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TEACHING GENERAL ENGLISH IN LARGE CLASS SETTINGS: DOES COLLABORATIVE LEARNING METHOD WORK?

PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGRIS MKU UNTUK KELAS BESAR: BERHASILKAH METODE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING?

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Abstract

Teaching English as a foreign language has been challenging from time to time. Moreover, dealing with a big number of students in one class will add some displeasure, not to mention various backgrounds of knowledge and gap of English ability that they have. This article aims to see the effectiveness of Colaborative Learning (CL) method in improving students speaking ability and studying behaviour in general English subject in a large classroom context. A classroom action research is used as the experiment method, where post-test and observation sheets happened to be the instruments. The finding of this paper shows that CL successfully promotes an option to improve students' performances, which are spoken ability and studying behavior. Students' attainment in speaking included pronunciation, vocabulary, content accuracy and grammar. Meanwhile, students' attitude that was observed covered enthusiasm, participation, discipline and teamwork.

Keywords: *Collaborative Learning, General English, Large Class, speaking ability, studying behaviour.*

Abstrak

Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris dari waktu ke waktu banyak mengalami tantangan. Selain itu, banyaknya jumlah mahasiswa dalam satu kelas, perbedaan jurusan dan program pendidikan yang ditekuni, serta

kemampuan Bahasa Inggris dasar yang berbeda-beda diantara mereka juga menjadi persoalan tambahan. Penelitian Tindakan Kelas ini bertujuan untuk meneliti peran Collaborative Learning (CL) sebagai metode yang tepat bagi para dosen untuk mengajarkan Bahasa Inggris MKU pada kelas besar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa CL berhasil memperbaiki hasil belajar mahasiswa, yakni kemampuan speaking dan juga sikap belajar. Kemampuan speaking meliputi pengucapan, kosakata, ketepatan isi serta gramatika. Sementara sikap mahasiswa diamati pada aspek antusiasme, partisipasi, disiplin, dan kerjasama.

Kata kunci: *Collaborative Learning, Mata Kuliah Umum Bahasa Inggris, Kelas Besar*

Introduction

General English has been offered for many years in Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) as one of the compulsory subjects. The main reason for this institution's policy is to help students to read English-written journals and textbooks at their academic level. Also, this subject may help them improve their speaking ability in their daily life. Referring to these aims, General English usually focuses on pronunciation, vocabularies, grammar, reading and speaking. As a brief description, General English subject is conducted once a week in the classroom, taking approximately 100 minutes for every single meeting. The number of students in each class is about 50 to 60 who come from various program education. This large class, of course, becomes a weakness to run learning process effectively, as highlighted by Bahanshal (2013) that teaching in a big class can distract teaching and learning process in an ELT (English Language Teaching) context. The number of students in a large class can be different in numerous countries. In Europe, Anderson (2015) explained that a large class usually has 35 students. In Asian countries, on the other hand, the presence of 40 up to 45 students in an English classroom is seen as a barrier in teaching (Nan, 2014).

An overcrowded classroom causes many drawbacks, according to various studies. Armstrong, Chang, & Brickman, (2007) argued that it would be impossible for a lecturer to provide enough time to assist and give feedback to each student in a large class. Arriba (2016) classified at least three problems when there are lots of students allotted in a large class. First, two-way communication between students and lecturer will not run equally. Some students can get appropriate time to ask assistance while others become neglected due to time limitation. The second reason is, if the lecturer gives a conventional lecturing method, not all students will fully participate in listening

to their lecturer. The issue can promote disengagement between students and lecturer. The last point is, Arriba, (2016) mentioned that many students in one class can hinder lecturer to observe and check their students' progress one by one and what difficulties that they have been through in class.

Similarly, from preliminary observations and interviews with some lecturers in UNP, teaching General English in a large class is challenging because of some barriers in various perspectives. The first problem is the classroom's management. It is difficult to check all students, to control their disciplines, and to ensure that all of them are active and fully pay attention to what lecturer says. The second problem is that the students have different basic of English ability, especially speaking. The more various their English level, the more learning style they have to get. A student that has better English skill will probably participate dominantly and discourage other weak students.

