An Analysis of Students' Perspectives on the Implementation of Group Work in English Learning Process

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ABSTRACT: This research investigated the perspectives of students on the implementation of group work in English learning process associated with five basic principles that facilitate group work, a theory by Johnson and Johnson (2009). The qualitative method was used to construct this research through the interview as the main technique and documentation to support the research data. This research was conducted in SMK Negeri 1 Marisa at the second-grade students. As a result, researcher found that (1). All participants showed a positive response associated with positive interdependence, in a sense of responsibility was emphasized. (2). The second basic principle that must exist is simultaneous interaction, which is related to the interactions of students, and the quality of their interactions. Related to this, there was a negative response from students on how the students were divided into groups. (3). Students gave quite positive responses related to the third basic principle, individual accountability, which is about the contribution of each student in the group. (4). The majority of students know how to act in groups, giving skills to students must be done and trained to be applied consistently. (5). Teachers need to consistently provide instructions, monitor the learning process, and evaluate it at the end of class. Investigating student perspectives regarding a strategy or a method implemented by the teacher in the teaching and learning process is something that needs to be done. By not ignoring students' opinions or perspectives, the teaching and learning process will take place more optimally.

KEYWORDS: Students 'perspectives, group work. learning

INTRODUCTION

These days English as an international language becomes an important language that needs to be taught in most countries in the world. English in Indonesia has begun to be taught or introduced to students from an early age. English lesson has been taught at various levels of education, from the initial, intermediate to university levels. English teachers are expected to have more skills and creativity in teaching English. The teachers are expected to be more creative and innovative in teaching so that students can be more enthusiastic about learning English. One of the ways that teachers can do to make the learning activities in the classroom become more attractive and effective is by applying a variety of learning strategies.

Learning strategies in education are defined as planning which contains a series of activities designed to achieve certain educational goals. Kemp (1995) also explained that the learning strategy is a learning activity that must be done by teachers and students so that learning objectives can be achieved effectively and efficiently. Group work is one of the learning strategies that are usually applied by the teachers in teaching and learning activities. Group Work (SGW) learning strategy is one of the cooperative learning strategies and can be viewed as a modification of the whole class lessons, which is a way of teaching where students in the class are divided into groups of 3 to 5 people. According to Granstorm (1998), there are three ways to organize classroom activity, namely whole-class lessons, group work, or individual work. In its application, as the name implies, students have to work together as a whole to achieve the teaching goals, they must cooperate in completing an activity or a task given by the teacher, and required to trust each other in the process. The researcher finds that group work as a teaching strategy in its application has advantages and disadvantages. There might arise many obstacles when the teachers apply this method in the classroom. For example, if a teacher only sees the result of a group without monitoring the process, it will be difficult to know individual abilities of each student, how well they interact in that group, the obstacles that each student might have, or the right things they really feel when they placed in a group. The success or the failure of the implementation of a teaching strategy is indeed unpredictable. Meanwhile, the basic thing which we have to realize is that students are the component who feels the effect the most. For this reason, it is very important to investigate their opinions and perspectives towards the implementation of the method, which is by investigating their perspectives as individuals.

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Perspective is the way we see something, especially one that is influenced by our beliefs or experiences. Everyone has perspective; we have different perspective in every single thing or object. Barkhuizen (1998) stated that the opinion of teachers and students is very different. Therefore, the researcher believes that by investigating more deeply the perspective of students towards the implementation of group work, things that might not have been realized before could be revealed. Another advantage that we can get if we investigate what students really feel is the teacher can re-evaluate how the strategy is implemented, without ignoring the opinions and perspectives of students about the teaching strategy then in its application the maximum results can be achieved. Therefore, this study focus on investigating students' perspectives on the implementation of group work in English learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of Perpective

Based on Oxford dictionary, perspective is a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view. Perspective has Latin root meaning "look through" or "perceive", and all the meanings of perspective have something to do with looking. Perspective is the way we see the world. It comes from our personal point of view and is formed by some factors which have been revealed above. There is an article in Forbes that has written by Steffan Surdek, a consulting principal and corporate trainer at Pyxis Technoligies, he wrote about why understanding other perspectives is a key leadership skill and there is a point about perspective in his post that really interesting. He distinguishes perspective and reality, according to Surdek reality can be a different things. It is like we can say that our own perspective is our reality, but as we consider that each individual have their own perspectives than when we look at the shared reality of an event, the more perspectives we get, the closer us to the reality.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a learning model where students with different abilities learn in small groups. Cooperative learning model is a learning strategy that focuses on grouping students with different academic ability levels into small groups (Saptono, 2003). In another theory, Johnson, et al. (1994) stated cooperative learning is the use of small groups (2-5 people) in learning that allows students to work together to maximize their learning and learn from other members of the group. The objectives of cooperative learning are different from conventional groups that apply a competitive system, where individual success is oriented towards the failures of others. Meanwhile, the purpose of cooperative learning is to create a situation in which individual success is determined or influenced by the success of the group (Slavin, 1994). Furthermore, Roger and David Johnson (2009) said that not all group work can be considered cooperative learning, for that, five elements of the cooperative learning model must be applied.

