

I can convey my own idea and opinions and discuss with teammates to know others' viewpoints. (Student 1)

I think this learning style gives every student an opportunity to express his/her own ideas and claims, and obtain feedback from other classmates, which help the student to look at an issue from diverse perspectives. (Student 2)

It can facilitate thinking skills, and [help me] get to know different issues to gain knowledge. (Student 3)

I like some topics that made me think more deeply in the issue. (Student 11)

Nevertheless, QT also has its pedagogical limitations. The major problem that confronted the students was associated with their expressive skills in English. Although many of them had ideas in their mind, they had problems expressing them clearly in English. One of them also responded that he/she felt anxious about speaking English. These factors influenced the students' participation in group discussions.

Sometimes I know what to say in my mind but I just cannot express it promptly and accurately enough in English. (Student 2)

Sometimes I didn't know how to put my idea into words to tell my classmates. (Student 5)

Table 5 Example questions collected from the students

Question type	Pretest: <i>From Refugee Camp to Runway, Hijab-wearing Model Breaks Barriers</i>	Posttest: <i>Arrests in the Shooting of a Pakistani Schoolgirl</i>
<i>1. Authentic question</i>		
1-1 Generalization question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think Halima is confident? • What impact did Halima Aden make by wearing hijab on the runway, especially on teenagers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Malala's action change the world? • What do you learn from Malala?
1-2 Speculation question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If refugees immigrate to Taiwan, would you make friends with them? • Is it possible that the hijab culture goes into the mainstream of fashion one day? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you do if you are a girl who is banned from education? • If Malala doesn't survive, what the influence of this attack is?
1-3 Analysis question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is Halima distinct from other girls? • Do you think Halima is different from other American models? Which part is different? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malala has courage, and what other personality did you observe from her story? • What was the most important key to Malala's success?
1-4 Affective question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think Halima is beautiful? Which part? Her spirit or appearance? • Do you want to become a person like Halima? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about Malala's acts? • How do you feel when you saw Malala's bravery for resisting?
1-5 Connection question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's the true meaning of hijab to Muslim women? • This report raises an issue on respecting other's culture, what part of tradition in Taiwan is not respected now? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's the common place between Malala and Denise Wallace? • What inspiration may Malala's incident give to people?
1-6 Extended question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's the origin of hijab? • Do you think people really can achieve race equality? • What kind of help or assistance that American can give to the refugees? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can Pakistan's government do to make sure that school children are protected? • How did Taliban know Gul Makai is Malala?
2. Test questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Halima Aden? • How did she break barriers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did a fourteen-year-old school girl get shot? • What organization do the gunmen belong to?

Note Grammatical errors in the students' questions are retained in the table

Sometimes my thoughts seem to be complicated and difficult to understand, and I cannot express them clearly owing to my current English proficiency. (Student 7)

I cannot speak English fluently, and I also have a fear of speaking English because I know too little vocabulary to convey my idea well. (Student 9)

Apart from sharing their insights with regard to the strengths and limitations of QT, the students suggested many ways that could help QT proceed more effectively, such as “[ensuring] time management is more flexible” (Student 2), “tape-recording group discussions” (Student 3), “giving students more questions related to the topic” (Student 11), “joining the discussion with students” (Student 12), and “encouraging every student to express their ideas bravely, and guiding them to speak out step by step” (Student 7). These suggestions provided a useful groundwork for me to further modify the course and adapt my teaching to students’ needs in the subsequent semester.

3.1.3 Adaptation of the QT Approach in the Instructional Activities

While the previous section reports the students’ perceptions of QT in the first semester, my journey with QT went on in the second semester. In that semester, 23 of the students continued to take the course, with one new international student joining them, resulting in a total number of 24 students. Based on the students’ earlier responses, I decided to slightly modify my teaching style and instructional activities in the hope that QT could be better adapted to the students’ preferences and characteristics.

The two most significant changes involved the use of class handouts and the teaching of pragmatic devices. With regard to the use of handouts, while QT encouraged students to raise diverse questions freely with only minimal teacher involvement, sometimes I felt confused about how to bring the class back together and wrap up the discussion after the conclusion of the students’ work in small groups. After consulting with a colleague, I decided to prepare a handout for each round of QT discussion, which could hopefully enable me to manage the class more effectively. To be specific, the handouts included two core sections: Essential Vocabulary and Useful Expressions (see Fig. 1 for some sample items). The first section aimed to help students review key vocabulary in the reading passage before they started to discuss it, and the second section presented useful English expressions or pragmatic devices they might find helpful during group discussions. In the Useful Expressions section, we used materials based on Keller and Warner (1995) to discuss how to politely interrupt other people’s talk, how to state a possibility, how to highlight a point, and how to correct a previous statement.

