

Group Work Practices In The Classroom And Group Learners' English Grades

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Abstract

This study determined whether there was a relationship between group work practices in the classroom (in term of students' involvement of group work) and English grade of the students with group learning style. The 62 group learner students, 30 males and 32 females, were the respondents of this study. The instruments were the questionnaires of Reid (1995), Malalantang and Rumbay (2013). Purposive sampling method was used to gather the data. The result of this study revealed that there was a significant relationship between group work practices in the classroom and group learners' English grades ($p = .003$, $r = .243$). Also, there was a significant difference of group learners' English grades based on gender, where $p = .038$, male mean score was 83.5 and female mean score was 89.3 and the average level of group learners' English grade was 86.2 and it was in a good level. It is recommended that group work practices in the classroom may be used as a strategy in learning English.

Keywords: group work practices in the classroom, group learners, group learning style.

I. INTRODUCTION

When we are interested in something, we are working hard for it. It is the same idea for an effective learning in the classroom. When students are interested in learning English they might study hard for it. Many strategies were used by the teachers in order to make the learning effective for the students and one of diverse strategies used in the classroom is group work. Group work is a method which has been worked in teaching and learning activities for many years (Victoria University of Wellington, 2004). Additionally, Forsyth (2012) explained that the usefulness of group work was not only felt by students merely but teachers as well. Therefore, group work might be a recommended strategy for students in learning English as a second language (Reid, 1995).

Group work in English language classroom should be designed carefully. Chen (2004) mentioned that it is a need for teachers to understand the grouping and careful planning in order to increase the effectiveness of group work such as the group size and group strategies. Besides, teachers should be aware of students who are sitting together in groups, it does not indicate they are working together to accomplish the task,

more likely students may just play and talk to each other (Albadwawi, 2004; Forsyth, 2012).

Group Work Practices

There are several types of group work commonly used in the classroom. Forsyth (2012) offered two main types of groups: Heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping; where heterogeneous grouping is group of students with different levels of ability, and homogeneous grouping is group of students with similar ability. Different from Forsyth (2012) Davis as cited in Victoria University of Wellington (2004) and Al-Sheedi (n. d), identified generally three types of group work; those are formal learning group, informal learning group, and study teams. Wherein formal group of learning is a group in a single class which is exist for some weeks and formed in order to perform the task completely; and informal group of learning is a group that occur temporarily in a single class meeting; while study teams are groups which are exist during a semester or a course. The employing of these group types depend on the activity and its duration (Chen, 2004), also the goal that teachers attempt to achieve (Cohen, 1994).

Using group work method in the

classroom draws numbers of benefits. Long and Porter (1985) in their study mentioned the potentials of group work in second language learning such as “increasing the quantity of language practice opportunity, improving quality of student talk, for individualizing instruction, creating a positive affective climate in the classroom, and increasing student motivation” (p.208). While Loser (n. d) emphasized that activities like group work, discussion, and other forms of collaboration have great potential for helping students process new information, ideas, and procedures so that learning is expedited” (p. 9). Furthermore, working in groups enable students who have difficulty to talk in class may be encouraged to speak in small group; also students have opportunity to participate in class actively (Sarkisian, 2010). Since the potential of group work in the classroom is so significant, so, it should be planned, controlled, and valued (Smith, 2006). Accordingly, the potentials of group work in increasing teaching and learning process will work if this method is managed properly.

The effective participation of students in this method is made possible, in the teaching-learning. Both teacher and students discuss the problem and then arrive at some conclusion. Thus, group work discussion is a thoughtful consideration of relationships involved in the topic. Mainly there are two types of discussion in the group: spontaneous discussion, and planned discussion (Reid, 1995).

Spontaneous discussion: It generally starts from students question about some current event that may be related to the topic under study. That question may be discussed in the group. This discussion helps the students to understand current events and to analyse and relate facts to the real life situations. In the discussion the knowledge of the students is reviewed and their understanding is developed. Finally, each group may give the report.