Five Basic Principle that Facilitate Group Work

According to Johnson & Johnson (2009), Slavin (2009) there are five basic principles which should be included in designing cooperative learning activity. First, positive interdependence is like the very important element of cooperative learning that each person's efforts gives benefits to the whole group and the students must be responsible for their own learning. Second, Simultaneous interaction means that students are required to interact verbally with one another on learning tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 2008), exchange opinions, explain things, teach others and present their understanding (Ballantine & Larres, 2007). Group size and the frequency of students' cooperation on their learning task determine the quality of interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Moreover, the academic level of all students in the group can influence the quality of group interaction. Each student's learning ability should be identified in order to help them in giving feedback and support one another in their learning. Third, Individual accountability means that individual learning of all group members affects the achievement of that group. If there is no individual accountability, one or two group members may do all the work while others do nothing. Students who arranged in a small group may have great individual accountability, it is supported by Johnson theory which stated that the smaller the size of the group, the greater the individual accountability may be (Johnson & Johnson, 1994a;b;c). Forth, interpersonal and social skills are the fourth important element of cooperative learning. In reality, students cannot work effectively if socially unskilled students are arranged into one group (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Therefore, in order to help students cooperate effectively in a group then social and interpersonal skills, such as listening attentively, questioning cooperatively and negotiating respectfully need to be taught (Killen, 2007). Fifth, Group processing is defined as reflecting on a group session to help students: (1) describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful; and (2) make decisions about what actions to continue or change (Johnson et al., 1994, p.33). Group processing helps improve the effectiveness of the members in contributing to the shared efforts to achieve the group's goals via reflection on the learning process (Yamarik, 2007). In other words, the purpose of group processing is to clarify and improve the effectiveness of the members in contributing to the joint efforts to achieve the group's goals.

METHODOLOGY

This research has been done by using qualitative research design which describes the data not by using number or numerical form. In qualitative method, the data was described by using sentences. Hancock, Windridge & Ockleford (2009:7) stated that qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. This research was conducted in SMKN 1 Marisa. SMKN 1 Marisa is one of ten vocational high schools located in Pohuwato, one of the districts in Gorontalo. The researcher had previously conducted observations at that school relating to Teaching Practice II activity. The reason for the researcher to make this school as

the site of research is because the researcher already has an initial overview of the teaching and learning process in the school, and has seen a general depiction of the characters of the students. Like vocational schools in general, male students are dominating the total number of students. There are eight departments in this school in which each department has its own characteristics. The researcher chose three students from each department. Thus, the total participants are 24 (twenty-four) students.

In collecting the data, the researcher used two techniques of data collection. The techniques are interview, and documentation. In this step, the researcher gave some questions related to the title or the purpose of this research. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview for 24 students who are chosen by purpose. The questions provided was compiled based on Johnson's theory about five basics principles that facilitate group work and also supported by another theory that related to this study. The last technique used by the researcher in collecting the data is documentation. There are four steps that were conducted by the researcher in analyzing the data. Creswell (2009) stated that there are several steps that can be done by the researcher in analyzing qualitative research data it involves preparing, understanding, representing, and the last interpreting the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the theory from Johnson and Johnson (2009) regarding the five basic principles that facilitates group work, the researcher has set 5 indicators that are used as the basis for the preparation of interview questions, namely: Positive interdependence, simultaneous interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and social skills, and group processing. The research findings are presented sequentially based on these 5 indicators.

Positive Interdependence

Positive interdependence can be defined as a commitment that each person's efforts provide benefits to the entire group. The main thing that is emphasized in this first principle is about the responsibility of students for their work, and their sense of responsibility for the work of their friend in the group. Referring to the first indicator, the researchers gave three questions to participants regarding positive interdependence. The three questions are:

Do you feel responsible for the task or the role that given to you in your group?

Do you feel responsible or concerned about the work of your friends in group?