What’s more, to explore the students’ perceptions of these two pedagogical modifications and the QT approach practiced in the second semester, I invited them to fill out the second online evaluation survey. Of the 24 students enrolled in this course, 13 students completed the survey, with the response rate being 54.2%. As this survey aimed to discover the effects of using handouts and teaching pragmatic devices on

I. Essential Vocabulary

1. d_____ (v.): to break down or destroy something (Answer: damage)
2. s_____ (adv.): happening at the same time (Answer: simultaneously)
3. un_____ (adj.): not dependable; not totally trustworthy (Answer: unreliable)

II. Useful Expression: How to Interrupt Others Politely

1. Excuse me, can I share my experience here?
 2. That's interesting, and could you please tell us more about it?
 3. Sorry to interrupt you, but could you please explain your idea again?
-

Fig. 1 Sample items on a class handout

the students' group discussions, I will focus on the students' responses to Questions 3 and 4 in particular.

With regard to the effects of the handouts, 9 of the 13 respondents (69.23%) were in favor of my intention to facilitate the QT discussion with a handout. Most of them found the handouts useful because they could provide a more straightforward direction about how to proceed with their discussion and what vocabulary they could use from the assigned reading. The handouts also helped them gain a comprehensive understanding of the reading passage to be discussed with their partners. Their responses are as follows:

The handout made the discussion more specific. (Student 2)

Handouts help me to figure out the structure of the article in more detail. (Student 6)

I think it is helpful, because we can discuss the questions on the handout directly, which is more efficient. (Student 8)

Personally, I like that approach, because I like to write down notes on the handout. It's convenient to have some inspiration and vocabulary at hand, which can also serve as a reminder. (Student 12)

I think the handout is very useful because it give some directions when the group has no idea about the discussion. (Student 13)

However, three students did not deem the handouts (23.07%) to be useful. While two of them did not clearly specify the reasons, Student 5 responded that students could

take part in any group discussion as long as there is a question to discuss, and having a handout does not significantly help them.

I think handout doesn't apparently help. As long as there'll be a question, we can do the discussion. As a result, I think the function of the handout is the vocabulary part. (Student 5)

Moreover, Student 11 had mixed feelings about the use of handouts and considered it as a double-edged sword that might facilitate their discussion but also lower their motivation to brainstorm questions by themselves. This student's response follows:

I think it can facilitate the QT approach very much, but it also allows us to be lazy. Once we have the handout's content to discuss, we pop up fewer question by ourselves, and sometimes when we finish discussing the handout, our discussion ends as well. (Student 11)

Secondly, the students' responses were also analyzed to determine their impression of the effects of teaching pragmatic devices. Analysis of their responses also shows mixed results. On the one hand, 8 out of the 13 students (61.54%) responded that the explicit instruction about pragmatic devices was helpful, such as Students 4 and 6. Student 6 even considered this part of the instruction to be "the most practical part of the course." However, as pointed out by Student 8, students may need more practice so as to apply these pragmatic devices more actively when they are talking in a group. Also, Student 11 responded that although learning the pragmatic devices was useful, they did not always apply the pragmatic devices in their discussion.

Yes, I think it's good to tell students some skills that we can apply in real conversation and turn them into a habit. (Student 4)

I think it works, but we need to practice them more after class, so that we can use them more actively in group discussion. (Student 8)

Yes, I think it's helpful. It teaches us how to communicate politely, but sometimes when we discuss actively, we forget to use the expression. (Student 11)

On the other hand, 5 students (38.46%) felt that learning the pragmatic devices was not particularly helpful. Student 1, for example, stated that he/she was more "accustomed to using simple expressions." Moreover, Students 5 and 12 both suggested that students should be given chances to figure out how to interact with other people appropriately by themselves, rather than learning the rules explicitly in class. Both of them believed that students could remember more deeply the rules they themselves induce from authentic interaction, and they could even produce better ways to interact with others.

