



STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLABORATIVE REASONING DISCUSSIONS (CR)

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Abstract

The present study was a part of larger research aimed at investigating the students' perception on the implementation of collaborative reasoning discussions (CR) to improve their participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking class. This study was qualitative study under action research approach conducted in a single classroom consisting of 21 undergraduate students of Economic Faculty majoring management. The data were gathered through observations and open-ended questionnaires during three cycles. The collected data were further analyzed using inductive analysis. The results indicated that 100% students agreed that CR provided them more chances to participate during the teaching and learning process. Moreover, they also stated besides giving them more chances to participate, CR brought them other benefits such as developing their critical thinking and collaborative skill, and increasing their motivation in learning English. In conclusion, the students had positive perception on the implementation of CR in their EFL speaking class.

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English has been taught as a foreign language since the 1950 curricula. At the beginning era of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia, the common method used by instructors was the Grammar Translation Method where the teaching and learning process was teacher-centered and students were passive during the actual education process (Lie, 2007). In 2004, there was a shift towards a student-centered approach because the 2004 English curriculum employed a communicative approach which gave more opportunities for students to actively participate during teaching and learning (Lie, 2007). Thus, English teachers in Indonesia need to transition their classrooms from teacher directed to a student-centered approach in order to place the students at the center of the teaching and learning process to develop their language abilities.

Even though it has been a decade since the first time Indonesia implemented the student-centered approach, the majority of Indonesian students are still passive during the teaching and learning process and the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom discourse is still dominated by teachers as indicated in Khafidin (2013). The lack of improvement in student participation is because the teacher-centered teaching and rote learning are deeply embedded in Indonesian school settings, and the Indonesian teachers are trapped into employing pedagogy which stresses students' memorization for success in the examinations, especially in elementary to high school levels (Zulfikar, 2009).

However, researchers have found that student participation is one of the essential factors for successful language learning (Aidinlou & Ghobadi, 2012; Li & Jia, 2006; Mingzhi, 2005; Murray & Lang, 1997). There are three reasons why students' participation in language classrooms is a crucial factor in the teaching and learning process, as follows: (1) active participation can aid acquisition (Aidinlou & Ghobadi, 2012), (2) active classroom participation facilitates students' interest, motivation, learning and academic performance

(Murray & Lang, 1997), (3) participation can foster students' cognitive development based on social cultural theory (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). In brief, students' active participation during the language teaching learning process appears to play an important role in developing students' acquisition in the target language. However, in Indonesia, teachers still struggle to improve the students' participation (Khafiddin, 2013). Enhancing students' participation is not solely a matter of encouraging students to raise their hands more often and say whether they agree or disagree with the topic discussed in the learning process. Enhancing students' participation has to deal with what students say when they participate and how they contribute to the teaching and learning process.

Student participation is not a novel issue in EFL/ESL classrooms because encouraging EFL/ESL students to participate is considered a challenging task for teachers (Belchamber, 2007). As a result, a lot of researchers have conducted studies related to the ways of enhancing students' participation in EFL/ESL classrooms, e.g., Exley (2005), Khafidin (2013), Li and Jia (2006), and other researchers. However, Delaney (2012) argued that teachers pay more attention in enhancing the quantity or the number of times students participate. Delaney argued that enhancing the quality of student participation in terms of fluency, grammar, and content of students' utterances was also important to developing their language skills. Teachers should pay attention to whether students give logical opinions or arguments, give examples or evidence to support their arguments, etc. In Indonesia, teachers still struggle to improve the quantity and the quality of student participation (Khafiddin, 2013). Enhancing student participation is not solely a matter of encouraging students to raise their hands more often and say whether they agree or disagree with the topic discussed in the learning process. Enhancing students' participation has to deal with what students say when they participate and how they contribute to the teaching and learning process.

In my EFL classroom as in other typical Indonesian EFL classrooms, I found that some of

my students actively participated in giving their comments, questions, and ideas during the teaching and learning process, but the majority did not ask and respond to questions, comment on others' opinions, or give ideas related to the topics discussed in the class. My EFL classroom lacked the optimum quantity and quality of student participation.

