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# INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A MEDIUM FOR PROVIDING LEARNING EXPERIENCE AS MANDATED BY THE 2006 AND 2013 CURRICULUMS: THE CASE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL CLASSROOMS

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## ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning (CL) is a mandated teaching method in Indonesian schools. Nevertheless, little is known about how this teaching method is implemented and how it promotes learning. Through qualitative research methodology, this study investigated how individual accountability as one of CL principles and activities was enacted in secondary school classrooms and how it enhanced EFL learning. Data were gathered through three data collection strategies and analysed using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Seven roles of individual accountability in CL were identified and one of them was reported in this paper. Through their performance of individual accountability in CL, the EFL learners gained learning experience as mandated by the curriculum implemented in their school. By performing their individual accountability in CL, i.e., communicating what was learned, the EFL learners in the middle school carried out the communicating phase, which was one of the five phases prescribed by the 2013 curriculum's scientific approach. In the case of the high school's EFL learners, through their individual accountability performance, they elaborated on what they learned. This activity was a manifestation of the elaboration phase mandated by the 2006 curriculum. This study recommends the inclusion of what constitutes CL in the Process Standard of Primary and Secondary Education.

**Keywords:** individual accountability, cooperative learning, EFL

## INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, this study was concerned with the use of cooperative learning (CL) in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms and how it benefited EFL learners. When this study's data collection was conducted (i.e., during the second semester of the 2014/2015 academic year) in Semarang Central Java, the 2016 and the 2013 curriculums were being implemented, with the latter under revision. The 2013 curriculum was being implemented in schools appointed as try-out for the curriculum, or in schools that have implemented the curriculum for three semesters (i.e., from the 2013/2014 academic year). The 2006 curriculum was being implemented in the schools that implemented the 2013 curriculum only for one semester (i.e., in the first semester of 2014/2015 academic year).

Document analysis carried out throughout this study showed that the 2006 and 2013 curriculums adopted competency-based curriculum and employed genre-based approach as one of the ways to help learners achieve the goal of their English learning. The goal of English instruction in Indonesian secondary schools has been to develop learners' communicative competence. According to Agustien (2015), when this is the goal, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is also one of the approaches that guide the instruction. Richards (2001) underlines CL as one of the teaching methods under CLT.

In this study, CL is defined as a group learning activity in which individual students' contribution to the learning is realized through performance or presentation, which is beneficial not only for their own learning but also for their peers' learning. Literature demonstrates that CL increases EFL learners' achievement (e.g., Bejarano, 1987; Ghaith, 2003; Liang, 2002; Sachs, Candlin, & Rose, 2003). However, little research has been done on how CL works and enhances EFL learning. Literature also suggests that CL works when its principles are enacted (Chen, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1996, Slavin, 1999). Nevertheless, research on CL principles is scant. This study focused on one of CL principles (i.e., individual accountability) and explored how this principle enhanced EFL learning.

Individual accountability in CL, in this study, is defined as an activity (performance or presentation) that individual students do in front of their peers, which means that it is public or witnessed by other students, and is required to complete a learning task. Four levels of individual accountability in CL were identified: 1) individual accountability in pairs, 2) in home groups, 3) in other groups, and 4) to the whole class.

This study sought to answer the following question: What is the role of individual accountability in CL in Indonesian secondary school EFL classrooms? In this paper, I present one of the seven identified roles of individual accountability in CL in the studied EFL classrooms, and I argue that through their performances of individual accountability in CL the EFL learners gained learning experience as mandated by the 2006 and 2013 curriculums.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

