

Multiple Studies: The Influence of Collaborative Learning Approach on Indonesian Secondary High School Students' English-Speaking Skill

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Abstract

To respond the globalization, the importance of English communication skills including speaking skill increases. Looking at Indonesian context, secondary high school students find spoken English much more difficult than written English. Students are good at grammar, reading, and writing but they can hardly speak (Hairdara, 2016). This article proposes collaborative learning approach (CLA) as one suitable solution to solve the obstacles of sharpening English speaking skill due to its benefits. The discussion of this investigation highlights some benefits of CLA in developing speaking skill and the challenges need to be considered as well. Receiving well proven evidence of its benefits, CLA is recommended to be implemented in the teaching and learning of English speaking skill. As the results of this investigation, there are three main benefits of CLA whose implementation can reduce language anxiety, raise students' participation, and increase students' self-confidence.

Keywords: collaborative learning approach (CLA), benefits, and English-speaking skills

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INTRODUCTION

Background, Definition, Significance

One of the consequences resulting from globalization is the increasing demand of the ability to communicate using English. To respond this phenomenon, Indonesian students are demanded to be able to speak English. However, spoken English still seems difficult for many Indonesian secondary high school students. Haidara's (2016) research reports that many Indonesian secondary high school students are good at English written tests like reading and writing, but most of them still are hardly able to speak. Meanwhile, "the mastery of speaking skill in learning any language including English is a priority for many second or foreign language learners" (Haidara, 2016). There are some factors that can hinder students'

improvement in speaking skill. These factors can be lack of practice, high language anxiety, and lack of confidence (Haidara, 2016). In response to these problems, one solution could be the collaborative learning approach (CLA). Many studies have shown the positive language learning outcomes of this approach in which students can engage and gain more opportunities to practice target languages in the classroom activities (Thousand, Villa & Nevin, 1994; Macaro, 1997; Nunan, 1992). However, it seems that most of the Indonesian teachers are not familiar enough with this approach. Therefore, further research on CLA would be beneficial for teaching practice where students' speaking skill could be nurtured.

Collaborative learning is a process of learning in which students collaborate together to attain 'common learning goals' (Macaro, 1997). It implies that CLA is established through pairs or group works to involve students during learning process. There are at least five attributes of this approach. They are: "1) a common task or learning activity suitable for group work, 2) small-group learning, 3) cooperative behavior, 4) interdependence, and 5) individual accountability and responsibility" (Davison, 1994, p. 25). All these attributes can facilitate students to develop their speaking skill.

Considering these features of CLA, hence, this critical article will argue that collaborative learning is very beneficial to develop Indonesian secondary high school students' speaking skill. This main argument is constructed by the possible benefits of collaborative learning on speaking skill, such as reducing language anxiety, encouraging active participation, and increasing confidence and self-esteem. This study also provides a significant insight to overcome the problems of students' English speaking skill. Additionally, it will demonstrate the use of CLA in teaching English speaking skills. At the end, it will give the article conclusion in which it will summarize the key points and provide some recommendation of further implementation of collaborative learning in English language teaching. Based on these, English teachers also can benefit from this investigation in a way that they can insert collaborative learning approach into their teaching practice. In addition, of this study will provide different perspectives how collaborative learning approach influences the proficiency of English speaking skill. Thus, English teachers or English education researchers can consider proper adjustments and modifications of the CLA implementations to enhance their students' English speaking skill.

RESEARCH METHODS

To understand the purposes of this study, the research questions are listed as follows:

- a. What are the benefits of collaborative learning approach on students' speaking skill?
- b. What are the challenges of implementing collaborative learning approach in Indonesian secondary high school level?
- c. How can the challenges of CLA implementations be overcome?

The research methodology of this study is literature review. To demonstrate the topic of the investigation, the first step is collecting academic literatures relevant to collaborative learning approach and English-speaking skill. The selected literature are gathered from books and articles of reliable academic journals. Then evaluating and analyzing these academic sources are done critically to frame the issue and construct arguments.

As mentioned above, another focus of the article is to elaborate the benefits of CLA in developing students' English-speaking skill and there are three benefits of it i.e. to decrease language anxiety during English classroom activities, the second one is to increase the participations of the students to take a part in learning, and to help students enhance their confidence in speaking English.

