

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

CL is one of so many approaches which can be introduced to learners of English in Indonesia. To make CL more meaningful, it is required of both teachers and learners of English to know what CL is all about. But more importantly, it is also required to design its learning materials which make learners learn the English language in order to attain the goal which has been set forth. CL is worth considering to be used as one of approaches in learning of English in Indonesia.

Key Words: *cooperative learning, small groups of learners, interdependence, interaction, social skills.*

Introduction

One of language teaching issues under debate is **Cooperative Learning** (CL is used throughout this article). On the one hand, some educationists are pushing forward the issue of individual learning or the so called self-regulated learning or autonomous learning (Wenden 1991; Dickinson, 1991; Ajisuksmo, 1996). It is said that learning is more an individual enterprise. It has something to do with each individual learner to manipulate his cognitive competence to gain knowledge. On the other hand, some others are also pushing forward the issue of CL (Dickinson, 1991; Ajisuksmo, 1996).

This paper aims to discuss quite in detail in what CL is all about. Particularly, it will concentrate on the following points: Root of CL, Definition of CL, Strengths of CL, Weakness of CL, Schedule for CL, the Implementation of CL in Indonesia which is further divided into (1) its possibility and advantages and (2) Application of CL in Classroom, and finally Concluding Remarks.

Root of CL

It is worth positioning CL in the context of teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. CL is, indeed, one of so many approaches introduced by English foreign language teaching experts in order to help EFL learners be exposed to real or nearly-real atmosphere of language learning. EFL learner's exposure in this context will make him acquire the language being learnt faster and to speak it fluently, communicatively, and more naturally (Stern, 1986; Abbot and Wingard, 1987). Thus, the position of CL is obvious in the teaching and learning of English as foreign language and it contributes to the replacement of what Abbot and Wingard (1987) call "pseudo teaching".

As a matter of fact, CL takes its root from human being real life. Human beings tend to live in groups both in smallest groups (in terms of amount of members) and in largest ones (a state). The most salient evidence of human beings' living in groups is that they cooperate. For instance, cooperative has been a cultural heritage in Indonesia. In a spirit of "gotong royong", the Indonesians cooperate their efforts in handling any kind of work, be it heavy or light.

Even every member initiates to build cooperative with other members in the community where in they live. In later development, cooperative becomes their social consensus. In the mind of every member of a community, there exists his status as a member of the community making one aware of this social responsibility. He, by his status as a member of the community, holds on that he must unite his efforts for the sake of his own needs and also needs of others.

The social responsibility of every member of the community is commonly actualized through his ability to interact with other members of the same community. If observed, cooperation is successfully built in a community where multi-ways of interaction exist. Members

of the community can share ideas, information, feelings, and the like through doing a meaningful interaction in the cooperation setting. Interaction, even, plays a very crucial role in grounding the foundation of a better cooperation among members of the community. It is assumed that the interaction is the key to the success of community life and cooperation.

In the world of education, the experts have successfully transformed the ordinary philosophy of human being life into one of the educational strategies to make learning meaningful for learners. They consider that it will not only revive the tradition heritage which is value-laden in order to preserve it from extinction, but also there holds a belief that learning following the mentioned marvelous heritage above will result in great success in learning.

In foreign language learning, moreover, the transformation of the traditional heritage as described above into learning strategy will surely make learners learn a foreign language to gain success, the mastery of the language being learnt. Seeing that CL is a very suitable learning approach, especially in the context of learning a foreign language, the discussion about CL continues its way through. Further, the discussion will follow the points already proposed earlier.

Definition of Cooperative Learning

Prior to giving a definition of CL, three key words in this topic need to be described. The first is “cooperative” which may mean “working together”. Thus cooperative can mean “of or related to cooperative or working together (New World Dictionary, 1976).

The second key word is “learning”. Learning in this context is both behavioral and cognitive. By “behavioral,” learning is prominently marked by what are overtly done by learners. As a matter of fact, learners are getting together and doing a series of tasks collectively. They may, for example, solve language tasks assigned to them in learning groups. Simultaneously, learning is cognitive for it makes learners process and intake information mentally. As such, it is hoped to make every learner not only partake, but also pick up some knowledge, store and retain in memory, and in turn retrieve it for use.

In addition to the two key words, the brief discussion of the world learning has resulted in promoting another key word, the presence of which has enable one to define what CL is. The third key word is “learner”. It refers to who involves in working together or cooperating in learning or in doing assigned language tasks.

