PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS TOWARDS COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN LEARNING ENGLISH AT MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF MUARA BUNGO

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ABSTRAK

Pembelajaran kooperatif telah menjadi pendekatan pedagogis penting dalam pendidikan bahasa Inggris, dengan diskusi kelompok sebagai implementasi utamanya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris terhadap pembelajaran kooperatif melalui kegiatan diskusi kelompok di Universitas Muhammadiyah Muara Bungo. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis, penelitian ini melibatkan lima mahasiswa dari berbagai angkatan yang dipilih secara purposive. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik berdasarkan lima elemen dasar teori pembelajaran kooperatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki kesadaran tinggi terhadap interdependensi positif dan akuntabilitas individu, serta menyadari pentingnya keberhasilan kolektif. Mereka lebih menyukai format kelompok kecil dan menilai interaksi promotif sangat bermanfaat, terutama melalui fenomena "learning by teaching". Mahasiswa mengembangkan keterampilan interpersonal dan strategi penyelesaian konflik, meski keterampilan komunikasi masih perlu ditingkatkan. Pemrosesan kelompok muncul sebagai elemen yang paling sedikit diterapkan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan pemrosesan kelompok yang lebih terstruktur dan pelatihan sistematis mengenai prinsip pembelajaran kooperatif.

Kata kunci: *pembelajaran kooperatif, diskusi kelompok, pendidikan bahasa inggris, persepsi mahasiswa*

ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning has become a key pedagogical approach in English education, with group discussion as its primary implementation. This study aims to explore English Education students' perceptions of cooperative learning through group discussion activities at Muhammadiyah University of Muara Bungo. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study involved five students from different cohorts selected purposively. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis based on the five basic elements of cooperative learning theory. The findings indicate that students demonstrate high awareness of positive interdependence and individual accountability, recognizing the collective nature of success. They prefer small-group formats and value promotive interaction, especially the "learning by teaching" phenomenon. Students develop interpersonal and conflict-resolution skills, though communication skills still require improvement. Group processing emerges as the least systematically applied element. The study recommends implementing more structured group processing and systematic training in cooperative learning principles.

Keywords : *cooperative learning, group discussion, english education, student perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

English language learning in higher education is not limited to mastering linguistic content, but also involves developing students' critical thinking, communication, and collaborative skills. Cooperative learning has become a fundamental instructional approach that encourages students to actively exchange ideas, express thoughts, and build knowledge collaboratively, with group discussion serving as one of its primary implementations.

In the era of globalization, English language proficiency has become a basic necessity in higher education (World Economic Forum, 2020). Cooperative learning is defined as the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, cooperative learning is commonly implemented through group discussion activities that introduce students to collaborative problem-solving processes.

According to Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998), effective cooperative learning depends on five basic elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. These elements ensure that collaborative activities, such as group discussions, are not merely social interactions, but structured learning experiences that maximize both individual and collective learning outcomes.

Several previous studies have shown diverse results regarding student perceptions of cooperative learning. Prayudha (2023) found that most students view group discussion activities as beneficial for improving collaboration skills, broadening perspectives, and increasing responsibility and learning motivation. Sudiro et al. (2022) reported that 82% of students believe group discussions improve material understanding, with 76% reporting enhanced speaking skills.

However, previous studies have not deeply explored the actual lived experiences of students in interpreting and making meaning of their participation in cooperative learning activities through group discussions. There is a gap in understanding how the five basic elements of cooperative learning manifest in students' actual perceptions and experiences.

Therefore, this study aims to explore English Education Program students' perceptions at

Muhammadiyah University of Muara Bungo regarding cooperative learning implemented through group discussion activities in English language learning.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. The phenomenological approach was chosen because this study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of English Education students regarding their participation in group discussion activities. The research was conducted in the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Muara Bungo, Jambi.

The research participants consisted of five students selected using purposive sampling technique based on their involvement in group discussion activities. Participants came from different cohorts (2021-2024) to ensure diversity of perspectives and experiences.