The Benefits of Collaborative Learning on English Speaking Skill Reducing Language Anxiety

The first benefit of collaborative learning approach (CLA) on students' speaking ability is to reduce the language anxiety. "Anxiety is defined as distress or uneasiness of the mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune. General anxiety is the excessive and exaggerated worry about everyday things" (Suleimenova, 2013). Foreign language learners often experience anxiety in speaking the target language because the classroom environments seem threatening for students (Dornyei, 2002). Firstly, CLA can contribute in reducing language anxiety because it offers safe environments of learning English as a foreign language in order that the language anxiety decreases. Performing speaking English in small groups can make students feel more comfortable in making language mistakes then trying to deliver a speech in front of large groups of students. When a student sets an attempt to express an idea using English, only members of the group can listen (Dalisa, 2015). The fear of

making mistakes like mispronunciation or grammatical errors can diminish due to less threat of being judged by teachers or the entire classroom members (Dornyei, 2002). Secondly, CLA facilitates students to support each other instead of competing. The common goals of learning particular English materials lead students to encourage all students to participate in achieving the target goals (Dornyei, 2002), for example, performing a drama in which each member of the group should work together starting from preparing the plots of drama to practicing prior to the show in order to exhibit good performance. CLA benefits in terms of providing social supports from peers as stated by Dornyei (2002). To prevent language anxiety in English language learning classrooms, Dornyei (2002) suggests avoiding competitions and promoting cooperation. Cooperative behaviors generated by students through CLA environments can let students feel less anxious to produce a speech or conversation among members of the groups (Dornyei, 2002). Thirdly, being set in a group helps students build a level of trust to share their feelings (Gregersen, 2017). Shy students can feel less reluctant to put their effort into practice of speaking skills due to the belief that peers would appreciate what they try to contribute (Gregersen, 2017). This trust among group members gradually lessens fears or nervousness in communicating their ideas using the target language. As can be seen, CLA plays essential roles in reducing language anxiety in speaking English by creating supportive environments of learning.

Although the above evidence may be true, drawbacks of CLA in reducing language anxiety exist though, due to some reasons. The first drawback is that CLA promotes interdependence to each other among students (Gregersen, 2017). It implies that the success of completing a set task in CLA classrooms relies on the contributions made by each member of the group. Gregersen (2017, p. 122) argues that group works can “make students feel that they succeed and fail as a team”. Hence, CLA will trigger students to be afraid of making mistakes of performing their speaking skill because their failures will be seen as a part of group’s failures. As this pressure can hinder students’ willingness to contribute, students keep worrying that their contributions may create disadvantages to their groups. The second limitation is there is possible social incident that can appear during conducting CLA activities. ‘Social incident’ like disrespect in group learning can bother students’ confidence or cause fear in contributing (Järvelä, Volet, & Järvenoja, 2010). Insufficient understandings of respects among students can cause students to easily laugh or ridicule at their friends’ performance. Finally, they become reluctant to express their ideas in the group discussion and the anxiety cannot be eliminated or even get increased.

To overcome the issue of pressure in providing good contribution to group and social incident, English teachers and students should have the same understanding about the concept of collaborative learning. The core concept of CLA is about learning knowledge, skills, and competencies together (Serrano-Cámara et al., 2014). What students should do is to learn from each other by sharing language inputs and giving feedback to peers. Once students understand the goal of CLA, they can feel more comfortable to take a part in group discussion. Macaro (1997) argues that students perceive learning collaboratively helps them gain better understanding of language and more ideas from small group. They believe so because the learning process they experience is done by helping each other (Macaro, 1997). The values of helping each other in learning English can prevent social incident to occur. Holding the supportive values, students can realize that each of them has strengths and weaknesses, so they can respect strengths and weaknesses of the other group members. Eventually, CLA can be very effective to minimize the level of language anxiety due to promoting secure learning environments, developing trust among students and helping each other.

To sum, students can benefit from CLA especially to reduce language anxiety. Students can feel that speaking is less threatening when teachers are not around them (Macaro, 1997). In addition, CLA mediates students to encourage and learn cooperatively so the fear of producing mistakes may be less influential to students' learning performance.