I used two theories as my theoretical frameworks. The first one is Cultural-Historical Activity Theory or CHAT (Engeström, 2000; Leont'ev, 1978; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003, Yamagata-Lynch, 2007, Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The second one is Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) that encompasses the concepts of comprehensible input, comprehensible output, interaction, and negotiation for meaning. Through its concepts of activity system and its components (subjects, tools, object/goal, rules, community, and division of labor), CHAT was used to make sense of how individual accountability as an activity in CL serves as a medium of conscious learning in Indonesian secondary school EFL classrooms. The activity systems analysed were the implementation of CL the middle school and the high school EFL classrooms. Interaction Hypothesis was utilized to understand how individual accountability in CL promotes second language acquisition and development. In combination, the two theories were employed to understand the role of individual accountability in CL in enhancing EFL learning in the studied classrooms.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To address the research question, I employed qualitative research methodology, with the purpose of exploring the role of individual accountability in CL in enhancing EFL learning. To meet this purpose, I used qualitative case study because I needed a case or cases as specific illustration of the enactment of individual accountability in CL in EFL classrooms. This qualitative case study is categorized as multi-case study because two cases were involved and they were also the study's units of analysis: 1) individual accountability in CL in middle school EFL classroom, and 2) individual accountability in CL in high school EFL classroom. Data were gathered through three data collection strategies: 1) participant observations, 2) in-depth interviewing, and 3) document analysis. To guide data collection and analysis, I used constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

As indicated earlier, the study took place in two secondary schools: one middle school and one high school. One teacher from each school was involved, respectively: Andini and Putri (pseudonyms). Since students were the subjects in the activity systems (i.e., the doers of individual accountability in CL), students of the two teachers were also involved as research participants, especially those whose class were observed. From these students, I recruited four focal students for the in-depth interviewing. The middle school implemented the 2013 curriculum and the high school implemented the 2006 curriculum.

## FINDING

Through their performances of individual accountability in CL in their classrooms, the EFL learners gained learning experience as mandated by the curriculum implemented in their school. The relation between the subjects (i.e., the EFL learners who were the doers of individual accountability) and the rules applied in the activity systems helped me to identify this role. Rules refer to any formal and informal regulations that in varying degree can constrain or liberate the activity and provide guidance to the subject of what are correct procedures and acceptable interactions to take with other community members (Engeström, 1993). Among the rules analysed were the formal regulations or constructs, i.e., the curriculums that set the target competencies and learning objectives/goals, the lesson plans, and the official documents

(relevant Decrees of the Minister of Education and Culture). These rules guided how learning processes should take place to help the students attain their learning objectives/goals.

### Case One: Middle school<sup>3</sup>

As stated in the Process Standard for Primary and Secondary Education (National Education Standard Board, 2013a), the learning experience mandated by the 2013 curriculum was learning experience under the scientific approach. This approach was aimed at enacting a number of learning concepts used to develop the curriculum that reflect a paradigm shift in learning valued by Indonesian education system. The learning concepts include: “from teacher-centered to student-centered learning,” “from passive to active learning” and “from individual learning to learning in groups” (National Education Standard Board, 2013ba, p. 2). References suggest (e.g., Cohen, 1994; Keyser, 2000; Richards, 2002; Sharan, 2002) that the aforementioned<sup>3</sup> learning concepts are some of the underlying concepts of CL.

The Process Standard for Primary and Secondary Education (National Education Standard Board, 2013a) specified three stages of learning in a lesson: opening, main, and closing. The 2013 curriculum dictated that five learning phases should take place at the main stage of a lesson<sup>16</sup>: 1) observing, 2) questioning, 3) exploring, 4) associating, and 5) communicating (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014). The communicating phase, in Andini’s observed lessons, was realized through individual accountability performance in CL. More specifically, Andini’s students communicated their understanding or mastery of the target texts to their peers through their individual accountability performance in CL (Field Notes, 20150331, 20150401, 20150404, 20150406, and 20150413). Additionally, Andini’s students performed their individual accountability as one of the learning activities at the opening<sup>2</sup> stage of their lesson (Field Notes, 20150406). The following paragraphs will showcase how, through their individual accountability performance in CL, the student participants in the middle school gain learning experience as mandated by the 2013<sup>2</sup> curriculum.