Do you feel responsible or care about the result that your group gets at the end of the lesson?

Of the three questions the researcher gave related to positive interdependence, all participants' answers showed positive things. In the first question, all participants (24 participants) showed a positive response. In the second question, 18 participants (mostly) showed positive responses, and in the third question, 22 participants also showed positive responses. It can be seen from the statements of the participants in the interview:

"*Yes, be responsible. In the group, we are given responsibility not only to the group leader, as members we also have to be responsible because group work requires group thinking, not individuals.*"

In line with the statement above, participant 11 added that the role or task given to them in the group is a trust from the other group members. As quoted below:

"*Yes, because the assignment or role that was given to me is a trust that other people have given or entrusted to me. So I have to maintain that trust as much as possible.*"

Simultaneous Interaction

Simultaneous interaction/face to face interaction means that there is a need for verbal interaction between students in the process of working on assignments (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). The size of the group or the number of group members and the abilities of each student also needs to be considered to form an effective group. Referring to this second indicator, the researcher has compiled 3 questions related to simultaneous interaction:

Are you actively involved in asking questions, expressing opinions, or explaining your understanding of the material and the task that you do in group?

How many members do you think are suitable for being in one group so that the group becomes more effective?

What do you feel about the placement of group members? Have you ever felt unfair about how the group was formed?

In the first question, there were more than half of the participants (14 of 24 participants) who showed a positive response. In the second question, all participants can consider the perfect number of members to be in one group. While in the third question there was a slightly negative response that the researcher found regarding the sense of unfairness felt by students in the division of group members, this is the first thing that the researcher found that needed more attention from the teacher. It can be seen from the statements of the participants in the interview:

"*Yes, in order to create mutual communication between members in the group, and to provoke other members to play an active role.*"

"*Yes, whether you want it or not. Exchanging opinions, inputs, and understandings from each member is the key to the success of group work.*"

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Researchers found that almost all participants wanted that group formation should be left to the teacher only, by paying attention to several things such as the abilities of each student, and their level of activity in the classroom.

"For this matter, I might feel it would be unfair if students who are smart enough are gathered in one group. In my opinion, it is better if the teacher alone determines the group members because it will be fairer. If it is left to the students, they will only choose their closest friends."

Individual Accountability

Individual accountability means that the contribution of each student is necessary in group work. Each member must ensure that they do their best in their work because the contribution of each individual will affect the achievement of the group. Referring to the third indicator, the researcher has compiled 3 questions regarding individual accountability:

> *What do you feel about the students who did not talk or work at all in group?*
What do you think about the students who always take all the roles and dominate in every group work?
> *In your opinion, have you participated well in your group?*

> The main thing that is emphasized in this third principle is the importance of the contribution of each student in the group. Related to this, the researcher has given three questions that are used to explore students' opinions about group members who do not contribute, members who are dominant contributing and raise their awareness of their contributions to the group. From the three questions, the researcher got positive response from the participants, in the sense that the researcher found that students' awareness of the importance of individual accountability was good. This can be seen from the responses of students who show their disapproval of group members who do not contribute and also their responses to members who are too dominating. They are quite capable of analyzing the situations they face while working in groups. In addition, most of the participants also stated that they had participated well and were aware of the extent to which they had contributed. It can be seen from the statements of the participants in the interview:

"Sometimes things like this happen because there are group members who are not active in helping with the work or the assignment. I once had to finish all of our group work because the other members seemed indifferent."

"Yes. In my opinion, participation does not mean you have to be a speaker or actively voices during group presentations, but we can actively participate in other things such as actively giving ideas or sharing our understanding of the task, so that later the presentation can run optimally."

Interpersonal and Social Skill

Interpersonal and social skills can be defined as skills that should be mastered by each group member so that they can work well together. These skills include being able to listen attentively, questioning cooperatively, and negotiating respectfully (Killen, 2007). Referring to the fourth indicator, the researcher compiled 3 questions related to interpersonal and social skills:

> *What kind of person is easy for you to work with? Why?*
> *What kind of person is difficult for you to work with? Why?*
> *How do you deal with unpleasant situation in your group?*

> From the participants' responses to the three questions that were given by the researcher, the researcher concluded that students knew and were aware of the attitudes or skills they should have. They are also aware of the attitudes they shouldn't have. Students also know how to act in groups, they know what steps to take when dealing with bad situations in the group which they certainly cannot avoid. On the other hand, teachers still need to better equip students with skills that can help them in doing group work. It can be seen from the statements of the participants in the interview:

"In my opinion, those who can be communicated well, disciplined with time, and pay attention to small things well. With someone like this, we can share opinions about the group assignment, as well as pay attention to small things that we sometimes forget."