Active Participation

Once students can feel less anxious in starting conversations, they tend to maintain their participation in the learning process. Therefore, the second benefit of CLA regarding speaking skill is it increases students' participation. Besides providing secure learning environments to increase students' involvements, CLA also promotes more opportunities for students to practice speaking English. Manurung (2015) emphasizes the importance of opening wide opportunities to practice in the teaching of speaking. Looking at Indonesian contexts, generally each class consists of thirty up to forty students. Moreover, the English learning hours are so limited approximately only two meetings a week. Hence, many students cannot get adequate chance to practice their speaking skill during classroom activities.

However, the sufficient opportunities can be provided through CLA in which students can try starting to talk using English in small groups. Each member of the chosen group is encouraged to take a turn in explaining ideas and counted as important resource person (Nunan, 1992).

Another benefit of CLA on students' learning participation is individual accountability. Each student's participation that is acknowledged can support students to keep contributing to their groups (Gregesen, 2017). Take Jigsaw as illustration, each member of group has their own job distribution and they must apply the abilities of gaining information from other groups; taking notes of the findings; and making the findings public by precise communication to their 'home group' (Davidson, 1994). During the exploration of the given task, students can perceive how important their participation is because their presence is recognized by the learning process. Furthermore, the sense of accountability makes students improve their sense of responsibility at their learning achievements as a part of collaborative group works. "The true interaction is actually to engage students' awareness that they are not alone to finish class-works, they have their potency among individuals to accomplish all the tasks" (Slavin, 2014, as cited in Anwar, 2016, p. 225). The awareness of individual roles and collective efforts in achieving group goals trigger all members to be active in completing the tasks cooperatively. In a word, CLA increases students' engagements in speaking activities due to the increasing opportunities, level of individual accountability and responsibility in getting involved in the whole classroom activities.

However, CLA receives some critiques though, due to the potential social challenges that may hinder students' engagements in the learning process. "Groups can face multiple types of social challenges, which interfere with the social process of learning and task completion" (Järvelä, Volet,&Järvenoja, 2010). The first challenge is social conflict. When students cannot come to consensus due to their ego to stick on their own opinions, this situation may lead students to be less involved. Conflicts of students' goals, characteristics, and interests can be obstacles to learning participations (Järvenoja&Järvelä, 2009). It cannot be denied that reaching a consensus is difficult because students' views on a task can be diverse. Take 'role play' as an example, students can refuse to take a certain role that they dislike to do or two or some students wish to choose the same jobs or roles. If the conflict cannot be solved soon, the learning process cannot work as expected. Then students' speaking performance may seem impossible to occur because the unsolved dispute still restrains their willingness to take a part of collaborative works. The second challenge is students' diversity that can influence social communication

during group discussion. Students tend to feel comfortable to stay in a group with those whose characters or social and cultural backgrounds are similar. Hence, students may experience communication difficulty generated by “interpersonal dynamics”, such as different priorities and expectations in learning; different styles of working or communicating; the tendency of some individuals to rely on others to do their share of the work, and power dynamics among members” (Arvaja, Salovaara, Hakkinen, & Jarvela, 2007, as cited in Järvelä, Volet, & Järvenoja, 2010, p. 17). In short, the emerging issues regarding social conflicts and diversity seem so challenging for students to participate in group works especially speaking aspects.

Even though some researchers believe that social challenges may occur due to difficulty in making agreements and differences, CLA is still believed as a good language learning approach that can increase students’ engagements. This is because working as a group is a gradual process in which students need time to build relationship and value one another as learning partners (MacDonell, 1992). The conflict mentioned above is just a temporary problem. Moreover, in collaborative environments students are interdependent and share common targets, which in turn construct ‘feeling of solidarity’ and ‘comradely supportiveness’ (Dornyei, 2002). The effects of those feelings can influence students to take their parts voluntarily and emerging disputes can be solved through supportive discussion. Learning participation will not be seen as a burden, instead it can look like a fun for them. Dornyei (2002) even emphasizes that students tend to like each other regardless of ethnic, cultural, class, or ability differences when working together. The differences are good to facilitate them to develop social relationship and friendship as they practice respecting and accepting the diversity among them. The communication difficulty as mentioned above will gradually diminish and fade and it will no longer be an obstacle for increasing students’ engagement in learning process.

In brief, CLA has essential roles in elevating learning involvement of students. It provides more opportunities and it also saves time. Each student must have turns to demonstrate their speaking skills according to particular tasks or contexts. In addition, every individual is accountable and responsible to contribute to learning outcomes of groups which students belong to. Even though there are some challenges that may appear and interfere relationship among them, those challenges are still manageable for students. Instead, they can build stronger relationship regardless of

differences they have and their learning participation of English speaking activities significantly rises.

