COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AS THE MANIFESTATION OF SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to identify the teachers' barriers in implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms. The study was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo with two teachers as the participants. Additionally, the study employed a qualitative research method by using an in-depth interview to obtain the data. The findings of the study showed that it is difficult to assess students in collaborative work activities besides organizing the doings in the approach. To solve the problems, teachers should pay more attention to students' group performance, the social interaction, and mutual support of each member of the group rather than focus on group productivity and individual performance in assessing the students' achievement.

INTRODUCTION

Naturally, humans as social beings involve in social relations to learn how to live and take part in a group and how to liven up with others (Marcela & Castro, 2017). Conversely, in many EFL classrooms, learners' interaction is often ignored because EFL teachers tend to focus on the teaching of the linguistic components of the language. Additionally, the practices of the teacher-centered approach are usually favorable, and students have little opportunities for interacting with the others and working collaboratively. As a result, students have a lack of interest to learn the foreign language since it is not used "for authentic communicative purposes in their social surroundings" (Contreras León & Chapetón, 2016).

In the EFL class, collaborative learning is believed that collaborative learning can enhance students' knowledge of a new concept. Besides, it also supports the learners to use the target language, and it leads them to master the skills of the language (Slavin, 1996; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007). Smith and MacGregor (1992) state that the umbrella term for any kind of educational approach that engaging combined students' intellectual attempts or learners and educators

together is collaborative learning. Meanwhile, Gerlach (1994) defines collaborative learning as an approach that relied on the idea that "learning is a naturally social act." In line with this, in collaborative learning, students work together to accomplish a task which they cannot do independently (McRae & Guthrie, 2009).

Moreover, Visschers-Pleijers et al. (2006) claim that collaborative learning encourages meaningful learning, in which learners connect in high-quality social communication, such as talking about differing information. Therefore, the collaborative learning activity supports the learners by combining their awareness and proficiency, studying from one another, and developing new understandings. Here, in a group, students are expected to talk to each other, and from this discussion, the learning occurs. In other words, a collaborative learning approach may provide a bridge to promote participation, cooperation, and responsibility in an active dialog to complete the purposes of the learning.

According to Storch (2007), collaborative learning in the EFL class has some advantages. Firstly, it enables students to have more language practice opportunities. Di Nitto (2000) supports the idea by claiming that one leading cause of low achievement of learners in studying a foreign language is the insufficient time of their language practice. Therefore, collaborative learning can be one of the alternatives to solve the problem. By dividing the class into small groups, there will be more time can be allotted, and more chances of conversation can be performed. Secondly, collaborative learning can improve the quality of learners' talk. Zhang (2010) states that collaborative learning can be implemented to produce a social setting that imitates real-life in the way language is used. Here, it will promote students to construct not only the quantity but also the quality of speech through requesting, clarifying, and negotiating dialogue during collaborative learning activities. As a result, students produce speech more precisely and use proper language.

Third, collaborative learning benefits to create a positive learning atmosphere. Traditionally, the competitive arrangement in the EFL classroom makes students apprehensive of making mistakes. This unsupportive environment drives students to feel anxious and stressful. Conversely, collaborative learning is suggested to be implemented to make students have a more comfortable feeling and positive affective climate. Another advantage of collaborative learning is promoting

social interaction among learners. Brown (1994) claims that "the best way to learn to interact is through interaction itself." It implies that collaborative learning psychologically facilitates students to communicate with their partners in a relaxed and safe atmosphere. Finally, collaborative learning is essential to allow students to have more critical thinking (Maesin et al., 2009). It is called so because in collaborative learning, there is a problem-solving process that trains students to express their critical thinking on a certain difficulty. Therefore, students in a group can bring innovative ideas creatively to solve the problem given.

The implementation of collaborative learning has been challenged to be investigated. There are abundant studies investigates students' problems in collaborative practices (Ross, 2008; Webb, 2009; Popov et al., 2012). Nevertheless, there has been little attempt to study about the teachers' difficulties in conducting collaborative learning. The study exposed potential precursors that might support defining the identified barrier. It is essential to identify the possible reasons for unsuccessful implementation of collaborative learning, and this will aid teachers in encouraging more productive and pleasant collaborative learning experiences. Specially, the research question of the present study is formulated as follows "What barriers the teachers identify in implementing collaborative learning in the classrooms?"