An appropriate strategy or method is then highly needed to deal with mentioned issues in teaching General English in such a large class. Theoretically, the teaching and learning process in a large class will be much more effective through a contextual and collaborative way (Dooly, 2018). Dooly, (2018) stated that the contextual and collaborative process would highly motivate students to gain more input and output of learning. Nan, (2014) also confirmed that collaborative learning could improve students' independence in a large class. Dooly, (2018) described Collaborative Learning (CL) as an approach in the education field, which include cooperation between lecturer and learners or between learners and learners. Moreover, Tibbetts & Hector-Mason, (2015) mentioned CL as a proper way to lift students' participation and shift teacher oriented style to students oriented one. Because of this strategy, students will be more self-reliant and improved due to direct engagement in discussion or question and answer sessions with their partners, rather than passively listening to the old-school method from the lecturer (Rhoades, 2013).

Laal & Laal (2012) argued, in a CL condition, when they throw arguments and discussion with friends, students can improve their social, cognitive and emotional aspects at the same time. From the language learning point of view, Dooly, (2018) agreed that any discussion which involves both social and cognitive would increase the level of language learning progress if the students continually apply this method in the classroom. Pateşan, M., Balagiu, A., & Zechia, (2016) added an insightful advantage from CL to language learning, which is CL is very beneficial to strengthen students' self-confidence. They can work together, will help and learn from each other in many language learning skills such as

pronunciation, vocabulary and speaking activity. Laal & Laal, (2012) explained that CL would ease problems in a large class by distributing students to smaller groups. Thus, so the time portion of students to involve is higher. Rhoades, (2013) also claimed that CL would help lecturer to observe their students.

This article presents a study to analyze the effectiveness of CL use in teaching General English in a Large Class case, seen from behaviour aspects and English skill ability. This investigation will contribute to the ELT field and particularly issues in a large class. The discussion of this article will also be promising as a milestone of further relevant studies.

Research Methods

Classroom Action Research is used to gather the data in this study. This design is considered as mixed qualitative-experiment, since on one side it has experiment procedures, subject and treatment; then on another side the data is qualitatively described. This research was held for 2 months from August 2018 to October 2018. A total of 50 students of General English class were taken as research subject, 34 were female and the rest was male. Two main instruments were deployed, that are a post-test and observation. Post-test was then taken to measure students' ability in cognitive aspect after being treated by CL method and observation was essential to compare students' behavior while studying without and with CL.

To describe steps of research implementation, a cycle term is used in this research design. The cycle comprises four steps; planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In general, in a planning step, activity is preceded by preparing teaching lesson plan, syllabus and teaching material. During this experiment process, the chosen lesson material was describing self and others' appearance and personalities. This material includes list of adjectives to illustrate someone's physical look as well as their personality traits. This topic was also used as post-test instrument. Type of post-test is speaking test which assessing some categories; pronunciation, choice of words, grammar and content accuracy. Observing sheets were also organized in planning step.

Second step is doing action or giving the treatment to students. Participants were divided into 7 smaller groups, consisting of 6 people in 7 groups and 8 members for another group. Technically, for group division, the more members in a group, the more interaction can be made (Rhoades, 2013). Lecturer began the class by giving list of adjectives of physical appearance and personality, and list of part of body. After that, students were assigned to sit per group, and started to practice the pronunciation together with their friends. Also

at this time, students were instructed to discuss the meaning of words and ensure that each member understands. Next, lecturer explained briefly some grammatical expression to describe a physical appearance and describe people personality. Students pay full attention and took important note. After that, again, students went back to their group and practice their speaking to describe their self to their friends. In this time, students were giving peer correction to their friend's pronunciation. Lecturer went around and checked each group and gave assistance.

While giving CL treatment, the third step, an observing step was also on process. Through observation, lecturer graded some improvement in students' social behavior including enthusiasm, participation, discipline and teamwork. These aspects were scored within 1-4 scoring range (4=very good, 3=good, 2=fair, 1=poor). In this study, observation was taken twice, in pre-treatment session and in cycle session. Pre-treatment session occurred in earlier month to observe students' prior behavior towards conservative learning process.

Last activity of the cycle is reflecting, in which the treatment is evaluated thoroughly. If the procedure needs to be revised, then treatment is adjusted and experiment continues to cycle 2, 3 to get more accurate data. In this study however, cycle only happened once. To draw final result, both observing sheets and post-test scores were analyzed and interpreted. Success indicators of treatment can be seen through two aspects; a good score of post-test and positive improvement from behavioral aspects.