In two of the five observed lessons, the student participants in the middle school learned from notices (the day’s target text). Working in pairs and through a CL structure named Think-Pair-Share (see Kagan&Kagan, 2009), each student<sup>2</sup> participant had a notice with them and was asked to think about the answers to these three questions: 1) What does the notice mean? 2) What should<sup>1</sup> we do? 3) Where can you find the notice? After the Think phase, the student participants presented their answers to their partner (i.e., individual accountability in pairs). This is the Pair phase. Next, with the help of the previous presentation and feedback from their partner, the<sup>1</sup> student participants presented their answers again to the whole class (i.e., the Share phase, or individual accountability to the whole class) (Field Notes, 20150331, 20150404). In short, by performing two levels of individual accountability in Think<sup>2</sup> Pair-Share, the student participants communicated their understanding of the assigned notice. Through their individual accountability performance in CL, these EFL learners experienced the communicating phase of the mandated scientific approach.

In the other observed lesson, the middle school students learned about narratives, more specifically fables, through a CL structure named Numbered Heads Together (see Kagan&Kagan, 2009). Their performance of individual accountability through this structure was to communicate their comprehension of a fable they read, entitled *Mousedeer and Crocodile* (Lesson Plan, 20150413). A few steps of Numbered Heads Together, however, were missed by Andini. How she used the structure is as the following.

The students sat in their group. They were then given a number as a label (i.e., one, two, three, four, or five) and listened to Andini’s comprehension questions. After she finished reading one question (e.g. what did the mousedeer want to do?), Andini asked students with a certain number to<sup>2</sup> quickly raise their hand and the quickest student was given<sup>2</sup> the chance to answer the question to the whole class (Field Notes, 20150413). This was an individual accountability to the whole class. It took place in the main stage of the lesson for the students to communicate their understanding of the text they read.

The English teacher’s book for grade eight (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014) describes that the communicating phase of the scientific approach is for developing the students’ ability of presenting the knowledge and skills, either in spoken or written mode, that they have mastered or have yet to develop. Andini explained that since the target language skill

for all of the observed lessons was speaking, the communicating phase her students did through the individual accountability in CL was for them to speak in English (First Interview, 20150406). This indicated that her students' individual accountability performances in CL were to give them learning activities relevant to the target language skill and functioned a medium for them to gain the learning experience as mandated by the curriculum. This also showed how Andini as the teacher played a role as one of the tools in the activity systems. The learning activities Andini designed and facilitated followed what was mandated by the curriculum and they were aimed at covering one of the competencies set by the curriculum for EFL instruction, i.e. the students' mastery of the language skills to communicate the target texts they learned (the Content Standard, National Education Standard Board, 2013b).

In sum, the communicating phase was mandated by the 2013 curriculum to take place at the main stage of the lesson. Through their performances of individual accountability in CL, the student participants in the middle school experienced the communicating phase in the main stage of their lesson. Through their individual accountability performances in CL, these students gained the learning experience set by the 2013 curriculum.

### Case Two: High School

Through their performance of individual accountability in CL, the student participants in the high school (tenth graders) experienced the elaboration phase of learning, which was mandated by the Process Standard of Primary and Secondary Education for the 2006 curriculum (National Education Standard Board, 2007). This Standard consisted of the guidelines for the planning and the process of teaching and learning. Similar to the Process Standard for the 2013 curriculum, the Process Standard for the 2006 curriculum prescribed three stages of learning, including: the opening, the main, and the closing. The Standard dictated three phases of learning: exploration, elaboration, and confirmation that should take place in the main stage. The Standard also stated that CL was one of the teaching methods that teachers should use in the elaboration phase. The paragraphs that follow will showcase how through their performance of individual accountability in CL the student participants in the high school gained learning experience as mandated by the 2006 curriculum. They will also discuss how the formal constructs (the relevant Decrees of the Minister of Education and Culture) aligned with individual accountability in CL in terms of giving the students the learning experience that these constructs set.