MATERIALS

Foundations of Collaborative Learning

There are three main foundations of collaborative learning. They are Vygotsky's perspective, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) perspective, and motivational aspect. The following are the description of each angle as the basics of collaborative learning.

Vygotsky Perspective

Philosophically, collaborative learning is related to sociocultural theory (Oxford, 2014). Here, the theory is influenced by Marx and Engels' perspective in the eighteenth-and nineteenth centuries. Below the umbrella of Marxist philosophy, in terms of education, learners will work together to gain success, and they would get nearer together to support each other. In addition, Hmelo-silver et al. (2019) state that sociocultural approaches to learning are relatively broadly implemented

by educators. The sociocultural approaches have been under the influence of L.S. Vygotsky (1896-1934), a Russian psychologist. He was an education revolutionary in countless ways; he disputes for teachers that it is more important to assess a student's capability to resolve problems, rather than only focus on their knowledge acquisition mainly.

The prominent Vygotsky's idea concerning collaborative learning is "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)" (Vygotsky, 1978). In this theory, he claims that a learner can accomplish his/her tasks if he/she is directed by more capable peers or adults' guidance. Besides, the ZPD theory has a social origin, which is the cognitive system of learners comes from their communication in the social groups, and they cannot be taken apart from their social life. Further, Smidt (2009) notes the ZPD emerges from the significance of educational tools, i.e., group sharing, and social learning, i.e., studying together with peers. In line with this, Behroozizad, Nambiar, & Amir (2014) defines that the constructions of human psychology do not subsist in their mind; unless they are created as an outcome of interaction activity with their social context. For short, the appearance of intellectual functions relies on social relations.

Individual learners necessitate developing their ZPD to achieve their self-regulation. Concerning the EFL classroom, Ohta (2001) states that the ZPD is the gap between foreign language learners' "actual developmental and potential growth levels." Here, the level of actual development is determined by individual linguistic production; meanwhile, the level of potential development is the result of language that produced by individual learners since they work collaboratively with their peers or teacher.

When students socialize and interact with their peers and teacher, it means that learners involve in activities with them (Vygotsky, 1981). The condition enables the individual learners to be part of the shared culture community discussing with the other members. Consequently, the cognitive development of the students would occur through the partaking or "through participation in an ongoing social world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In other words, in the ZPD perspective, personal knowledge does not come out itself in mind. However, it is a part of cultural practices. Additionally, in the process of acquiring a new concept, the prominence is not only on the focus being; however, the important features such as

interacting, sharing practices of knowing or meaning-making (Stahl, 2006), and learning from collaborated problem-solving attempts are essential. Oxford (2014) and Kaendler et al. (2014) explain that in Vygotsky's perspective, the role of a teacher is as a facilitator, guidance, or contributor to supporting the learners to improve their language and cultural skills. In the foreign language classroom, Vygotsky's idea of support might contain a clue, a word of honor, an implication, a strategy of learning, a grammar reminder, or a rigorous review of anything that the particular foreign language learners need at a specified time.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Perspective

Not only relating to Vygotsky's idea, but collaborative learning in EFL also has close interconnection with the theory of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) (Lin, 2015). Here, the term of second language acquisition can be used interchangeably with foreign language acquisition. In SLA, there are two hypotheses: the input hypothesis and output hypothesis (Krashen, 1985; Swain, 2000). Input hypothesis conceived that SLA is determined by comprehensible input that an individual receives. It can be assumed that learners gain language when they are aware of what they have read or listened to. If the input is not comprehensible, the input will not supply to second language proficiency. While, the output hypothesis argued that when the language input is comprehensible and essential for the second language learners, it enables the learners to speak and produce output for restructuring their interlanguage grammar (Swain, 2000).