The main research instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol designed based on the five basic elements of cooperative learning theory. The interview questions aimed to uncover participants' personal experiences, their evaluations of the group discussion method, and the challenges or benefits they perceived in the process.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted individually with each participant. The interviews took place during August 2025, both face-to-face and online. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis used thematic analysis following six interconnected stages as outlined by Creswell (2012): preparing and organizing data, exploring and coding data, developing descriptions and themes, representing and reporting findings, interpreting findings, and validating the accuracy of findings. Validation was conducted through member checking where participants were asked to review summaries or interpretations of their interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Findings Based on Five Elements of Cooperative Learning
1. Positive Interdependence

The findings reveal that students demonstrate high awareness of positive interdependence in group discussions. All five participants (P1-P5) consistently emphasized the critical importance of each member's role, indicating understanding that individual

success is linked to group success.

P1 stated: "The role of each group member is very important. Each individual should play their role appropriately, fairly, meaning we prepare the material together and discuss it together. If we only rely on one person... it will affect the smoothness of the presentation as well."

Students' recognition of mutual dependence is evident in their understanding that relying on a single member negatively affects presentation quality and group dynamics. This finding supports Prayudha (2023), who found that students view group discussions as beneficial for improving collaboration skills.

The establishment of common goals, while present in most groups, tends to be informal rather than structured. P2 explained: "For common goals, they usually always exist... before presentations we determine first who will work on which part, when the target must be finished."

2. Individual Accountability

The data reveals that students have developed a strong sense of individual accountability within group discussions. All participants emphasized the importance of personal preparation, not only in understanding content but also in developing presentation skills.

P1 explained: "Of course, I will prepare the topic thoroughly, and even though we understand the topic, another thing that needs preparation is the ability to deliver it, because I am also still continuously learning about that."

P5 concluded that group discussions force individuals to study and prepare differently compared to individual study: "If we study alone it's as we please... but in group discussion, whether we like it or not, we have to study."

In handling passive members, participants showed various approaches ranging from tolerance (P1), proactive encouragement (P2), to direct reporting (P3). This variation in strategies reflects different personality types and conflict management styles.

3. Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction

The findings strongly support the value of face-to-face promotive interaction in group discussions. Four out of five participants (P1, P2, P3, P5) expressed a clear preference for small group interactions, citing increased comfort, freedom of expression, and more balanced participation.

P1 stated: "I am more comfortable speaking freely when I am in a small group... I feel freer and more confident to express arguments."

The learning by teaching phenomenon was universally experienced by all participants, confirming Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development theory. P3 described: "Of course, this helps deepen my understanding. Because by explaining again to groupmates, I automatically remember what we have presented."

The confidence-building aspect of face-to-face interaction was particularly notable. Four participants reported increased self-confidence through regular opportunities to present and explain material. This finding is consistent with Hadijah and Musfirah (2022), who noted that group discussions enhance students' confidence and motivation.

4. Interpersonal and Small Group Skills

All participants identified communication as the most critical skill for successful group discussions. P1 emphasized: "The most important skill because this is group discussion, first is definitely communication... when presenting, what we need most is the skill to deliver material, or public speaking."

However, all participants also acknowledged that their communication skills, particularly public speaking, require further development. This honest self-assessment indicates metacognitive awareness about their learning needs.

The findings reveal diverse conflict resolution strategies employed by participants, including cross-checking information (P1), deliberation and consensus-building (P2, P3), democratic voting (P4), and direct communication (P5).

Adapting communication to accommodate members with different abilities emerged as a significant challenge. P3 acknowledged: "Maybe I find it a bit difficult to adjust my way of communicating. Because with different people, it means my communication also has to be different."

5. Group Processing

Group processing emerged as the least systematically implemented element of cooperative learning in students' group discussion experiences. Three out of five participants (P1, P2, P3) reported never conducting formal post-discussion evaluations, while the remaining two (P4, P5) engaged in only informal reflection activities.

P1 honestly revealed: "So far, during these four years of my study, I have never conducted... an evaluation of the group discussion process... after presentations, we usually

consider our task finished and the group disperses."

Despite the lack of systematic practice, all participants recognized the importance of group processing for improving future performance. P1 added: "It is very important in my opinion that there should be an evaluation, because it will later affect our group's performance in the next presentation."