Results and Discussion

Pre-treatment session

Before CL treatment was given, students were taught conventionally by having casual lecturing method for 4 meetings. Lecturer explained the material and continued with a speaking exercise. They were requested to have a role play with any friend who sat beside them. Topic material in this pre-treatment was much easier than the topic that would be taught in treatment session. While they were exercising, observation sheet was filled according to their behavior. Students' score of their behavior can be seen through table 1 below:

Table 1. Pre-treatment Behavior score

Aspect	Enthusiasm	Teamwork	Participation	Discipline
Avarage	2.12	1.79	1.73	2.20
Score	Fair	Poor	Poor	Fair

In general, the students seemed so passive. Students did not request any assistance neither asking further explanation about the material. When they were instructed to have role play between students, it only lasted for couple of minutes and they did not have any initiative to improve or speak more.

Treatment session

During 4 meetings of treatment, 4 social aspects from their behavior have positive improvements. Enthusiasm and teamwork score were better than other aspects, but each score is getting higher than pre-treatment. It can be seen through table 2

Table 2. Post-treatment Behavior Score

| Aspect	Enthusiasm	Teamwork	Participation	Discipline
Avarage	3.2	2.9	2.6	3.0
Score	Good	Fair	Fair	Good

After that, in the fifth meeting, students were assigned to have a speaking test, with relevant topic. Each student had 5 minutes at minimum to have their presentation about describing self and others' appearance and personality traits. 11 students could speak more than allocated time. 19 students successfully completed the task in 5 minutes and the rest spoke less than 5 minutes but still more than 3 minutes. The distribution of students' ability in completing the task can be seen through this chart:
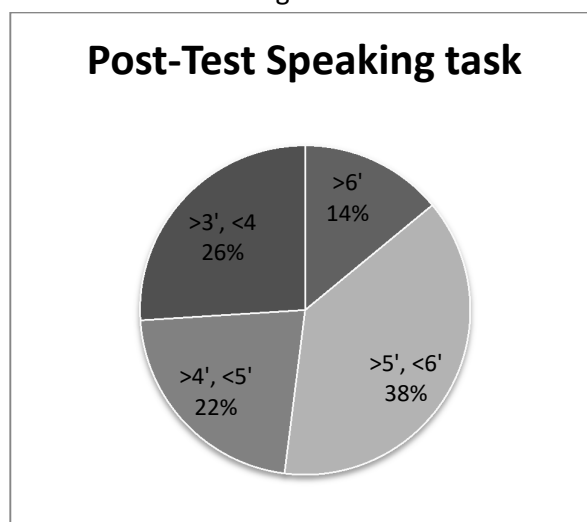
Graphic 1. Post-Test Speaking Task Time Duration

Despite of the length of students' speaking time, the assessment of post-test were based on some criteria: pronunciation, vocabulary, content accuracy

and grammar. Students' score are following: 4 students got 85, 2 people got 82-84, 7 persons got between 80-82, 11 students got 78-79, 16 students got 75-77, 4 students got 72-74 and the rest got 70-71.
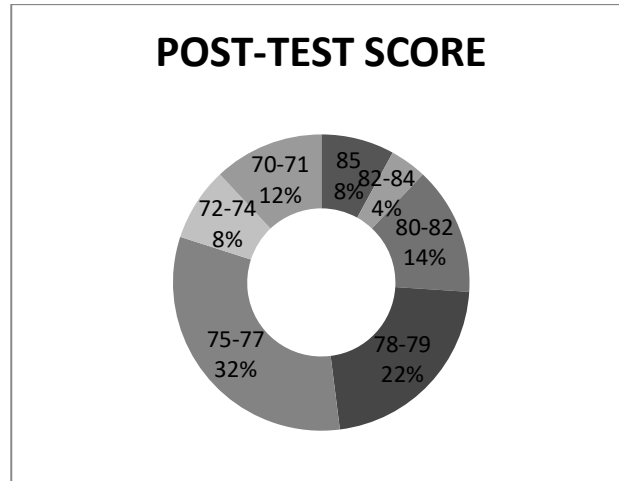