The three key words above may imply that there is a shift from the heavy foreign language teaching to the heavy learning approach. Concretely speaking, there are four implications of the CL as an approach. First, CL implies that, primarily, it is learning oriented and secondarily, it is teaching oriented. Since 1980s learning replaces the primary roles teaching has been playing so far. The activities in the classroom have positioned learning as the main concern. Learners are pushed to exercise their inner capacity in order to construct knowledge for themselves of what they experience through a well- planned collective or group activities set by teachers in place of passively listening to teacher’s lectures. The second is that the approach to employ must enforce learner’s learning to occur by providing relevant activities, such as, discussion, arguing, assessing, evaluating, etc. the nature of all provided activities must hand in hand lead learner to construct knowledge by and for his own. The third is that the role of learner is central. The construction of knowledge is purely under learner’s responsibility. The last implication is that the role of teacher is but reduced to be only competent facilitator and a manager (Oxford, 1990).

So, what is cooperative learning? It refers to collective efforts of learners in form of the “seek and find” of knowledge initiated by groups of learners for their own needs through well-planned learning activities designed by teachers. The “seek and find” of knowledge is manifested in overt learning activities in group task accomplishment setting, the knowledge may refer to any scientific acquisition a learner gains from collective learning activities. Thus, collective learning activities learners are engaged to are not only such kind of mere activities of accomplishing assigned tasks, but much more than that, it is expected that every individual learner learns, in that he gains input, processes it, and intakes it for the enrichment of his knowledge repertoire (cf. Ellis, 1986).

Basic Principles of Cooperative Learning

The following are some basic principles of CL. They are:

(1) The principle of independence

In a group a learner is dependent on other learners in collective learning in which he participates. None will be out of such kind of the so called interdependence. However, this must be in a positive sense. The interdependence must create a “balance” atmosphere, in that every learner contributes meaningfully for the sake of his learning and the group’s the interdependence must not allow any domination of one or two persons (learners) in the group. Instead, everybody has to take part fairly actively.

(2) The principle of interaction

Interaction among learners in the group occurs in multi ways, because CL basically pushes learners to participate in any kind of collective learning activities, such as: discussion, problem solving, debating, etc. this principle is in detail as follows: (a) develop and share a common goal; (b) speak out your understanding of the problem to all group members; (c) respond to, and work to understand others’ questions, insights, and solutions; (d) the accountable to others; and (e) be dependent on others.

(3) The principle of small groups

Learning in a CL setting requires few learners in each group. At the most, a class has twenty members. They are then divided into groups as to be able to apply CL in a more effective way. It is said that each group of 3 to 5 provides more opportunities for individual learner to participate in any of learning group activities.

(4) The principle of social skills

Every learner in a group has to have both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The former refers to how a learner learns or gains information from others and at the same time shares his to others. This is done upon the basis of the ability to take his turn appropriately meaningfully and to shift the turn to other group members. The latter refers to the ability to treat the group as a medium through which learners attempt to learn by sharing and actively constructing knowledge. This is also a skill to establish togetherness in learning, in deciding core materials in their learning group. In detail, the social skills are as follows: (a) each learner brings strength to his group; (b) each learner is responsible not only to with him, but also to help others understand the source of the strength; (c) a learner who lacks spirit of learning should be encouraged and proactively empowered to contribute; and (d) learning is positively influenced with the presence of diversity of perspectives and experience.

(5) The principle of democratic atmosphere of learning

A group member can learn from others new knowledge. Here, feeling of appreciating one’s ideas, information and concept is important as the basis of reasoning, logic and valid source of reference. Every learner has the same right to express his ideas and in turn to be open to further discussion of the idea or information. The speaker (one who speaks out his ideas) is hoped to defend his ideas or adjust and accept others’ ideas.

Strengths of CL

Theoretically, it is believed that successful language learning is also determined by cooperation in which language learners partake. Learning in groups is considered to be one of the most influential techniques where in learners actively use the language. Thus, CL, at least, has the following strengths:

(1) Supporting learning environment

Through CL, learners may learn a language more naturally and are highly exposed to the use of the language being learnt. Learners in groups can share what they have in mind with less fear, although their language may be marked with errors. Since everybody in groups has to share ideas, the frequency of talk in group learning is, of course, higher and demanding as well.

(2) Involving active and creative thinking.

Learners engaging in CL are required to participate actively by sharing ideas. The participation demand from individual learner his ability to manipulate his creative and critical thinking. Only by doing this, a language learner may partake meaningfully in such group learning.

(3) Learning can be fun and less tense.

Learning can be fun because a language learner is with other language learners. In such atmosphere, a learner feels “accompanied”, in that his being alone in learning which may cause boredom or inability to endure learning for a longer period of time is now minimized. It is less tense because learning together does not impose the rule of “must”. A learner is to participate but is not forced to express his ideas of either pro’s or con’s to what is under discussion. The participation occurs because learners involved are conscious of the added value in partaking in CL activities.

