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DIVISION OF LABOR IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING'S INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACTIVITIES: PROCESS AND BENEFITS FOR EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Research revealing the positive effects of cooperative learning (CL) on EFL learning is vast and well-documented, yet little is known about the processes occurring within the use of CL in EFL classrooms. This qualitative case study fills the gap in the literature by exploring the role of individual accountability—a principle of and one of the activities in CL—in enhancing EFL learning. The study was conducted in Indonesian middle and high schools' EFL classrooms. Document analysis, classroom observations (involving two secondary school teachers and 77 students), and in-depth interviews (involving the two teachers and four focal students) were utilized as data collection methods. The gathered data were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory. One of the findings—identified by looking at the relation between the EFL learners as individual accountability performers and the division of labor—substantiated that reciprocity and exchange of information took place in the observed CL groups. Specifically, the division of labor arranged by the procedures of the selected CL structures (including individual accountability activities, i.e., performances and peer interaction) made the EFL learners specialize on a certain part of the learning materials—thus creating information gap—and learn from their peers' presentations of expertise (i.e., the previously thought about, discussed, and learned information).

Keywords: division of labor, cooperative learning, individual accountability activities

Introduction

A number of studies demonstrate that the use of cooperative learning (CL) develops ESL/EFL learners' mastery of language skills and components (e.g., Alghamdi, 2014; Almuslimi, 2016; Bejarano, 1987; Ghaith, 2003; Liang, 2002; Sachs, Candlin, & Rose, 2003, Wei & Tang, 2015). Nevertheless, research that portrays processes occurring within the use of CL in ESL/EFL classrooms is particularly scarce. Studies in this area can actually offer insight into how to implement CL effectively. To fill this gap in the literature, I conducted a study on the implementation of CL in Indonesian EFL classrooms with the focus on the enactment of individual accountability, which is one of CL principles. This principle was chosen as the study's unit of analysis because it is a key principle of CL (see Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Kagan, 1989;

Slavin, 1996) and little research has been done on this principle.

With the purpose of exploring the role of individual accountability in enhancing EFL learning, the present study sought to answer the following question: What is the role of individual accountability in CL implementation in Indonesian secondary school EFL classrooms? In this paper, I report parts of the study's findings and in doing so I argue that individual accountability in CL endorses reciprocity and exchange of information takes place in CL groups. These activities are attributed to the division of labor arranged by the procedures of CL techniques or structures (the latter term will be used henceforth). The division of labor make the EFL learners specialize on a certain part of the learning materials—thus creating information gap—and learn from

their peers' presentations of expertise (i.e., the previously thought about, discussed, and learned information). Thus, I also argue that reciprocity and exchange of information are supportive of second language acquisition and learning.

Methodology

To address the research question, I employed qualitative case study and gathered the data using three strategies: participant observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (from March 2015 to September 2015). Two cases were analyzed during the study, i.e., individual accountability in CL implementation in a middle school and a high school EFL classroom. I involved one teacher from each school (respectively: Andini and Putri, pseudonyms) and students in the observed classrooms (77 students in total). They were selected through purposeful and convenience sampling. I also utilized convenience sampling strategy to recruit students for the in-depth interviews. They were (pseudonyms): Midya, Budi (eighth graders), Natya and Joko (tenth graders).

I gathered the following data: 10 field notes totaling approximately 70 pages (from the participant observations), 110 pages of interview transcription (from 19 interviews), and analytic memos and journal entries for each data source (field notes, interview transcriptions, and relevant documents). To guide my data analysis, I employed constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) and used concepts from my theoretical frameworks (cultural historical activity theory—CHAT and Interaction Hypothesis, described in greater detail in this section) to look at the research participants' meaning making, including when I was doing line-by-line coding (including in-vivo coding), focused coding, and axial coding. Themes emerged from the data through the process of coding and analytic memo writing.