Planned discussion: A topic for a discussion is initiated by the teacher. Such as by asking students to discuss them in the group and at last to form them at the conclusions. List of questions by the teacher should be discussed in the group at the

appropriate time. At last, each group may report on what they have discussed.

Furthermore Reid (1995) mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of a group work method. The advantages are: 1) there is a spiral of learning principles, 2) it helps to motivate the students through their participation in discussion, 3) it helps to develop students ability to express themselves orally, 4) it helps to develop the powers of thinking and reasoning in the students, 5) it helps the students to analyze and draw conclusion critically. Also, 6) it helps in creating a healthy discussion between the teacher and the students in giving the taught.

The disadvantages of a group work method are: 1) there is a chance that only a few students may dominate the whole discussion, 2) it is possible that the discussion is initiated on those aspects of the problem with which few prominent students of the class are concerned, 3) this method is time consuming, 4) this method is not adaptable to all teaching-learning situations, and 5) this method is difficult to assess to all the students in terms of learning outcomes.

So far there is a need of a procedure to control the discussion in the group such as: 1) the discussion may be started by the students in giving facts, describing a situation etc., 2) the teacher may introduce the topic by providing data, 3) the teacher in cooperation with the students should finalise the important points and relevant facts, 4) to make the discussion interesting and lively it is desirable to cite the personal experiences of the students relating to the topic, 5) give illustrative material collected from various sources and presented in the class, 6) kinds of proposed solution given by students be presented to the class, 7) summary of the work done and problems discussed be prepared by student leaders, 8) each group sends a person to report on what they found.

One thing to be aware of in the group discussion is the nature of class discussion makes the process very time consuming. The process of exploring a subject matter, while keeping students on task in the discussion, requires far more time than lecture style instruction. Short class periods may not be sufficient to accommodate a complicated subject matter or to fully explore the

objective. This forces the teacher to either a bridge the lesson plan, leave a subject unfinished or resume the discussion during another class period.

Group work practices naturally open avenues for discussion between students and other students. While these discussions are the focus of the assigned task in the class, they may turn toward areas that the teacher does not intend and even move entirely away from the point of the discussion. While it is possible to redirect an errant conversation back on track, valuable class time is lost and the risk losing student's focus on the subject matter. In regards, the teacher needs to control the discussion by moving around, listen to each group discussion and once a while ask students some questions.

Group work become less effective with a group size greater than 8 students (Reid, 1985). As the group size grows beyond this point, individual voices become unheard and the opportunity for the students to give ideas decreases.

Group work discussion environment allows a few individual students to dominate the conversation. This tendency benefits the strongest students, the individuals that already most familiar with the subject. Other students are able to relax and participate less often in the group discussion. This freedom leads to a relaxation of their student responsibilities. They are free to assume that they can avoid studying, reading assignments or individual contemplation of the subject. To avoid this problem, stick to the group size and be sure every member of the group has responsibility in the group.

Group work practices is such a useful method to be applied in English classroom. A study has been conducted by Al-Sheedi (n. d) which focused on investigating basic education teachers' views about using group work to promote the learning. By using a questionnaire, this survey collected the data from 240 English teachers of 48 schools in Batinah North Region of Oman. The finding showed that overall participants held very positive views about using group work method in English classroom. It stated that 98.6% participants agree that using group work in the classroom increases pupils' achievement; 98.2% respondents agree that pupils who work in a

group learn more than pupils who work individually; 99.3% participants agree that group work is an appropriate technique to use be used in the classroom. Al-Sheedi (n. d) recommended to all teachers in her region to use group work method in the classroom not only when teaching English but in all subjects; and to educational institution to design books that promote group work for teaching English in Basic Education School.