Weaknesses of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning also has its weak side. Prior to the implementation of CL, the strengths of CL have to be thought of as points which are necessary to prepare appropriately. Otherwise, they will turn to be the weak side of CL. Most particularly, however, there are some weaknesses to be considered very seriously, such as:

(1) Time consuming.

If not well schedule, more time is spent for the group learning. The schedule can be surpassed.

(2) Not total participation.

Those with low motivation, lack knowledge and weak commitment in the collective learning will not totally participate. Thus, this cannot advocate significant input to them.

(3) Noises. if there are many groups, surely noises increase. Thus, it is necessary to distribute some other groups to other rooms or other places outside the classroom.

(4) Goal achieved or not. Goal achieved for the group may happen but possibly not for every individual learner for some goal is not achieved. Here, they do not gain any significant input for their group learning.

(5) Language learners ‘different intelligence. In a group where variability in terms of intelligence is very high among learners in the same group, it is assumed that learning hardly occurs. High intelligent learners have to come down to the level of those of low intelligent learners. Surely, this is a real problem to attend to. on the other side, those low intelligent learners feel discouraged to position themselves with those high intelligent learners. This happens because of not only the existence of the two groups of learners’ schemata of language knowledge they have, but also different cultural of individual learners involved which influence their total participation. In relation to this, Holt et al (1991), write: “linguistic and cultural” diversity creates tremendous challenges for teachers”.

Schedule for CL

Holt et al (1991) argue it is necessary to arrange time schedule. Teachers may begin with giving instruction in a few minutes (5 minutes, for example) and grouping students (5minutes for example). Teachers may continue distributing well organized materials and asking students to question if the materials and instructions are not very clear to them (in about 10 minutes). Collective learning may take place for about 20 to 30 minutes and class discussion for about 10 to 15 minutes.

Holt et al (1991) also propose that CL can last five minutes, fifty minutes, and or regularly for a period of time every day in five weeks. This depends on what to do. A five minute CL activity may, for instance, be done on a topic guessing. A short text is given with some topic alternatives and teachers ask students to guess the topic of the given text in groups in five minutes.

The implementation of CL in Indonesia

For this sub-topic, the following are to be discussed.

(a) Its possibility

It is a reality that English is a foreign language in Indonesia. This is the reason why most of the Indonesian learners learn it only with an instrumental motivation to pass the examination and to get the diploma.

Many have been done to help learners learn English with both instrumental and integrative motivations. Most prominently, this is exercised through so many well planned in-service trainings for teachers nationwide. Teachers of English in Indonesia are engaged not only in the upgrade knowledge programs prepared by the government, but also in reconstructing self-awareness concerning the instrumental and integrative motivations.

Yearly, in addition to the in-service trainings, in Indonesia a seminar workshop on the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFLIN) is held. Many TEFL specialists and practitioners both from the country and overseas participate. They are engaged in thinking of a better way of helping learners of English learn more fruitfully from time to time.

The prime objective of the in-service trainings and also the yearly TEFLIN seminar-workshop in Indonesia is, of course, to uplift the quality of the learning of English in Indonesia.

However, less topics have been devoted to the CL. Samsuri's article "*cooperative learning*" (1997, in Sadtono, 1997: 158-165); Ajisukmo's concept of Cooperative Learning in her book "*Self-Regulated Learning in Higher Education*" (1996: 43-53) are, therefore, worth reading. Samsuri stipulates that CL is worth considering because learning involves not only individual learner but also collective learners. He writes: "*students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and if only other students in the learning group also reach their goal*". In addition to Samsuri's idea, Ajisukmo asserts that learning situation in a cooperative learning context is more conducive. More than that since learners are grouped into small manageable size, interaction among learners is higher and hence learning is more meaningful. She writes: "*this means that cooperative learning can only be attained if composition of the group is part of the design and organization of cooperative learning. Thus, composition of the group plays an important role in cooperative learning*" (45). Indeed, what she means by the composition refers not only to the amount of learners in groups (which are small in numbers) but also to intelligence variety of learners of group members as well as their cultural experience. A group, for example, does not comprise of all highly academic learners or of only learners with the same cultural background. To support the idea of both Samsuri and Ajisukmo, the following is the quotation of Holt et al: "*students need the maximum amount of time possible for comprehending and using the English language in a low risk environment in order to approach the language proficiency level of their peers.*"

It is necessary to reconsider implementing CL. Why is it so? Presently, in Indonesia the approach which is being effective is Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) not the CL as what is under the current discussion. Thus, it is necessary to abandon the CTL and to use CL instead? The answer is "not necessarily." Why? If observed, both CTL and CL share some likeness (Johnson, 2000: 88-91). Johnson includes CL in chapter IV of her book "Contextual Teaching and Learning". From that chapter, one may come out with what CTL and CL share, such as: (1) both emphasize that there is an existing environment which supports the learning; (2) both treat learners as the subject in learning process, in that both assert that learners are the active party in learning, knowledge is, hence, constructed by individual learner or group of learners involving collective learning.

