

EXPLORING STUDENTS' INDEPENDENCE DURING GROUP DISCUSSION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRAK

Diskusi kelompok merupakan salah satu metode yang bermanfaat dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Namun, terkadang guru atau pengajar tidak dapat memastikan keaktifan dan kemandirian siswa selama mereka dalam diskusi tersebut. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menginvestigasi kemandirian serta partisipasi/keaktifan siswa dalam diskusi kelompok selama pembelajaran bahasa asing. Dengan menggunakan angket terbuka dan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 15 peserta mahasiswa S1 Jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa diskusi kelompok memberikan banyak manfaat tidak hanya dalam hal kemandirian siswa, tetapi juga partisipasi atau keaktifan siswa. Mengenai kemandirian siswa, diskusi kelompok tidak mengurangi kemandirian siswa dalam mengerjakan tugas. Mereka mendapatkan lebih banyak informasi dan wawasan dari anggota lain yang memperkuat argumen mereka. Selain itu, siswa juga dapat berpartisipasi dalam diskusi kelompok dalam hal penyampaian gagasan, artinya keberadaan anggota lain tidak mengurangi keberanian mereka dalam menyampaikan gagasan.

Kata kunci: diskusi kelompok, kemandirian siswa, partisipasi siswa

ABSTRACT

Group discussion is one of the methods that is beneficial in language learning. However, teachers sometimes cannot closely investigate the students' activeness and independence in doing their work. Therefore, this study investigated the students' independence as well as participation/activeness in practicing group discussion during their foreign language learning. By employing open-ended questionnaire and qualitative approach, the data collected from 15 participants of undergraduate students of English Department. The result shows that group discussion promotes a bunch of benefits not only in the terms of students' independence, but also students' participation or activeness. Regarding students' independence, group discussion does not diminish their independent in doing their work. They get more information and insight from the other members that strengthen their argument instead. Moreover, students also can participate in group discussion in the term of delivering ideas, meaning that the existence of other members does not reduce their courage in delivering ideas.

Keywords: *group discussion, students' independence, students' participation*

INTRODUCTION

Language learning needs communication during learning process. While learning itself is a part of communication process. Houwer and Moors (2014) defined learning as a process that carried out by individuals to learn new behavioral changes as a whole, as a result of individual experience itself with the presence of surroundings. Since language functions primarily as a means of communication, the language learning must also be aimed to achieve both oral and written communication skills. This statement is supported by Keraf (1997) who stated that language is a means of communication between members of the community in the form of a symbol of sound produced by the speech organ. Through language, people can express their idea and feeling to others, which is the basic purpose of using language as a form of communication. One of aspects that support learning process is communication. According to Hovland (in Mulyana, 2007) communication is a process that allows people to transfer message or information in order to change

others' behavior. Communication needs at least a sender, a message and a recipient. Communication will be effective when a recipient interprets the message as it is intended by the sender. During learning process, the sender and recipient can be both teacher and students.

Group discussion is one of the appropriate strategies for language learning. Apparently, students have been familiar with the term "group discussion". Group discussion refers to a student-centered strategy in which they are divided into groups and they share their activities or ideas about given topic/problem. Group discussion is divided into two types: *small group discussion and whole group discussion*. According to Ariends (2008), discussion is a situation in which teacher and student or among students talk and share ideas or opinions. Group discussion has become a part of strategy of learning process particularly in language learning. It can increase co-operation between students. In a group discussion, students can exchange

their ideas, thoughts or view on the given issues through oral communication. Gulley (1960) stated that discussion group in class can engage students' participation and enthusiasm in learning. Besides that, Harmer (2003) mentioned the weaknesses point of group discussion are noisy, longer to organize than pairs, and some students are not enjoy so that there will be passive and active students.

Mostly, teachers can't observe the activity of the each group. The large number of students and the shortage of time make it difficult for the teacher to observe the students' activities during the discussion. It is impossible for teacher to go around the groups and check them one by one. Group discussion is not just about appointing students and giving them tasks, but teachers must also observe the activities during the discussion because it can help teacher to evaluate the learning process whether it is effective or not.

In a group discussion activity, there are two the type of students: active students and passive students.