CHAT (Engeström, 2000; Leont'ev, 1978; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003, 2007, 2010) was used to make sense of how individual accountability as an activity in CL served as a medium of conscious learning in the EFL classrooms. This theory sees an activity as part of a system and a system as comprise of the following components: subjects, tools, object/goal, rules, community, and division of labor. Two activity systems analyzed in the present study were the implementation of CL in the middle school and the high school's EFL classrooms. Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) was utilized to understand how individual accountability in CL promoted second language acquisition and development since this theory encompasses the concepts of comprehensible input, comprehensible output, interaction, and negotiation for meaning. These elements, as literature suggests, are important for promoting second language acquisition and learning. In short, I employed the two theories (CHAT and Interaction Hypothesis) to understand the role of individual accountability in CL in enhancing EFL learning in the studied classrooms, including how it helped the EFL learners learn the target language.

It is also appropriate to consider a number of limitations to the present study: the short period of investigation, especially with regard to participant observation data, i.e., one month (resulting in 10 field notes and 10 analytic memos), and my being "the researcher as translator" (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 168). The following were the translation works that I did: a) translating quotes from the interviews —especially those used to support my arguments— and relevant curriculum and instructional documents from Indonesian to English, b) translating key words and phrases from the transcriptions and document analysis data, and c) carrying out member checking in Indonesian. Notwithstanding, I believe this work has

important contributions to make for EFL instruction.

Findings and Discussion

In light of the definitions of CL in the literature, in the present study CL is defined as a group learning activity in which individual students contribute to the learning through performance or presentation, which is beneficial not only for their own learning but also for their peers' learning. Individual accountability is defined in the study as an activity (presentation or performance) that individual students do in front of their CL group members which is required to complete a learning task. My data analysis showed four levels of individual accountability in CL: 1) individual accountability in pairs, 2) individual accountability in home groups, 3) individual accountability in other groups, and 4) individual accountability to the whole class. A lower level of individual accountability (e.g., individual accountability in pairs) was usually followed by peer interaction that helped the EFL learners to prepare for a higher level of individual accountability (e.g., individual accountability in other groups). In this section, I will describe the process of individual accountability activities in CL and explain how they give benefits to the EFL learners, i.e., promoting reciprocity and exchange of information.

Through individual accountability in CL in their EFL classrooms, the EFL learners presented the previously thought about, discussed, and learned information to their peers in spoken English. This role of individual accountability in CL was identified with the help of the relation between the subjects—the EFL learners— with the division of labor in the activity systems, which refers to how the tasks are shared among the community (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). An account from each research site that depicted the use of one CL structure was presented as the following.

When the EFL learners in the middle school were learning through Think-Pair-Share, each student participant read a notice–the focused text genre, learned about it through the given questions, and in spoken English presented their answers to their partner (individual accountability in pairs). After that, they had a discussion with their partner about their presentation and gave each other feedback. Finally, they presented their revised answers to the whole class (individual accountability to the whole class) (Field Notes, 20150331, 20150404). In other words, through the two levels of individual accountability in Think-Pair-Share, the EFL learners shared with their peers the notice they had previously learned. They were exposed to a variety of notices because each of their peers had a different notice, and all of them performed their individual accountability. This process showcases task-sharing or division of labor in the classroom community that likely broadened the EFL learners' knowledge of notices as opposed to the learners' learning a number of notices on their own.

When asked to reflect on his experience of learning about notices through Think-Pair-Share, Budi said:

> *"Jadi kita menyampaikan, kita bisa menyampaikan, apa ya namanya, istilahnya, kayak ilmu yang kita punya kepada temen-temen. "*

> "So we present, we can present, what's so called, what's the term, sort of the knowledge we have to our peers." (Second Interview, 20150630)

Budi emphasized that through individual accountability in CL he shared the information ("knowledge") he had about the notice he read to his peers.

As in the case of the EFL learners in the middle school, through their individual accountability performances in CL, the high

school's EFL learners presented the previously thought about, discussed, and learned information to their peers in spoken English. This role of individual accountability was evident when they were learning about news items through One Stray in the first and second observed lesson, one of which is described as follows. One Stray was employed to introduce the learners to news items, which was a new text genre for them. Specifically, the high school students were asked to list as many news-related words as possible with their home group members. Then, they shared the list they generated to the other groups (individual accountability in other groups). The word list shared or presented was the result of the student participants' thinking, discussion, and learning with their peers, which helped them accumulate vocabulary of news items (Field Notes, 20150318).