"A person who does not respect other people's opinions, even though the facts are given during the discussion session he is still in his stance and does not want to admit the truth, he wants to win by himself."

"I think I consulted with friends in groups. Such a situation will quickly disappear if we contemplate it together."

Group Processing

Group processing can be defined as a reflection session that can help develop the effectiveness of group members in contributing to achieve group goals. Some of the actions that can be performed in group processing are: describing what actions can help or not at all, and state what actions can be continued or changed at all. Referring to the fifth indicator, there are 3 questions given by the researcher regarding group processing. These questions are intended by researchers to investigate how the learning process or the application of this learning strategies 'Group Work" in the classroom:

> *Does the teacher always give clear instructions before starting a study group?*
> *Does the teacher monitor the learning process?*

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Is there any review or feedback about your work after the lesson?

The main thing that is emphasized in this fifth principle is giving feedback. Based on the results of the interview, most of the participants stated that there was a review or feedback from the teacher at the end of the lesson. However, the teacher still has to make sure to always review what was learned and review how students are performing at the end of the lesson. It can be seen from the statements of the participants in the interview:

"Of course, yes, because giving clear instructions in group work is the main thing so that we can understand what assignments and roles that we have to take on."

"Yes, like coming to a group and asking what problems each group faced."

"Yes, in addition to evaluating the results of learning on that day, it is also to provide an outline for the material to be studied next week."

On the other hand, different from the statements above, the other participants stated that:

"It should be, but there are also teachers who let students discuss in groups, and they come back to class when the presentation and question and answer session will begin."

"It depends on the assignment. Some do feedback, some just collect it in the form of notes, clippings, papers, and so on."

Furthermore, at the end of the interview the researcher asked two more questions. These questions are intended to confirm whether this learning strategy (group work) can give more advantages (effectively) according to student's perspectives. The questions are:

Did you find any good points in doing group work?
Which do you prefer working in group or working individually?

Based on the results of the interviews, all participants realized that there were many good things or advantages they could get from working in groups. Based on the results of the interview, of the 24 participants there were 16 participants who chose to work in groups, and 8 participants chose to work individually. After being analyzed, based on the participants' answers, the researcher found that the biggest reason students did not choose to study in groups that they were worried about meeting uncooperative friends. It can be seen from the statements of the participants in the interview:

"Yes, of course. One of the examples is that we can discuss in solving a problem. We can find different points of view from each person, and our insights become wider because there are interactions with other people."

"For me, I prefer group work because there I can share with other friends. I also have a hard time studying on my own, it is hard for me to focus. I prefer to study in groups so I can share with other friends."

"I like both. If I have to choose which was more comfortable for me then I would probably choose to work individually. This doesn't mean that group work is ineffective, it's just that I am a shy person so working with many people will make me less comfortable, but I also realize that working in groups will help me be more confident."

If we analyze the students' answers to all the questions as a whole, we can find that in fact the majority of students have quite understood the concept of group learning itself. They are aware of their responsibilities in the group, they are aware that they need to depend on each other positively within the group, and they are also aware that the contribution of each member will greatly affect the work of the group. This is a very good achievement because awareness and attention to these things will affect the way they act in the group. As stated by Robert L. Mathis and John H. Jackson (2001) that the success or failure of a group in achieving its goals will be largely determined by the awareness of individuals in carrying out their duties. In addition, the students also show their interest in group learning. The majority of participants acknowledged that there are many positive things they can get by working in groups.

CONCLUSION

Investigating student perspectives regarding the implementation of learning strategy is an important thing to do, because a person's perspective can influence how he acts. Based on the analysis of the research data, it can be seen that the majority of students have a positive perspective on group work. This is indicated by their responses to the questions given in the interview. In this case, the researcher can conclude that the implementation of group work strategy in English learning at SMKN 1 Marisa is quite effective. To assess a learning strategy or a method is effective or not, one of them can be seen from how students show their interest in learning. Based on the results of interviews, the researcher found that the majority of students showed their interest in learning in groups, the majority of them admitted that this learning strategy could help them in many ways. Investigating student perspectives

regarding a strategy or a method implemented by the teacher in teaching and learning process is something that needs to be done. Through this, the teacher can re-evaluate whether the learning strategies that have been implemented are effective or not. By not ignoring students' opinions or perspectives, the teaching and learning process will take place more optimally.

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