Further, when students are required to make clear their output, they process the output again and adjust their interlanguage utterance that directs to the improvement of the second language (Pica, 1994). In a collaborative learning setting, students are provided with more prospects to repair their comprehension in their community. The communication between learners can determine the second language learning (Storch, 2002, 2007). At last, collaborative learning drives the learners to be more autonomy, i.e., independent and lifelong learners.

Motivational Perspective

The other perspective of collaborative learning is motivation. Some researchers state that motivation or how the students feel about language learning is a vital aspect besides cognitive skills to determine second language achievement in learning itself (Gardner, 1985; Cantwell & Andrews, 2002; Jiang, 2009). In

collaborative learning, motivation comes out when learners receive the group rewards at the time they can accomplish the learning objectives. Also, learners are more motivated when they work together with their peers rather than working individually.

Recent studies of Collaborative Learning

In the implementation of collaborative learning in the classroom, students meet several difficulties (Kreijns, Kirschner, & Jochems, 2003; Janssen et al., 2007). One of the problems is the coordination inequality of group members when they work together in problem-solving tasks (Barron, 2003). The study confirmed that the members of the group did not give their attention to others' ideas, disrupted them, and declined different suggestions with no considerations. Consequently, these led to group restraining in its function and gave a negative impact on individual learning. Besides, Ross (2008) claimed that there was no effective interaction between help-givers and help-seekers. When the members of the group, i.e., help-seekers, had low ability to construct a valid request to the help givers, surely they could not get any clue for their difficulties in completing the task goal. Moreover, Popov et al. (2009) defined that the cause of the communication problems in the implementation of collaborative learning is the lack of collaborative skills. From these studies, it can be implied that the lack of collaborative skills causes students' problem when collaborative learning is implemented.

From the teachers' point of view, involving students into groups, not consequence better learning and motivation automatically (Gillies, 2004; Khosa and Volet, 2013), although teachers have applied various types of collaborative learning. For this, some research shows that teachers' efforts do not always rule the students' interaction to promote fruitful collaboration (Blacthford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton, 2003; Baker & Clark, 2010). In implementing collaborative activities, teachers usually find difficulties, such as allotting individual responsibilities, presenting related materials, scrutinizing students' on-task behavior, setting up group-work beliefs and practice, and managing teamwork time (Blacthford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton, 2003; Gillies & Boyle, 2010). Not surprisingly, in preparing collaborative activities, teachers give the deficient focus of establishing norms of the group and facilitating activities. In other words, the main issue of teachers' difficulty is organizing collaborative activities.

The previous study has presented valuable information about the barriers that may affect the implementation of collaborative learning. Above all the difficulties found, the researcher wants to discover more problems encountered by teachers besides the challenge of organizing collaborative activities when applying collaborative learning in their classrooms. It is expected that the study can provide some insights for teachers who prefer to implement collaborative learning for teaching and address the gap in the research.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study employed a qualitative research method, and it relied on the responses of interviews with teachers who meet the criteria, principles, and procedures where the study was accomplished. Besides, we presented the objectives and the procedures of the study, and all participants were willing to get involved in the study. Moreover, we guaranteed the respondents' interview responses could not be traced back to them.

Respondents

The participants of the study were two teachers of English Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo. Both of them were male teachers with ten years of teaching experience since the English Study Program is relatively new. Here, the respondents chosen through purposive sampling, and only those who stated their willingness to join the interview in the study. All participants are pseudonyms: Teacher 1 and Teacher 2.

Instruments

The participants were interviewed using an in-depth interview. The interview mainly focused on the participants' barriers when they implement collaborative learning in their classrooms. Besides, we also try to obtain the information related to the antecedents of the barriers faced by the teachers from their responses. Here, the interview was held in the language that could make them feel more comfortable. We permitted the participants to the response in either Indonesian or English.

