

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this study were to describe how the students perceive their engagement in small group discussions and to explain the factors that influence the students engagement in small group discussions. A descriptive qualitative design was used in this study. The source of data was 25 students of Grade VIII SMP Al-Wasliyah 8 Medan. The data were analyzed by using descriptive qualitative. The results showed that (1) The students perceive their engagement in small group discussion positively. Most of the students agreed that being engaged in small group discussion was useful for them as EFL students and agreed that they have followed all activities in small group discussion and given their best effort. The students agreed that they could participate well in small group discussion, and felt motivated to engage themselves. The students felt that they were confident enough to deliver their opinions in group discussion. Besides, all of the students satisfied with their engagement in small group discussion. (2) The factors that influence the students in engaging in small group discussion were the students' relationship with teachers, relationship with peers and classmates, students' self-efficacy, students' self-regulated learning, and students' interest in learning.

Keywords: Perception, Engagement, Small Group Discussion

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nurkamto (2000) argues that there are several reasons that become challenges in the teaching of English in Indonesia, they are: (1) English is a foreign language in Indonesia, and students are only subjected to it in the class; (2) Indonesia is thousands of miles away from English-speaking countries, giving students very little opportunity to use the target language in real-life contexts; (3) Indonesia holds several traditional views that do not motivate students to learn as much as they could; (4) professional and academic qualifications of teachers are unsatisfactory; (5) the number of students in one class is large; (6) the learning aids are incomplete; and (7) the evaluation method is incompatible with communicative language learning.

English teaching experts have developed a variety of strategies to assist teachers in dealing with these issues. Community Language Learning (CLL) method is one of them. Community Language Learning is based on the assumption that a strong community can reduce students' anxiety (Brown, 2007). Small Group Discussion Technique is one of the strategies used in Community Language Learning.

According to Arends (1997), discussion allows students to openly discuss and play with their own ideas, as well as motivation to engage in discourse both inside and outside of the classroom. Wu (2008) backs this up, stating that small group discussions can encourage students to involve in the active process of knowledge construction. Furthermore, whether consciously or unconsciously, students learn from one another during group discussions. Jones (2007) adds that students' confidence will gradually improve as they actively share knowledge and thoughts when working together. As a result, the students are more confident in expressing their opinions their small groups.

According to Serravallo (2010), the discussion technique can pair up with the small group method to help students develop as readers and thinkers. Small groups will assist students in reading with interest and excitement, reading effectively, engaging in meaningful, invigorating discussions about book, reading fluently and expressively, and reading progressively more challenging literature.

In fact, one of teachers' hopes is for students to engage in group discussions. Teachers expect that all students will be able to contribute effectively during group discussions. According to Barkley (in Yanse, 2016), engagement is "the regularity with which students participate in activities that represent effective educational practices, and conceive of it as a pattern of involvement in a variety of activities and interactions both in and out of the classroom". Furthermore, teachers want their students to share their interest for their academic discipline and find their courses so fascinating that they freely, even enthusiastically, devote their hearts and minds to the learning process.

Referring to the previous research and definition, it can be seen that small group discussion is effective in improving students' reading comprehension. Therefore, the researcher needs to investigate how the small group discussion itself in students' point of view, so that teacher can evaluate their teaching strategy in the case of enhancing students' engagement and also this strategy will be increasingly used by other teachers. In this case, the researcher investigates the students' perceptions on their engagement in small group discussion. Additionally, the researcher analyze students of SMP Al-Wasliyah 8 Medan which the English teacher usually use this strategy in TLP.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Perception

a. Definition of Perception

Altman et al. (1985) say that perception is the way in which a person selects and groups stimuli so that they can be interpreted in a meaningful way. It shows a person's point of view on the reality around them.

b. Types of Perception

Irwanto (2002) says that there are two types of perception resulted from the interaction between individual and object. They are positive and negative perception.

c. Dimension of Perception

Chalhoun and Acocella (1990) state that perception has three dimensions, they are expectation, knowledge, and evaluation. People's ideas of what they will be and

what they will do are referred as expectations. So, in addition to having expectations, people should have efforts to meet them. Knowledge is defined as something that is known or assumed to be known about the physical, behavioral, past (past experience), reasons, and motives of things. Evaluation is the conclusion and feeling about something or someone based on how an individual fulfill the expectation.