Group Learners

Group learning style is a part of learning styles field. Dunn and Dunn as cited in Tabanlıoğlu (2003), defines learning style as "a term that describes the variations among learners in using one or more senses to understand, organize, and retain experience" (p. 7). According to Reid (1995), there are six learning styles; those are auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic, individual, and group learning style. Whereas in Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, there are eight types of learning styles; those are verbal (linguistic), logical (mathematical), visual (spatial), musical (rhythmic), bodily (kinesthetic), intrapersonal, naturalist, and interpersonal (Gregory & Chapman, 2006). Dealing with these theories, this study focused on group learning style (Reid's theory) or interpersonal learning style (Gardner's theory) which may be owned by learners thus they are called group or interpersonal learners. As stated by Reid (1995) that group learner is the one who learns more effectively through working with others. Similarly, Gardner, Jewler, and Barefoot (2008) emphasized that "an interpersonal learner likes to have many friends and is good at understanding people, leading others, and mediating conflicts" (p. 57).

The main purpose guiding this study was to determine whether there is a significant relationship between group work practices in the classroom and group learners' English grades. In addition, this study sought to find the following questions:

1. What is the average level of group learners' English grades?
2. Is there any significant difference in English grades of group learners based on their gender?

3. Is there any significant relationship between group work practices in the classroom and group learners' English grades?

The null hypotheses for this study were as follow:

1. There is no significant difference in English grades of group learners based on their gender.
2. There is no significant relationship between group work practices in the classroom and group learners' English grades.

Group Work Practices in the Classroom and Students' Grades

Group work practices positively can increase students' grades. This was investigated by Tok (2006) on his study which focused on discovering relationship between group work practices in the classroom and achievement in English language acquisition in a literature class. By using a questionnaire, pre-test and post-test questions, classroom observation, and interview questions, this mixed methods study collected the data from 210 respondents of Form four classes in a secondary school in Malaysia. Furthermore, the study showed that group work practices in the classroom has a significant relationship with students' English achievement. It means group work practices in the classroom enhance students' achievement in English literature grade.

II. METHODS

This study employed descriptive, comparative and correlational. Descriptive method used in order to find the average level of group learners' English grades. While comparative method used to see if there is a significant difference in English grades of group learners based on gender, and correlational method used to find if there is any relationship between group work practices in the classroom and group learners' English grades.

Purposive sampling method was used for this study where only group learners were taken as the sample. There were 62 group

learners consisted of 30 male and 32 female as the respondents.

The instruments used for this study were the questionnaires of Reid (1995), Malalantang and Rumbay (2013). Reid's questionnaire was used to find the respondents' who were group learners. The data was analyzed by using five - point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree to strongly agree which would receive a value of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The group learners are those who has answered the questionnaire number 3, 4, 5, 21, 23 and has the total score ranging from 38 – 50 as their major learning style preference. If answered Strongly Agree for question number 3, write a number 5 on the blank next to question 3 below. When it has completed all the numerical values for group learners, add the numbers, multiply the answer by 2, and it is the total.

Group learners		
3	-	5
4	-	
5	-	21
<u>23</u>	-	
Total	=	x 2 =

The reliability of Malalantang and Rumbay (2013) questionnaire was .80. English grade of group learners was interpreted based on Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia (National Education Department of Indonesian Republic) grading system for Laporan Hasil Belajar siswa SMA such these following scales:

D = Not Enough (<69) C
 = Enough (70-79)
 B = Good (80-89)
 A = Very Good (90-100)

III. RESULTS

The result of this study revealed that the average level of group learners' English grade was 86.2 and it was in a good level. Also, the finding showed that there was a significant relationship between group work practices in the classroom and group learners'

English grades ($p = .003$, $r = .243$). Also, there was a significant difference of group learners' English grades based on gender, where $p = .038$, male mean score was 83.5 and female mean score was 89.3.

IV. DISCUSSION

Group learners' English grades were in a good level. It is hoped by giving more opportunities to the students to be more active in the group by the teacher then their English achievement might increase to the very good level.

Females' English grades were higher than males'. This finding was supported by Biehler and Snowman (1993), Francis (2000) mentioned that males are good at Mathematics and females are greater at English and languages. Moreover, Arends (2009) said that female is better in accomplishing verbal skills such as reading and writing, and male achieves better in Science and Mathematics subjects.

Since there was a significant relationship between group work practices in the classroom and group learners' English grades, it is recommended that group work practices in the classroom may be used as a good strategy for group learner students to learn English.

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