Maybe it does help to those who really barely have discussion experience. In my case, I think we will learn these English expressions through the process, and they are not necessary be taught. When we learn them by ourselves, that would be natural that we'll never forget them. However, we may not understand them via teacher's teaching on purpose. (Student 5)

No, I think giving students the opportunity to talk more and encourage them to find their own ways to interrupt a conversation or show reservation before teaching expressions would be an interesting experience, that might stay in their heads. In real life, we also learn from making mistakes, so in my opinion, students should be encouraged to make mistakes before they learn the best solution to their problems. May they can even come with better solutions than the ones suggested by textbooks and study guides. (Student 12)

3.2 Discussion

This study aims to outline my journey of integrating QT into my freshman English class and adapting it according to my students' needs. It also reports the students' perceptions of QT and related instructional activities. Based on the analysis of the questions raised by the students as well as their evaluation surveys, this study shows that the students generally perceived QT to be conducive to their English learning experience. It encouraged them not only to interact with their peers more actively but also to look at an issue from diverse perspectives. At the end of the first semester, the students also demonstrated their ability to generate more questions for group discussions based on a reading passage. Moreover, in the second semester, QT was adapted to better facilitate students' group discussions, with the instructor employing a handout and introducing essential pragmatic devices. While most of the students who completed the surveys felt very positive about the usefulness of the handout, they generally had mixed feelings toward the pragmatic devices, which suggests that further investigations are needed to explore how to better adapt QT for advanced English L2 learners.

4 Summary and Conclusion

As Allwright (2003) highlights, Exploratory Practice (EP) sets out to “develop our [teachers’] *understandings* of the quality of language classroom life” and ensure that “practitioners, learners as well as teachers, can expect to gain, to ‘develop’, from this mutual process of working for understanding” (emphasis in the original; p. 114). During the course of this research project, my students came to realize that the challenges affecting their participation in group discussions included problems in expressing themselves in English, insufficient English vocabulary, and fear of speaking English. This project also helped them better understand that generating diverse questions based on a text can stimulate their thinking skills, promote their comprehension of a text, and enrich their understanding of the text. During the course of the project, I also gradually came to understand that QT can enliven students' group discussions and encourage them to take part more actively. It can also lead them to look at the issues discussed in the text from diverse perspectives, and use the text “as a jumping off point for productive talk in discussions” (Murphy & Firetto, 2018, p. 102)

Nevertheless, QT is not a pedagogical panacea that can apply to all classroom settings across all subjects without proper adaptation. Teachers should adapt QT based on their understanding of students' needs and characteristics, and ensure that QT helps achieve this result. Although the changes I made to QT in the second semester did not work out as well as expected, the challenge will motivate me, as an English teacher and L2 education researcher, to continue reflecting on how to

further adapt QT for my students. To sum up, the main findings and their pedagogical implications of this chapter can be summarized as follows:

- This study shows that QT motivated the students to raise more text-related questions. It encouraged them to think about a given text from different angles and enabled them to hear their peers' insights about the text.
- Extended questions and speculation questions were common before and after the students participated in the QT discussions.
- The use of handouts was favored by many students as a way to facilitate group discussions.
- Teachers are encouraged to adopt QT to create more group discussions and to help students explore a given text in depth.
- Teachers can give students appropriate scaffolding (e.g., worksheets and vocabulary) to help students participate in group discussions effectively.
- To make QT effectively fit in the target classroom context, teachers can make some appropriate adaptations to this approach by considering the students' characteristics, progress, and responses.

Appendix A: Learner Perception Survey on the Quality Talk Approach

1. What do you like about the Quality Talk approach?
2. What challenges did you encounter when you participated in the Quality Talk approach last semester?
3. What can the instructor do to make the Quality Talk approach more effective this semester?

Appendix B: Learner Perception Survey on the Adaptation of the Quality Talk Approach

1. What do you like about the Quality Talk approach?
2. What challenges did you encounter when you participated in the Quality Talk approach this semester?
3. In this semester, the instructor attempted to facilitate group discussion by preparing a handout for each textbook unit. Do you think that using a handout can facilitate the QT approach?
4. In this semester, the instructor aimed to facilitate group discussion by teaching useful English expressions, such as how to interrupt a conversation, and how to show reservation about a topic, etc. Do you think learning these English expressions can facilitate Quality Talk discussion?

5. What else can the instructor do to better prepare you for Quality Talk discussion in the English class?
6. Any other comments and suggestions about the Quality Talk approach?

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