In this study, I chose CR as the intervention to enhance my EFL students' participation because a number of empirical studies have shown that CR can enhance students' participation (e.g., Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001; Lin, et al., 2012; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2009). CR has a role as a means of fostering student participation due to three reasons. The first is that CR involves students in open participation to convey their ideas related to a certain text. In CR, students are engaged in open participation where they do not raise their hands for permission to speak but gradually learn to enter the discussion (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou, & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003; Dong, Anderson, Kim, & Li, 2008). The second is that CR is considered a technique which encourages student thinking because students need to decide their position towards an issue, give their comments, opinions, and arguments, and support their arguments using examples or proofs from the readings or their experiences (Moshman & Geil, 1998). The third is that CR places students at the center of the learning process which provides them more opportunities to participate in learning while the teachers should be learning facilitators (Jadallah, 2009). Teachers have to scaffold students to clarify and elaborate their thoughts, construct their arguments, and respond to others' arguments during CR (Jadallah, 2009). In short, CR creates more chances for students to improve the quality and the quantity of their participation because the discussions encourage them to convey and develop their ideas, opinions, or arguments related to a certain issue raised by the text they read before the discussion.

There are two studies related to the present study about CR to improve students' participation. These are the study conducted by

Zhang (2009) and Wu (2009) indicating that CR can foster students' participation and language skills. Zhang (2009) used a quasi-experimental study to investigate whether CR affected English Language Learner (ELL) students' oral and written English ability. Zhang conducted her study in four classrooms with total 75 Hispanic students from four fifth grade class. She randomly assigned two classrooms to apply CR and two other classrooms as control groups. She assessed the participants' oral and written skill using storytelling, listening and reading comprehension, reflective essay writing, motivation. She also assessed the ELL's English learning attitudes before the intervention and after a four-week intervention. The results indicated that CR improved the students' motivation and engagement, and accelerated ELLs' oral and written English. Based on her findings, Zhang concluded that CR gave significant benefits for ELL students in terms of enhancing ELL students' participation as well as their language ability.

Similarly, the study conducted by Wu (2009) showed that CR enhanced students' interests, participation and engagement in the discussions. Wu (2009) conducted a four weeks experimental study with 182 fourth graders of native speakers from 9 classrooms. The participants were assigned into three different conditions including three classes using CR, three classes using conventional discussions, and three classes not using discussions. The participants were assessed four times: (1) before the intervention, (2) on week 1, (3) on week 2-3, and (4) week 4. The findings showed that CR increased the students' interest, participation, and motivation compared to conventional discussions and no discussions. In short, CR is regarded as a discussion approach which can foster students' cognitive skills and participation.

This study was intended to examine the students' perception on the implementation of CR to enhance students' participation in Indonesian EFL classrooms. I chose CR in this study because of two reasons. First, the theoretical background of the importance of students' participation and CR are grounded on

the same theory, the socio-cultural theory. The assertion of students' participation as an important aspect in language classrooms is based on socio-cultural theory, and the principles of CR discussion are also grounded in the socio-cultural theory which states that students learn from social interaction (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). Thus, it is clear that the importance of students' participation and the principles of CR have same theoretical base. Having same theoretical base between the teaching technique and the problem which needs to be solved in a study is important because if the teaching technique is grounded on the same theory, it means that it addresses the same perspective and may solve the problem. Second, empirical studies have reported that CR has a role as a means of fostering student participation because CR involves students in open participation to convey their ideas related to a text and puts students as the center of learning process and teachers as facilitators during the discussions (Jadallah, 2009).