Graphic 2. Post-Test Speaking Task Score

CL method improves students' behavioral aspect

First social aspect or behavior which was observed is enthusiasm. This graphic below presents that average score of students' enthusiasm increased from 2.1 (fair) to 3.2 (good). In more detail, there were increases from 6 students to 23 students that have improvement in enthusiasm aspect. Their enthusiasm was observed through three indicators, such as practicing seriously in group, paying attention more when friends in group spoke up rather than showing disengagement like drawing, playing phone, or musing and asking more to lecturer when they felt confused about particular thing of lesson. Above all, this enthusiasm is related strongly with students' motivation, as (Pateşan, M., Balagiu, A., & Zechia, 2016) wrote, when students work together in group with their colleagues, their individual self-esteem, motivation and respect increase. The increase can be seen through this table:
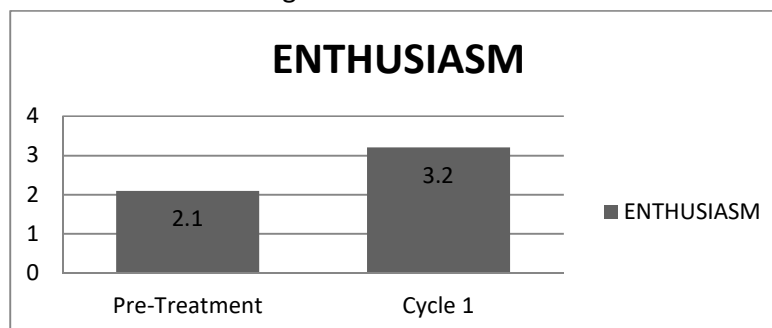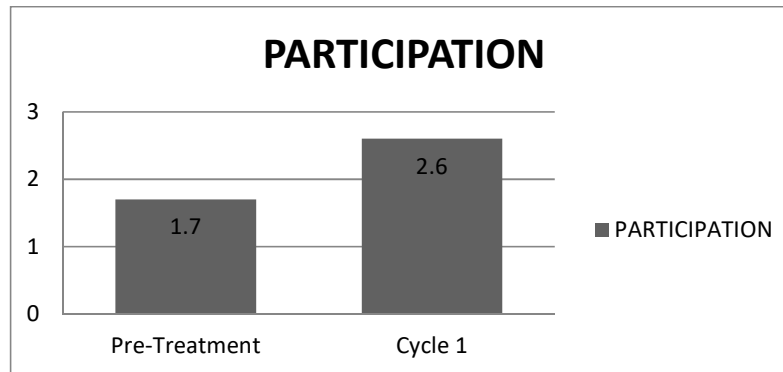

Graphic 3. Enthusiasm Score Comparison Pre & Post Treatment

Meanwhile, in teamwork aspect, the score is getting higher too, from1.8 (poor) to 2.5 (fair). This result is similar to what (Szewkis et al., 2011) said that CL gives a component that is not present in individual learning which are social interaction and students' ability to share points of view. This Teamwork was graded by looking close at these points: correcting friends' pronunciation, asking help to correct their pronunciation, giving idea when they played role play, and supporting each other to speak. At the beginning, there were only 3 students who wanted to help their friends in practice session. However after cycle 1, the amount of students that discussed actively with friends increase to 18 persons, distributed evenly from all group, as seen through following table:
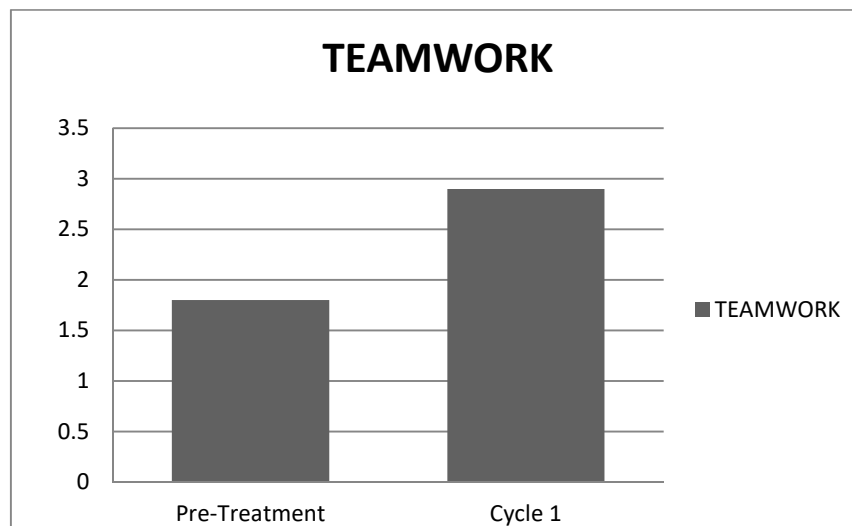
Graphic 4. Graphic 3. Teamwork Score Comparison Pre & Post Treatment