The main point to suggest, however, that the collective learning is a strong and effective way of learning. Thus, it is hoped, whatever the approach of TEFL in Indonesia

is in practice, like CTL now, CL is but of the best techniques which is applicable in English learning setting in Indonesia.

(b) Advantages

The implementation of CL has some advantages which are worth mentioning. They are: (1) learners can use English actively, contextually and communicatively in an almost natural environment wherein English is to be used. (2) from others, learners can learn almost all aspects of the English language, such as: structures – how sentences are constructed, how interrogative and negative sentences are made, and how effective sentences are also made; vocabulary – learners may pick up new words when they are learning in groups; pronunciation – learners may learn how to pronounce correctly from peers, etc.

Application of CL in Classroom

Key Principles for lesson plan (LP)

- LPs for CL are of well typed/computerized on one page for each our session. They show exactly what goals students are to achieve (stated in clear, specific performance objectives) and identify what specifically students will do in CL activities to achieve stated goals. The aims are to detect if students really learn prepared materials. Using consistent LP format for each of CL activities can help ensure that the students do learn what to learn.
- LPs for cooperative groups typically include:
 - Unit title (as umbrella topic, e.g. Graphs).
 - Overall question (identify one overall unit question on each lesson plan, e.g. How can graphs help me to defend my position?).
 - Related lesson question. This should frame each specific lesson and relate to overall unit question listed.
 - Learning standard addressed. Find and list specific state, local or national standard.
 - Performance objectives. List only one or two for each lesson, briefly stated to show what to attain, e.g. the learner will.....,etc
 - Motivation,. Introduce at the beginning of every CL activity to engage and interest students to partake actively. This can run for about three minutes, also containing overall guide to the subject.
 - Learning strategies. This covers the body of the LP. How are students managed to obtain, apply, and make decisions about the contents of materials in CL activities? Therefore, it has to be carefully planned so that students are guided in ways that make sense in the learning of each topic. All materials must relate specifically to to the performance objectives already made.
 - Assessment task. How to determine that students know the materials? Assessment tasks should vary and should be related to how they learn and demonstrate their knowledge of the content. So, if CL materials are about speeches and essays, multiple choice is inappropriate assessment to carry put. The assessment tasks must fit the learning if it is to be fair.
 - Closure. This is a final wrap-up of the ideas and, the time is limited. But it must be well-related to the opening and body of the lesson. To ensure, this must make students obtain and retain some significant input concerning what is learnt.
 - Reflection. This is where the teacher and students reflect on the effectiveness of CL activities. If found some parts are not effective, make revisions for next time activities.

Sample Lesson Plan (LP)

FIGURE 1

The following is a simplified version of the Aesop's fable.

THE FOX AND THE CROW

Once upon a time there was a crow who found a large piece of tasty cheese. He quickly put it in his mouth and flew up to a tree. A hungry fox walked under the tree and suddenly saw the crow and the cheese. She carefully planned what to say. “O crow,” she said, “you are a really fine bird! What beautiful feathers and eyes you have! It is too bad that you cannot sing.”

The crow was so happy to hear such nice things about himself. He was happier that he could show the fox that he could sing beautifully. But as he opened his mouth to sing, the cheese dropped to the ground in front of the fox. The fox quickly ate the cheese with great enjoyment.

Moral: He who listens to flattery forgets everything else.

Instructional Setting

Students: SMP students; Grade level: I-III

Delivery mode: English

Group Size: Four students per group, heterogeneous by English language proficiency

Content: English language development

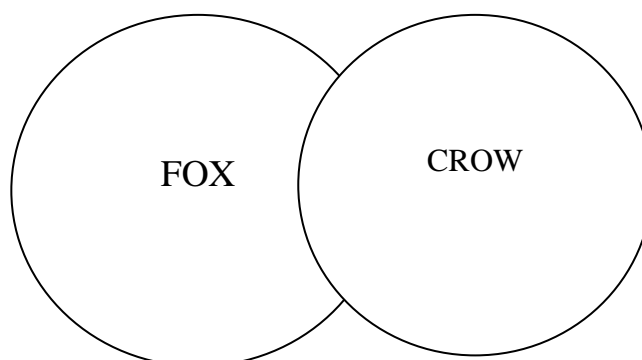
➤ *Activity 1. Brainstorming*

- a. Assign task to each member in a team of four (e.g. writer, reporter, facilitator, and timekeeper)
- b. After making sure that all students know what a fox and a crow are, give each team a Venn diagram with fox labeled on one side and “crow” on the other (see figure 2).
- c. Each team has five minutes to identify at least five things that foxes can do, but crows can’t and five things they have in common to both animals are written in the middle space of the Venn diagram; unique elements for the fox are written in the left space and for the crow in the right space.