Procedures

The interview was conducted in 20-30 minutes for each respondent. In the process of interviewing, we tried to reduce our personal feedback to avoid our influence on their responses. Moreover, we used verbally agreement to record the

respondents' responses using a digital recorder. In addition, we also made important notes of the observation during the interview in the form of a memo to help us comprehend the participants' responses (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Data analysis

After obtaining the data, we analyzed the interview recording by transcribing it, and read the transcription repetitively. Finally, we implemented a cross-case analysis technique (Creswell, 1998) to administer the density of the data into controllable themes and sub-themes and in checking the transcriptions and giving their comments and feedback.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the teachers' responses of to the interview, we found that the teachers' difficulty in implementing collaborative learning is in assessing the students. Both of the participating teachers claimed that making group output assessment is difficult. Here, Teacher 1 said, "*We did not have detailed criteria for assessing students' achievement after they involve in collaborative learning activities. Sometimes it is hard for me to give their scores after learning a certain topic.*" This fact showed that Teacher 1 focused on how to make students' judgments of their achievement of learning.

Meanwhile, Teacher 2 stated, "*In my opinion, the hardest thing when I implement collaborative learning is to see the individual contribution for the task I have given. I mean, students perform the task in the group, but I also need to assess their ability individually to see their accomplishment.*" Similarly to the statement of Teacher 1, Teacher 2 also mentioned that assessment becomes a barrier when he implements a collaborative learning approach. With the theoretical framework of collaborative learning (McRae & Guthrie, 2009), students can work collaboratively to complete their tasks, which they cannot do individually. It is clear that the participants have a lack of knowledge concerning collaborative learning. They did not centre to collaborative performance, but they paid more attention to marking personal academic learning and assignment performance.

To reveal more-in-depth information about assessing students who join collaborative learning, we also clarified the way they evaluate their students in collaborative activities. Teacher 1 responded, "*I usually assess the students'*

achievement from their outcome. However, I always ask my students to score themselves and their peers when they work in a group since my class has a large number of students. Unfortunately, I can't access all the groups' activities in the classroom, and I consider the results are not valid, and I must take it into account." This statement supported the first response of Teacher 1 about the problem faced regarding assessment. Here, the vast quantities of the class member can be the antecedent of teachers' problems in assessing their students. From the statement, there is a correlation between the difficulty of organizing the activities in collaborative learning (Blacthford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton, 2003; Gillies & Boyle, 2010) and assessing the students' performance individually.

Another question to support the objective of the study was what teachers' consideration in grouping the students. Teacher 2 countered, "*It depends on the condition of each class, I think. If I see the students' achievement of a certain subject is equal, I let my students choose their partners. On the contrary, if there is a gap among them, I mean here the gap of students' achievement; I will divide the groups based on their scores. You know, I, as a teacher, have a record of their previous scores. So, I spread the clever students for each group as a group helper, and then the others can choose with whom they will join. Nevertheless, sometimes I find some students do not work as their role in a group, but their partners' comments are positive. In scoring them as a member of the group, it is not easy in terms of their contributions.*" From the respondent's answer, it implies that another teacher's problem in assessing students' achievement is the emergence of free-riders (students who do not do their role in group). Comparing to Kaendler et al. (2014), the finding is the opposite of the respondent's statement. Concerning the theory, it is suggested that teacher competencies have a purpose at promoting the quality of student collaboration, such as determining their goals of learning, initiating helpful student behaviors, supporting, monitoring, combining, and assessing students' interaction. Therefore, teachers may not neglect the purposes of collaborative.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, we can conclude that the barrier faced by the teachers in implementing collaborative learning is assessing the students besides organizing the activities in the approach. Teachers may balance the cognitive and collaborative aspects of collaborative learning. Besides, when teachers mainly focus on group productivity and individual performance, they may find the pitfall of collaborative learning implementation. In other words, for assessing students in collaborative learning, teachers should consider the collaborative goals. Consequently, when teachers focus on assessing the group performance, the social interaction, and reciprocal support of each member of the group would simultaneously be reached.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the representativeness of the study may not be adequate since the participants of the study limited to two teachers. Future research could involve more samples to discover teachers' difficulty in implementing collaborative learning in their teaching process. Finally, the results of the study are not able to be generalized to teachers' problems faced in the classroom concerning collaborative learning. However, the study could be the starting point of future research of developing questionnaires.

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