DISSCUSSIONS

This study reveals the dynamics of implementing five basic elements of cooperative learning in group discussions among English Education students at Muhammadiyah University of Muara Bungo. The findings show significant variation in implementation levels across elements, with important implications for optimizing collaborative learning in Indonesian higher education contexts.

1. Positive Interdependence

Students' high awareness of positive interdependence reflects a deep understanding that individual success is closely linked to group success. This finding confirms Johnson and Johnson (2014) who stated that positive interdependence creates situations where students feel they need each other to complete group tasks.

The awareness of shared consequences, where "one person being lazy can harm everyone," demonstrates internalization of collective responsibility principles aligned with cooperative learning theory emphasizing that each individual's success is tied to group success (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). However, the informal approach to establishing common goals indicates the need for more systematic structures, although this may reflect Indonesian cultural preferences for flexibility and consensus-building, as noted in the findings that support Prayudha (2023) who found students view group discussions as beneficial for improving collaboration skills and shared responsibility.

2. Individual Accountability

The development of strong individual accountability demonstrates students' ability to balance personal responsibility with group collaboration. This finding confirms Sudiro et al. (2022) who reported that individual responsibility in groups enhances personal readiness and discipline.

The variation in students' responses to spontaneous questioning reveals a tendency toward learning compartmentalization, where students master their assigned

sections better than achieving holistic understanding. The phenomenon of social pressure created by group expectations motivates students to prepare more thoroughly compared to individual study, as observed that group discussions force students to study "whether we like it or not."

The diverse strategies for handling free riders, ranging from tolerance to proactive encouragement to direct reporting, reflects different personality types and conflict management styles.

3. Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction

The preference for small group interactions expressed by four out of five participants emphasizes the importance of supportive environments for self-expression and balanced participation. This finding aligns with research by Hadijah and Musfirah (2022) who found that small group discussions create more supportive environments for language learning.

The learning by teaching phenomenon experienced by all participants confirms Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development theory, where explaining material to peers deepens personal understanding and creates reciprocal learning cycles. The confidence-building aspect of face-to-face interaction reported by four participants is consistent with Hadijah and Musfirah (2022) who noted that group discussions enhance students' confidence and motivation in English language use. The importance of mutual support and motivation emphasized by all participants shows that enthusiastic group members create more engaging learning environments.

4. Interpersonal and Small Group Skills

The identification of communication as the most critical skill by all participants reflects metacognitive awareness about their learning needs, although they also acknowledged that their communication skills, particularly public speaking, require further development.

The diverse conflict resolution strategies developed by students - from cross-checking information, deliberation and consensus-building, democratic voting, to direct communication - demonstrates that students have developed multiple approaches to managing disagreements, though the effectiveness may vary depending on group dynamics and conflict types. However, the challenge of adapting communication to accommodate members with different abilities, as particularly noted by some participants, indicates that

students may benefit from explicit training in adaptive communication strategies to better support diverse group members.

5. Group Processing

Group processing emerged as the least systematically implemented element, with three out of five participants reporting never conducting formal post-discussion evaluations, while the remaining two engaged in only informal reflection activities.

The gap between recognition and implementation suggests that while students understand the value of reflection and evaluation, they may lack structured approaches or institutional support for conducting effective group processing activities. The tendency toward conflict avoidance, particularly evident in passive approaches to group problems, reflects Indonesian cultural values that prioritize harmony and face-saving, though other participants demonstrated more direct approaches to addressing group issues.

The absence of systematic group processing represents a significant opportunity for improving learning activities, especially group discussion methods. As noted by Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998), group processing is essential for ensuring that cooperative learning groups function effectively and continue to improve over time.

CONCLUSION

English Education students at Muhammadiyah University of Muara Bungo demonstrate positive perceptions toward cooperative learning experienced through group discussion activities. Students show strong awareness and natural implementation of four out of five basic elements of cooperative learning theory. They acknowledge the importance of interdependence, take individual responsibility seriously, prefer small group interactions that enhance understanding through peer teaching, and develop various conflict resolution strategies.

However, group processing remains the most unsystematically implemented element, with students rarely conducting structured post-discussion evaluations despite acknowledging its importance. This study confirms that cooperative learning principles manifest effectively through group discussion activities in the Indonesian EFL context, although systematic implementation of all five elements requires further institutional support.

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