In the first observed lesson, the students learned about short news items (the day's target text) through Numbered Heads Together. Like how it went in Andini's class, a few steps were missed in Putri's use of this CL structure. Her students sat in groups of four or five and worked on an exercise sheet containing a short news item with 12 blanks in it. As Putri was reading the complete news item aloud, her students individually filled in the blanks. Each student in the group was then given a number (i.e., one, two, three, four, five or six). One number was called out and assigned a blank to fill in. The students having the corresponding number raised their hand quickly and the quickest got the chance to write their answer on the white board. This was their individual accountability to the whole class (Field Notes, 20150318). In short, in this lesson, individual accountability in CL was used to facilitate the students in presenting the result of their individual work to the whole class. This activity was a manifestation of the elaboration phase, which was mandated by the Process Standard to take place in the main stage of a lesson.

In the same lesson, through One Stray (see Kagan & Kagan, 2009), the student participants performed their individual accountability in the other groups and again to the whole class. Putri used the CL structure to elicit words related to news items. Working in the same groups as they did in Numbered Heads Together, Putri's students listed down as many news item-related words as possible. Next, one member from each group was asked to stay in their group while the rest visited the other groups. Meeting the other groups' members and sitting with them, the student participants shared their word list (i.e., individual accountability in other groups). When requested by their peers, they also explained the meaning of the words. Then, everybody went back to their home group and added words to their list of news item-related vocabulary. After that, one representative from each group came to the white board to write their words (i.e., individual accountability to the whole class) (Field Notes, 20150318). Hence, in this lesson, individual accountability in CL was used to facilitate the students' presentations

of their group's work, and this activity allowed the students to gain learning experiences related to the mandated Process Standard. More specifically, they elaborated on the learning materials as part of the lesson's main stage of learning.

Still in the same lesson, the high school students carried out another performance of individual accountability to the whole class. Through Team Jigsaw (see Kagan&Kagan, 2009), Putri got her students to explore the aspects of a news item. Each group was given one aspect: group one got the definition, group two the social function/purpose, group three the generic structure/organization, and group four the language features. They were then asked to discuss the assigned part. Afterwards, one student from each group presented to the whole class the result of their discussion (i.e., individual accountability to the whole class) (Field Notes, 20150318). There were also a few steps missed in Putri's use of Team Jigsaw. As in Putri's use of One Stray, individual accountability in Team Jigsaw was for the students to present the group's work, and this elaboration activity was mandated by the Process Standard to take place in the main stage of a lesson.

As described above, the use of individual accountability in CL in the observed lesson was for the student participants in the high school to present or elaborate on the learning materials, i.e., news items, including relevant vocabulary and the aspects/features of the text to their peers (Field Notes, 20150318, 20150401). Putri asserted that her focus in her teaching was for her tenth graders to master the knowledge of news items, especially because this text genre was new for them. Her students' mastery of this text genre was realized through their presentations of their own and their group's work (Third Interview, 20150404). These presentations, carried out through performances of individual accountability in CL, were the forms of elaboration activities mandated by the Process Standard. This identified role of individual accountability in CL, as in the case of Andini, showed Putri's role as one of the tools in the activity systems. She designed and facilitated her students' learning in activities that followed what was mandated by the curriculum while at the same time aimed at covering one of the competencies set by the curriculum for EFL instruction, i.e. the students' mastery of the knowledge of the target texts (the Content Standard, National Education Standard Board, 2006).