Certainly, not all student are active in a group discussion because they have different about approaches to learning, different lifestyle, and motivation. Active students are individuals who demonstrated their activity in different aspect of the learning process. These students are open to communication and act as active learners in the classroom. According to Kanar (2012), "Students who are active learners are involved, self motivated and willing to take intellectual skills." Active students often give their response regarding the information presented by the teacher. They ask more questions in the group discussion. This is because they are not confused to express their points of view in public. In group discussion they prefer to share information with others and even bring others round to their way of thinking.

Researchers and educators assume that active learning is an approach "where learners participate in the learning process by building knowledge and understanding. In schools they will usually do this in response to learning opportunities designed by their teacher"

(Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2019). Active learners are those who know how to make sense of new information and ideas and they know how to use their existing knowledge to understand new material. In order to understand lessons, active students have to perform an active process in making sense of using existing knowledge to comprehend new information or new knowledge. This process involves using long-term memory to develop deeper understanding of messages and lessons. Indeed, active learning has its root from a learning theory named Constructivism founded by Jean Piaget (1896–1980), which emphasises the fact that learners construct or build their understanding. According to this theory, in the meaning making process, children can replace or adapt their existing knowledge and understanding with deeper levels of understanding.

In group discussion, some students are active but some other passive. Passive learners may quietly absorb information and knowledge without typically engaging with the

information received or the learning experience. They may not interact with others, share insights, or contribute to a dialogue. passive learners have a tendency preferring to learn from an auditory intake of information, for instance, through listening to lecture and logical presentations. They also prefer isolated testing methods, such as quizzes and flashcards to check what they have learned (Rodriguez, 2018).

There is other statement about passive students from Howe (1993) he argues that the passivity amongst students by saying that whether “language learners are passive or active in class depends more on their teachers’ expectations than on culturally-based learning styles” (cited in Marilyn Lewis & Fiona McCook, 2002).

Based on the reasons, the reasons, this study investigates the students’ independence regarding their feeling and activeness in group discussion. Employing qualitative approach, 15 participants were investigated by using an open-ended questionnaire. The collected data

were analyzed by using relevant theories and studies.

DISCUSSION

Group discussion, as a part of Communicative Language teaching (CLT), provides a bunch of benefit for learning, including language learning. It changes the paradigm of teacher-centered to learner-centered, and -oriented to process-oriented instructions (Fujimoto: 2010). By using this method, students have chances to communicate with their peers using the target language. After collecting the data taken from the open-ended questionnaire, this study found that among those 15 students, most of them believed that this method serve more advantages instead of disadvantages. This study divided the findings and analysis into two main parts, namely group discussion for students' independence and group discussion for students' participation.

Students' independence

Based on the questionnaire distributed to the participants, group discussion supports students' learning independence by several

reasons. They assume that they can get support from their friends as well as assistant in finding solution for several problems. Group discussion, as the part of a group work, provides a bunch of benefits for students. Cohen and Lotan (2014) defined group work is doing activity together by actively participate to achieve the learning goal. Moreover, group discussion provides higher graded learning for the students (Garside: 1996).

Regarding the students' independence, most of them could perform their independence in group discussion because of several factors, including motivation from their friends, learning competition in a group, and fostering their critical thinking. In fact, by learning together, they are provoked each other to be better and do more rather than they work alone. The elaboration of the results is stated as follows:

1. Most of the students like to work in group/pair rather than individually. Ford and Vaughn (2011) in their study revealed that working together in a group, prevent the students of being

alone. They can share their thought and get feedback from their partners. However, we cannot deny the fact that in a class learning, there are one or more students prefer do everything by himself. Even, a silent and passive student can deliver information in a group discussion, which might be beneficial for others to develop their ideas.

2. Regarding their independence, most of them believe that they do their work (delivering their ideas) in the group independently. As the result, they have courage to defend their opinion in the group. The students feel that it is the time for them to show their existence and thought, and for the confident students, they have a chance to compare their ideas with others. For some students, expressing ideas in a classroom is something hard. In a group discussion, they just need to share their ideas in front of smaller numbers of students, and they do not have to stand in front of the class while many eyes are looking at them. Therefore, all students' thought

can be accommodated because they can deliver it independently.