2.2 Student Engagement

a. Definition of Student Engagement

Kuh (2009) describes student engagement as the time and effort learners dedicate to activities that are empirically related to desired academic outcomes, as well as what schools do to encourage students to participate in these activities.

b. Factors Influencing Engagement

Rahmah et al. (2020) state that there are five factors that can influence student engagement. These include relationship with teachers, relationship with peers and classmates, self-efficacy, academic self-regulated learning, and motivation and interest in learning.

2.3 Small Group Discussion

a. Definition of Small Group Discussion

Arends (1997) defines discussion as a form of process in which people communicate and exchange ideas and opinions. Discussions can just take place within the group, and they cannot be thoroughly examined unless the idea of a team is considered (Gulley, 1960). A group, according to Homans (in Gulley, 1960), is a set of individuals who interact with each other, typically for long durations, and who are few enough that every member can interact with everyone else face to face, rather than through other people. According to Sanchez (2009), a small group has at least three members and no more than fifteen members. According to these theories, the sharing of knowledge, opinions, and thoughts among all members of a group of at least three or five people in terms of problem solving that develop throughout the learning process is referred to as small group discussion.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by using descriptive qualitative research. The source of data was 25 students of grade VIII at SMP Al-Wasliyah 8 Medan. The data of this study were the students' answers of questionnaire about their perceptions of their engagement in small group discussions and interview transcript of the students conducted by the researcher. In this study, the researcher collected the data by using questionnaire sheet and an interview guideline. The questionnaire analysis in this study was done numerically. The researcher counted the number of ticks from each degree of agreement for the closed-ended questions. The researcher then converted the data into percentages and interpreted them. The interview analysis was obtained by compiling all of the interview results. The interview results were then analyzed by summarizing the interview questions' responses.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Students' Perceptions on Their Engagement in Small Group Discussion

The researcher distributed questionnaire consisting 14 statements that describe students' perceptions on their engagement in small group discussion to 25 students. It was found that the students perceive their engagement in small group discussion positively. Most of the students believed that they satisfied with their engagement in small group discussion. The students felt that they participated well in group discussion in order to develop their English skills and were motivated to get engaged in small group discussion. They felt good about their engagement in small group discussion. They perceived that they have followed all activities in group discussion and given their best effort. Moreover, the students were self-assured enough to participate in the group discussion.

4.2 The Factors that Influence the Students' Engagement in Small Group Discussion

From the result of the interview, the factors that influenced the students in engaging in small group discussion were students' relationship with teachers, relationship with peers and classmates, students' self-efficacy, students' self-regulated learning, and students' interest in learning. The students stated that their relationships with the teacher and their classmates improved as a result of small group discussions. Small group discussions also had an impact

on their self-efficacy by increasing their confidence. So do with their self-regulation and their interest to learn English. These factors then influenced the students in engaging in small group discussion.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of data revealed that the students of grade VIII SMP Al-Wasliyah 8 Medan perceive their engagement in small group discussion positively. The students believed that they satisfied with their engagement in small group discussion. The students felt that they participated well in group discussion in order to develop their English skills and were motivated to get engaged in small group discussion. They felt good about their engagement in small group discussion. They perceived that they have followed all activities in group discussion and given their best effort. Moreover, the students were self-assured enough to participate in the group discussion.

According to Coates (2005), the concept of student engagement is based on the constructivist assumption that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in purposeful activities in group discussion. The students agreed that they participate well in the group discussion and give their best efforts to improve their English. Rush and Balamoutsou (2006) adds that engaged students share the values and learning strategies, learn with others, actively explore ideas, and learn to respect others' opinions. When students are a part of a learning community, they focus on learning, ask questions in class, feel comfortable participating to class discussions, and are motivated to participate in classroom activities.