Each student contributes responses as the writer fills in the Venn diagram

- d. Two teams join, with reporters from both teams sharing their diagrams, Team members can add new items as they go or delete incorrect items.
- e. Diagram with team names can be placed on bulletin board

FIGURE 2
EXAMPLE OF VENN DIAGRAM



Before doing the following activities, the teacher should first read the fable “the Fox and the Crow” to the class, using a variety of visuals to make the content understandable. The teacher may read it twice. Students can listen and take notes (words, phrases, sentences) to help the recall the details later.

➤ *Activity 2. Group Discussion*

- a. Ask teams to generate questions they can ask other teams about the fable. Assign role as above. Each writer records the questions.
- b. Ask each team to select its best question and one team member to share it with another team.

- c. Call on team representative to share their best question with the whole class.
- d. Follow this activity with either cooperative review, number heads together, or send a problem. Each of these requires students to answer question about the fable.

➤ *Activity 3. Cooperative Review*

- a. A student from one team (e.g. Team 1) asks a question.
- b. Team 3 discusses the answer briefly, making sure all members agree, and the team reporter gives the answer. Team 1 judges whether the answer is correct. If incorrect, or if another team wants to add to the answer, Team 1 calls on another team.
- c. Team 3 asks a question and the review continues.
The teacher may want to add a competitive dimension among teams by giving points. For example, if the question is appropriate, Team 1 gets one point. If the response to the question is correct, Team 3 gets a point. If the answer is incorrect, Team 1 gets one point and calls on another team to answer.

➤ *Activity 4. Number Heads Together*

- a. Ask students in each team to number off (e.g. #1, #2, #3, #4). If a team has five members, two students can have the same number and work together.
- b. The teacher poses a question about the fable. Questions for this structure should be high – consensus not short answer. Question may be generated by the teacher or borrowed from the teams' question pool generated above.
- c. The teacher gives each team time to discuss the answer. The teacher may structure the discussion by creating steps, such as: (1) each member closes his or her eyes and thinks of an answer; (2) they open their eyes, put "their heads together," and share answers with their team members; (3) team members agree on the best answer; (4) they make sure that all members know the answer.
- d. The teacher calls a number at random (e.g. #3) to answer the question. Call on the first #3 who raises his or her hand. When calling on a number, such as #2, "participation can be increased by having all #2s work together. For example, #2s from each team might come to the chalkboard and write the answer simultaneously. Or each team might have a slate on which #2 could write the answer and then hold it up.

➤ *Activity 5. Send a problem*

- a. Each student writes a question on one side of a piece of paper and the answer on the other side. Questions should be in "recall level" and in short answer, true false, or multiple choice.
- b. One student on each team collects the questions and answers from each member and passes them to another team.
- c. Students from pairs within each team. Each pair takes two questions. Questions might include: "why did the crow drop the cheese?" and "what did the fox say to the crow?" student #1 asks student #2 two questions; student #3 asks student #4 two questions. Student #2 then asks #1; student #4 asks student#3. The two pairs then exchange questions and repeat the process. Each student answers as best he or she can, and students can discuss the correctness of each response in their pairs.
- d. After responding to all four questions the team exchange their questions with another team. They continue this process until all teams have responded to all questions.

➤ *Activity 6. Group discussion*

- a. Assign roles to team members. Ask teams to use brainstorming to generate the possible moral of the story.
- b. Each team reaches consensus on the moral.

- c. The recorder on each team writes the moral on a piece of paper and passes it to other teams. Recorders may also simultaneously write their team's moral on the chalkboard.
- d. The teacher leads a class discussion on each of the morals presented, noting similarities, differences, underlying meanings and so forth.

Concluding Remarks

CL is a promising approach to the Indonesians who are learning English. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider its implementation in the setting of the English language pedagogy in the country. At least, in line with the latest development with regards to the selection of what approach to use in the English language pedagogy in Indonesia – that is CTL -, an attempt to push forward the shared points of both CL and CTL appears to be the most possible solution to take.

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