3. The students believe they can get new information and perspectives from others that ease them to understand the material better. Students' diversity in a group provides creativity for them in exploring ideas independently (Thornburg: 1991). The diversity enables them in gaining new insight, information, knowledge, and views on an issue. Culture, family background, educational background, gender, past experience, and many other aspects can form a new point of view that bears a new opinion or develop someone's idea.

4. They can deliver their ideas independently after gaining some information from others. Group discussion provokes the students to be confident and expose their independence in presenting ideas. By looking at others in delivering ideas, they are like to be forced to do the same. And by turn taking in delivering idea, it is impossible for the students to reject the turn to speak.

It is undeniable that in some occasion, only few students are too active and dominate the discussion. This problem can be anticipated by the teacher by using the appropriate instruction and material to be discussed. By providing appropriate material based on their level, the teacher can make sure that all students can understand and deliver their thought. Difficult or inappropriate material to discuss will make the discussion useless; due to not all students can reach the sources and ideas. Absolutely, language learning is one of the fields that gain much more advantage in discussion rather than other field, because this field require communication skills that is the main part in any discussion.

Students Participation

Group discussion eases teachers in many ways, including engaging the learners, developing learning material, and controlling class. They just need to check the group activity and result of the discussion to make sure that the material has been delivered and understood properly. However, it

cannot guarantee that all group members actively participate in the discussion. As Kim (2013) revealed in his study that there is difference frequency of interaction between large and small group discussion. It emphasizes that teachers also need to consider the numbers of students in a group to ensure that the discussion runs optimally.

Regarding the students' participation, most of the participants in this study have a chance as well as deliver their ideas in the group. Besides that, they can defend the ideas because they construct the ideas independently and some of them believed that they can persuade others to agree with their ideas. The following elaboration is the detail results of this study:

1. Among those 15 students, 12 students are sometimes able to deliver their ideas in the group and 1 student felt that he/she can dominate the group. It proves that they get their chance to deliver ideas because they have the same level, as learners, without considering their background and status. This chance sometimes hard to get when the teacher ask

them to deliver their ideas in a classroom discussion. More numbers of students creates fewer chances for them to speak.

2. They want to participate and deliver their thoughts actively, but they do not have courage in delivering ideas confidently, because of many reasons. Having rejected in the previous discussion, missing some evidence and doubting their own opinion because of uncertain information strongly influences them in delivering ideas confidently. Although, the fact shows that some students just run with their opinion without verify the fact.
3. 50% of the participants feel they can persuade others to agree with them. Absolutely, this is supported by their confidence and proof that can be used to persuade others. They also have chance to persuade some new people (for them) because they have the closer communication that enables them to greet and talk each other. Persuading others needs evidence, confidence of the speaker, and the way the speaker deliver the persuasion. Therefore, by using group discussion, they can tell others privately and more detail to agree with them.
4. Students are able to get and give new information in the group because of the diverse information and perspective. They learn new insight, experience, and information from different perspectives. By having different background and culture, they are forced to tell it to other group members, to show that they have something new that they need to tell.
5. Some students argued that they can improve their critical thinking by sharing ideas in the group. Feedback from the other group members is beneficial for them to explore and develop their thought. Dixcon (1991) believed that group discussion, especially small group discussion, is one of the best methods for teaching critical thinking. More participation they give, more critical thinking they can practice.

Sometimes, every group member's participation in a group discussion is questionable. Is it true

that they can conduct the discussion together, in a balance portion? Do they take turn in delivering ideas? Can they improve their communication skill using this method? and so on. However, it cannot be generalized that all of students cannot optimize their language skills during the discussion. To prevent passiveness of the group members and to make sure that the group discussion runs well, teacher needs to divide the groups appropriately. The division may consider several aspects, including students' activeness, level of understanding, or others. One for sure, that consideration is also regarding the material that is discussing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and analysis, this study concludes that group discussion promotes not only students' independence, but also students' participation or activeness. Regarding students' independence, group discussion does not diminish their independent in doing their work. They get more information and insight from the other members that

strengthen their argument instead. Moreover, students also can participate in group discussion in the term of delivering ideas, meaning that the existence of other members does not reduce their courage in delivering ideas. They also can persuade others to agree with their ideas because group discussion promotes them the chance to have closer communication with other people.

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