METHOD

This study was a part of larger research employing action research design consisting of three cycles. Thus, this study was designed as a qualitative study under action research approach conducted in a single classroom consisting of 21 undergraduate students majoring management of Economic Faculty of Sultan Agung Islamic University. The data were gathered through observations and open-ended questionnaires during three cycles. Three open-ended questionnaires were given: (1) after the cycle 1, (2) after the cycle two, and (3) after the cycle three. These questionnaires were conducted to reveal if the students response and perception of the implementation of CR to improve their participation. The questionnaires helped to uncover whether the students were aware of any differences related to their participation after the implementation of CR across cycles. In addition, I asked questions whether they found CR helped them in participating in the discussion. Thus, these questionnaires were conducted how the students responded to the implementation of CR

after the first, second and the third cycle. The collected data were further analyzed using inductive analysis. There were five steps used in analyzing the data in this study: (1) data reduction, (2) transcription and coding, (3) data classification, (4) data tabulation, and (5) data description and interpretation (Hatch, 2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Open-ended questionnaires were given to the students after the cycle 1, 2, and 3 to uncover their perception on CR. There were two points derived from these questionnaires. The first, the findings from the questionnaires indicated that 100% of the students agreed that CR gave them more chances to participate in the class. The followings are examples of the students' answers of the question asking if they found CR provided them more chances to participate during the class,

Yes. Absolutely. I got more chance to participate in classroom cause collaborative reasoning discussions give us a chance to bring our opinion in front of the class and explain to the other about what we think.

Yes. Because I can speak in group and class discussion.

The students got more chances to participate because in CR the students were asked to convey their opinions related to the reading they had read before the discussions in groups as well as class discussions. Moreover, it was because of one of the features of CR called open participation in which the students did not raise their hands when they wanted to convey their opinions. Thus, the students gradually entered the discussion without raising their hands and waiting for the teacher's permissions to speak.

The second, the students stated that CR: (1) developed students' critical skill, (2) developed students' collaborative skill, (3) gave more chances to participate, and (4) increased student motivation. Thus, the benefits of CR based on the students' opinions on CR after they had CR were represented in this following figure based on post cycle 1, 2, and 3 questionnaires,

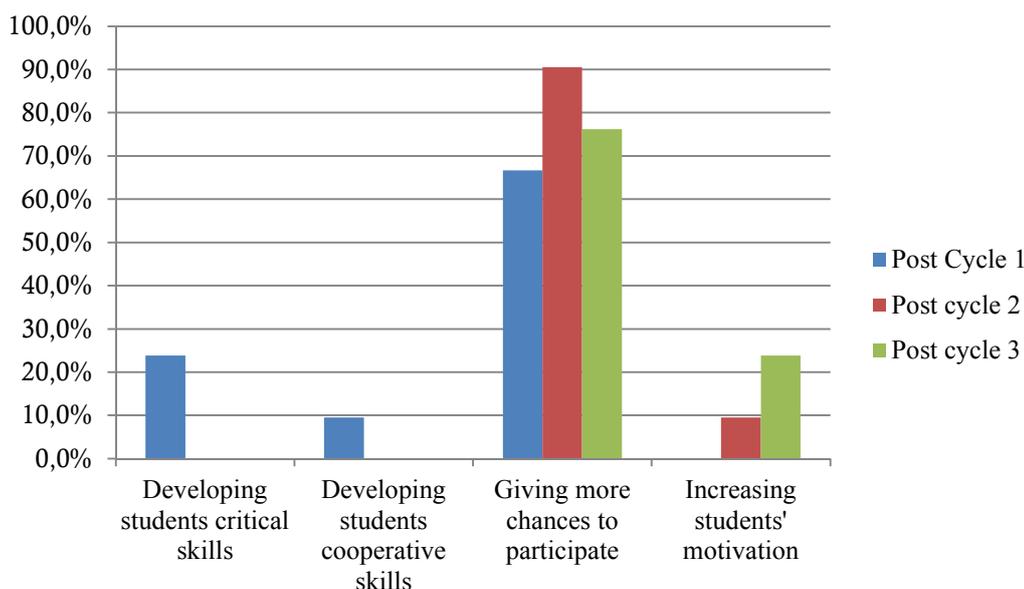


Figure 1. The Students' Perceptions on CR

In Figure 1 presented the benefits of CR based on the students' answer for the questionnaires after cycle 1, 2, and 3. In cycle 1 there were 3 benefits that the students found besides giving more chances to participate. They found that CR developed their critical thinking, cooperative skill, and giving more chances to participate. Next, in cycle 2 and 3, the students stated that CR also raised their motivation in learning English. The followings were examples of students' answers for the question what their opinions after they had the discussions,

The discussion make me critical about the topic and it is good.