Third point in observation was participation. In this aspect, students were graded through these indicators; having strong willingness to raise hand and perform in front of their friends, and being active to practice or discuss in group. Although not all students have strong motivation to participate in classroom, but average score still showed positive improvement than pre-treatment session. The score climbed from 1.7 (poor) to 2.6 (fair). The difference can be seen as followed:

Graphic 5. Participation Score Comparison Pre & Post Treatment

This result of participation supports (Imai, 2010) argument that through CL, students improved their collective thinking process, task organization and their participation. Similarly, another study revealed that the strategy of CL can increase students' participation level, problem solving skill and critical thinking (Mehta, 1998)

Last thing observed was disciplines level. According to observation sheet, students became more discipline during CL treatment, rising from 2.2 (fair) to 3 (good). Indicators of their disciplines were obeying lecturer's instruction, completing any task on time and being punctual in every meeting. The improvement can be seen as followed:
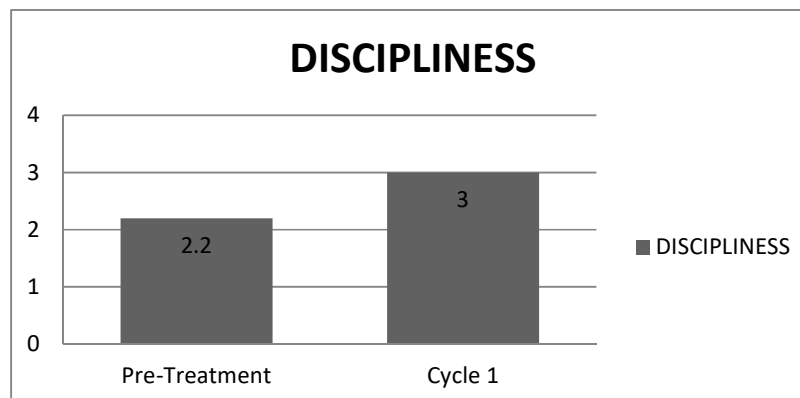
Graphic 6. Discipliness Score Comparison Pre & Post Treatment

According to (Ibrahim et al., 2015), each participant in classroom must be aware that their success or failure depends on effort of each individual, so each person will be responsible for his individual task. Thus the increase of disciplines of the students in this research proves that CL can motivate students to become more discipline.

CL method improves students' English ability

Despite of the length of speaking time, the assessment of post-test were based on some criteria: pronunciation, vocabulary, content accuracy and grammar. These aspects then accumulated and ranked. University has set a passing grade for this course, that students need to reach score 75 and above. Students' score are following: 4 students got 85, 2 people got 82-84, 7 persons got between 80-82, 11 students got 78-79, 16 students got 75-77, 4 students got 72-74 and the rest got 70-71. CL method has given students heaps chance of peer interaction that results a significant rise of their score. (Ning & Hornby, 2010) supported that if compared to conventional instruction, CL can enhance students' vocabulary knowledge and grammar use.

Conclusion

Study of CL use in teaching English is increasing but the implementation of CL in a large classroom with various background is challenging in another level. The major contribution of this paper is that CL clearly gives significant impact toward students 'behaviour and also their average score of speaking. However, there are some limitations that may affect the findings. An ideal classroom action research likely needs an interview sessions with targeted students to deeply dig their opinion about how they actually they felt when this treatment are given. Second, a circle is basically enough to see the result, but more cycles will give more accurate result. The last point is, an experiment method can be used to compare a group with CL and another group of studnets without CL treatment.

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