Recalling the use of One Stray in her classroom, Natya believed that she learned from her classmates' individual accountability performances:

> "Pengetahuannya jadi nambah, dikit-dikit gitu. Maksudnya kan, misalkan pasif terus, di kelompok terus, ngga maju ke depan atau ngga mau komunikasi dengan yang lain kan ngga tau informasi dari kelompok lain, dari kelompok sendiri bahkan."

> "My knowledge gets increased, bit-by-bit. I mean, if I don't participate, sticking around in the group, not presenting in front of the class or not communicating with the others, I would not know any information from the other groups, or even from my own group." (Second Interview, 20150629)

Natya stresses the importance of presenting the information she had and communicating with the other groups' members for increasing her understanding ("knowledge")

of the learning materials. Implied in her account was her awareness of the division of labor and the information gap it created for her and her peers to learn from each other ("I mean, if I don't participate, sticking around in the group, not presenting in front of the class or not communicating with the others, I would not know any information from the other groups").

Andini confirmed that the individual accountability in CL that her students performed when they were learning through Think-Pair-Share was a medium for them to present the previously thought about, discussed, and learned information to their peers in spoken English. She observed that in order for her students to perform their individual accountability, they should know what they should do and "carry out the assigned task" when working in CL group, which means that they should know the division of labor and follow it accordingly. She said

> "Masing masing individu harus berusaha untuk memahami dan melaksanakan tugas yang diberikan saat kerja di kelompok CL karena nanti dia mempunyai tanggung jawab pribadi."

> "Individual students should try to understand and carry out the given task when learning in CL group because they will be held accountable for this." (Second Interview, 20150408)

Andini further explained that when students knew the task assigned to them, they would try to understand and master what they should present in their individual accountability performances. In other words, knowing the division of labor was part of students' preparation to present the learning materials (information) to their partner, group members, or to a wider context of audience, such as in other groups or to the whole class. Put it differently, her students'

understanding of the division of labor in Think-Pair-Share helped them to present the information they previously thought about, discussed, and learned (Second Interview, 20150408).

As Andini did, Putri confirmed that her students' individual accountability performances when they were learning through One Stray were for them to present the previously thought about, discussed, and learned information to their peers in spoken English. She highlighted that the presentations were especially beneficial for the students because the learning materials were new for them (news items) and her emphasis was on their mastery of the knowledge of this text genre (Follow-up Interview, 20150604). Additionally, she was with Andini in that when learning through CL, each student should know the task assigned to them, highlighting that she should work on this issue in her CL implementation especially in her tenth grade classrooms because she believed that they were new to CL (First Interview, 20150318). In sum, the two teacher participants believed that students' knowing the division of labor would help realize their presentation of the previously thought about, discussed, and learned information to their peers in spoken English (individual accountability performances). This finding is consistent with the propositions found in the literature that teachers need to train their students—especially those unfamiliar with CL—on how it works (e.g., Byrd, 2009).

Conclusions
Looking at the relation between the secondary school students as the performers of individual accountability in CL and the division of labor or how the learning tasks were shared, my analysis demonstrated that individual accountability prescribed by the procedure of the CL structures used in the EFL classrooms served as the medium for the learners to present the previously thought

about, discussed, and learned information to their peers in spoken English. The division of labor made individual students carry out the presentations; their individual accountability performances were required. Reciprocity and information exchange followed the presentations. This signifies the close connection between the subjects and the division of labor and between these two components and the community in the activity systems, especially because the student participants shared the same learning objectives and they were the audience of their peers' presentations. Seen from an Interaction Hypothesis lens, reciprocity and information exchange, which are attributed to the chain of activities in individual accountability in CL, help enhance EFL learning because EFL learners have more opportunities to use the target language to present what they learn and interact with their peers. These activities make elements important for second language acquisition and learning—comprehensible input, comprehensible output, and negotiation for meaning— available in EFL classrooms.

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