Very nice, it also helps me in working collaborative with the others students because it is important in job after we graduate.

It is not only interesting but also make me speak English more often.

Menjadi semakin suka dengan belajar bahasa Inggris karena kelasnya semakin asyik (I become more enjoy in learning English because the class is getting more enjoyable.)

From the students' answers above, we can see that the students had perceptions that besides CR gave more chances for them to participate, CR also brought three other benefits in the class. The first, they argued that CR helped them for being critical about the issue because in CR they

were demanded to give their opinions related to a certain topic based on the reading they read before they had the discussions. Furthermore, they also had to give reasons for their opinions as well as examples for supporting their arguments. Thus, they did not simply state they agreed or disagreed with the topic but they had to give supporting arguments for their opinions.

In addition, the students also stated that CR also helped them in working collaboratively with their peers. In CR they constructed and reconstructed their arguments as their interacted with their peers. They worked collaboratively in formulating their arguments for their position towards the topic. They questioned each other position towards the topic, and if they had same position, they discussed with their friends and worked collaboratively in looking for reasons or arguments for their position.

There were two points derived based on the findings of the students' questionnaire. The first is that all the students in the class agreed that they got more chances to participate and CR helped them to actively participate in the teaching and learning due to open participation. Open participation provided them more chances to deliver their opinions because they were asked to convey their opinion in group and class discussions without being called by the teacher.

The second, besides improving my EFL students' participation, CR also brought other benefits to my students including developing students' critical thinking skill and students' collaborative skill, and increasing students' motivation. First, the students stated that CR provided them chances to develop their critical thinking because in the discussion they were demanded to give their opinion on the reading topic given as well as evidences or examples to support their arguments. This statement was aligned with the notion that CR was intended to stimulate critical reading and thinking stated by Anderson, Chinn, Waggoner and Nguyen (1998). In the discussion the students were asked to convey their opinion related to the reading topic, challenge each other opinions and develop reasoning related to the texts. In addition, the students also brought their own experiences related to the topic and waved with the evidences from the reading to support their opinions, so they did not simply stated their stance towards the topic but they also elaborated their arguments. By doing so, the students developed their critical thinking during the discussions.

Second, CR helped the student in developing their collaborative skill because it was grounded on socio-cultural theory in which the students develop their cognitive skills during their interaction with their peers (Lin et al., 2012; Wu, 2009). During the discussion the students interacted with their peer in groups in formulating their arguments by asking each other stances, challenging each other opinions and working collaboratively in constructing their arguments when they had similar opinions. Thus, the students construct and reconstruct their thinking through their interactions with their social environment and learning process cannot be separated within the society.

Third, CR also increased their motivation in learning English because the class became more interesting. They were engaged in the discussion and had chances to convey their thoughts not only as listeners to the teacher's explanation. CR created classroom discourse more dynamic and dominated by the students because the teacher was the facilitator so the

teacher did not allow dominating the discussion (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003). Thus, the students became more motivated in learning English because they were engaged and became the center of learning.

In brief, the students had positive perception on the implementation of CR in their EFL classroom.

CONCLUSION

Students had positive perception on the implementation of collaborative reasoning discussions (CR) to improve their participation. Moreover, they stated it also increased their critical thinking, collaborative skill, and motivation. Students' participation in EFL class is an important aspect in developing their language skills so that teachers need to apply pedagogical strategies to foster their participation, one of the strategies is implementing collaborative reasoning discussion (CR). However, the teachers should investigate the students' perception on the implementation of CR in order to figure out how the students found CR helped them in fostering their participation. Their perception of the implementation of CR helped the teachers planned and adjusted the discussions based on their perception.

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