All in all, individual accountability in CL in the secondary school EFL classrooms played a role as a medium for the students to gain learning experience as mandated by the curriculum implemented in their respective school. The Process Standards of Primary and Secondary Education and the other Decrees of the Minister of Education and Culture applied in the two schools were the rules that provided guidance for the teachers in designing and carrying out their lessons. This guidance included the incorporation of CL and where in the lesson their students should communicate or elaborate on what they had learned, i.e., performing their individual accountability. This analysis also showed that in their effort to comply with the Process Standard (i.e., with regard to how learning should take place), the teacher participants also aimed at covering the competencies mandated by the Content Standard. From a CHAT lens, this shows that the identified role of individual accountability in CL emerged not only because of the interconnectedness between the subjects and the rules but also because of the internal relationships between these two components and the tools in the activity systems. The teacher participants were among the tools in the activity systems because they were the implementer of the curriculum, the designer of the lessons, and the implementer of CL in their EFL classrooms.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that CLT is enshrined in EFL curriculum in most educational contexts, research on how it is actually used is scarce, not only in the literature of EFL instruction in Indonesian contexts but also that of broader Asia Pacific countries (Nunan, 2003). CLT been adopted for EFL instruction in Indonesia for more than three decades (Lie, 2007) and still remains in place today (Agustien, 2015). However, similar with EFL instruction in other Asia Pacific countries, there is a huge gap between ministerial rhetoric and classroom reality (Nunan, 2003). Indonesian EFL teachers are weak in teaching methods and do not have a strong enough teaching repertoire (Alwasilah, 2012/2013) as evidenced by their emphasis on rote learning (Alwasilah, 2013).

The identified role of individual accountability in CL discussed in this paper provided evidence of how through their individual accountability performance, EFL learners involved in this study used the target language, either in spoken or written mode, to communicate or elaborate on their understanding and mastery of the learning materials to their peers. This is a learning activity mandated by the curriculum implemented in their school. This identified role of individual accountability in CL also demonstrates how CLT's underlying concept was put in practice, i.e., language learners learn the target language through using it to communicate with their peers (Larsen-Freeman, 2012; Richards, 2002). In other words, this study offers a description of CLT was in use and how CL, through its individual accountability, could accommodate the application of CLT in EFL instruction.

While this study's document analysis (particularly on the Content Standards) demonstrates that genre-based approach was adopted in the EFL instruction, data gathered from other data collection strategies do not show the manifestation of this approach in the teacher participants' instruction. As the previous section has shown, the two teacher participants' instruction followed what was mandated by the Process Standard of the curriculum in their respective school. While the teacher participants employed CL in their instructions, the gathered data did not indicate that their CL implementation was due to their understanding of the connection between CLT and CL. This appears to indicate that the teacher participants need to develop their understanding of approaches to language instruction relevant with the goal of their EFL instruction, i.e., to develop their students' communicative competence.

It is beyond this study's data can tell but based on my observation (including teaching Curriculum and Materials Development courses to EFL teacher candidates when the 2006 curriculum was implemented in all schools), I believe that CL can accommodate the four learning stages of genre-based approach: 1) building knowledge of the field, 2) modelling of the text, 3) joint construction of the text, and 4) independent construction of the text. In other words, I believe, as how CL could provide the EFL learners learning experience as mandated by the 2006 and 2013 curriculums and how CL helped to put CLT in practice, CL can also accommodate the use of genre-based approach. CL can be used at any stage of the four learning stages. Hence, I recommend TEFLIN to provide our English teachers with comprehensive practical guidelines that encompass the underlying concepts of the adopted approach(s), including relevant teaching methods such as CL, which can help our English teachers to actualize the approach(s) and facilitate their students' EFL learning. Additionally, as the previous section has indicated, there were a few steps missed in some of the uses of CL structures in the studied classrooms, which had consequences for the EFL learners' interaction with their peers (not discussed in this paper due to the space limit). Hence, since it is a mandated teaching method, I also recommend the inclusion of what constitutes CL in the Process Standard of Primary and Secondary Education, including the variety of CL approaches, CL principles, and samples of CL structures along with their functions and procedures. With this inclusion, it is expected that teachers will implement CL more effectively. As for English teachers, the practical guidelines from TEFLIN and the Process Standard should guide them to better help their students acquire and learn the target language, and in turn achieve the goal of their EFL learning: increase in communicative competence.

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