The study revealed by Yanse (2016) revealed the same result that the majority of the students had good perceptions of their engagement in small group discussion.

The factors that influenced the students' engagement in small group discussions were their relationships with teachers, relationships with peers and classmates, students' self-efficacy, students' self-regulated learning, and students' interest in learning, according to the interview results.

First, the students had a positive relationship with the teacher while learning in

group. It was demonstrated by the EFL teacher who desired to integrate with the students. Between the teacher and the students, there was no barrier. The teacher established a friendly environment in which the students could enjoy the class. The teacher was also kind to the students. She always asked the students if they were having any problems when she came to their table. According to the explanation, the researcher concluded that the active teacher played a critical role in encouraging student engagement. According to Martin and Dowson (2009), students feel connected to their teachers and safe at school when teachers are dependable sources of instrumental and emotional assistance at challenging moments.

Second, when studying through small group discussion, the EFL students had a positive relationship with their friends. It was evident from the students who were actively engaged in any discussion with their group mates. The students shared their thoughts while also listening to those of others. The students also indicated that they became closer to other students in the class during small group discussions since they had the opportunity to interact and solve challenges together. According to Furman and Buhrmester (1985), warmth is an important component of high-quality peer interactions as well as highly practical classroom settings. However, other students stated that the group member was the most important aspect influencing their engagement. If they had engaged friends in the group, they would be engaged as well since they would see and follow their friends' instructions. It was because the engaged friend's positive energy could motivate them to be more active.

Third, when the students were learning through small group discussion, they demonstrated functional self-efficacy. It was shown by students who found it is easier to understand the material because during the discussion they could ask their classmates if they had any questions. The students also claimed that in small group discussions, they discussed the assignment cooperatively in order to determine the best result. As a result, the students were more assured in answering every question without hesitation. According to Tyler and Boelter (2008), "self-efficacy is the perceived ability to learn and perform a task or sequence of behaviors at a defined, optimal level of performance". Furthermore, the students stated that learning English through small group discussions increased their

confidence.

Fourth, this study revealed that the students had good self-regulation in English learning through small group discussion. The students stated that they actively planned strategies to be the best group in class in order to achieve a high score in English. The students assigned responsibilities to each group member in order for the tasks to be completed as quickly as possible. They discussed their opinions and gained new knowledge from their friends while finishing the assignments. Furthermore, the students were active in asking the teacher questions if they were having difficulty. This is also supported by Rush and Balamoutsou (2006). They claim that engaged EFL students share the same values and attitudes to learning and teaching process. They also devote time and effort to educationally significant work, collaborate with others both in and out of the classroom, actively explore ideas effectively with others, and learn to value the viewpoints of others.

Fifth, the students were enthusiastic about learning English through small group discussions. For the students, having a discussion was a pleasant way to learn, and it encouraged them to participate actively in the classroom activity. Meanwhile, the other students said that engagement is the responsibility of everyone. It is in accordance with Harlen (2006) who says that personal interest evolves as a way of being over time when person experiences success and excitement in learning. This demonstrates that personal interest is an essential part in engaging learners in learning.

It has similarity with the previous study conducted by Rahmat et al. (2020). The study revealed the factors that motivate the students in engaging in small group discussion were because of the students' relationship with the teacher, the relationship with peers, the self-efficacy, the self-regulated learning, and the interest in learning.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the conclusions were stated as follows:

- a. The students perceive their engagement in small group discussion positively. The students felt that they could participate well in small group discussion and were motivated to engage. They found that they followed all the group discussion activities

and did their best effort. In addition, the students felt confident enough to express their opinions in the group discussion. This meant that they were not too shy to engage themselves in group discussion. Also, most of the students believed that being engaged in group discussion was useful for them as English students. It could help them develop their English skills.

- b. The students' relationship with teachers, relationship with peers and classmates, students' self-efficacy, students' self-regulated learning, and students' interest in learning were the factors that influenced the students in engaging themselves in small group discussion.

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