Increasing Self-Confidence to Speak English

The third benefit of CLA in improving students' English-speaking skill is development of self-confidence and self-esteem. As mentioned above, students encourage one another in collaborative groups. "Such groups can increase learners' psychological health by providing a nurturing environment" (Kohonen, 1992). Moreover, mitigating the language anxiety and increasing opportunities to practice, CLA gradually can develop students' confidence in speaking English. This is because CLA provides social interactions that are necessary to shift students' confidence as well as self-esteem (Kohonen, 1992). To be confident, one needs other people to shape it by intensively communicating ideas or feelings and confirming curiosities or interests (Dornyei, 2002). "Self-esteem and self-confidence are social products, which means that they are created by people around us", (Dornyei, 2002, p.90). The more students interact with their peers using English, the more confident they will be to employ English as a medium of communication. This is in line with Anwar's (2016, p.228) point of view that "self-confidence emerges by itself when the opportunity and the frequency of sharing and discussing have been accumulated". Furthermore, CLA allows students to have experiences of success in learning. Dornyei (2002) believes that there is no better way for building self-confidence than to generate sense of success. In CLA classrooms, sense of success is built by multiple efforts students do in attempting to speak English. As the language anxiety can be prevented and students' participations are supported by CLA, students can feel braver to put an effort. Starting to try their performance, students will realize that they are better than they thought before. Once they can demonstrate a successful effort, they will stay motivated to improve their current abilities. Finally, their self-confidence can grow well due to sense of achievements.

In addition, self-confidence can develop in CLA due to the involvements of four behaviors of confidence. Four behaviors that are considered as confidence are willingness to take risks, to confront problems, to raise questions, and to discuss difficult issues (Clark, & Gakuru, 2014). Being accountable and responsible in contributing to their groups, each learner is encouraged to face challenges of completing their parts. At the first effort, taking a part in group discussion looks like a burden for them because they are obliged to do so. The more they engage with group interaction, the more they get used to facing possible risks of group discussion. Furthermore, collaborative working improves sense of community where sympathy

among students emerges due to social support from one to another. “Without a feeling of community people are on their own, likely to be anxious, defensive and unwilling to take the risks involved in learning” (Wegerif, 1998, as cited in Van den Bossche et al., 2006, p. 551). Similarly, the behaviors of confronting problems, raising questions, discussing difficult issue are shaped through tasks completion done by students. Assigned a certain role in a group, individuals learn to face their own problems as a team. This situation can eliminate the threat of confronting a problem of the given tasks due to feeling of togetherness (Anwar, 2016). During group discussions, students can learn to ask their own questions to satisfy their curiosity and demonstrate their opinions of given issues (McDonell, 1992). In ‘buying and selling in markets’ as an example, students can apply their English knowledge of not only asking prices but also bargaining prices of products. All in all, as four behaviors of confidence are shaped well in CLA environments, students can become more confident in speaking English.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has shown that CLA has significant benefits of improving students’ speaking skills of English. The first benefit is that language anxiety declines due to less threatening learning environments, cooperative behaviors and social supports generated by students. Another benefit is increasing students’ active engagements in the learning process. Students are encouraged to take a part of group discussions and they are accountable and responsible on their own roles in their groups. Moreover ‘feeling of solidarity’ and ‘comradely supportiveness’ can increase students’ willingness to participate actively in classroom process (Dornyei, 2002). The last benefit students can get from CLA in improving their speaking skills is the growing self-confidence to speak English. This is because CLA allows students to gain senses of achievements and develops four behaviors of confidence like taking risks, confronting problems, asking questions, and discussing difficult issues. Consequently, the implementation of CLA is really recommended to teach English speaking skill.

In the future investigation, it is suggested to examine the influences of CLA on the other English skills such as listening, reading, and writing. Such research is very important to monitor developments of all skills in collaborative groups. Besides teachers also must provide various activities regarding CLA principles in order to

involve students' participations in learning process. Such efforts are highly necessary to improve qualities of teaching English as foreign language in Indonesian contexts. Therefore, the better improvement of CLA can influence teaching and learning English in better ways.

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