STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the gap in understanding how collaborative learning strategies support independent learning among high school students, specifically at SMA Negeri 7 Medan. The purpose of the research was to explore students' perceptions of collaborative learning within the context of independent English language learning. A qualitative case study design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture students' attitudes, challenges, and personal insights. The participants consisted of Senior High School students actively engaged in collaborative learning activities. Data were analyzed descriptively to identify key themes and patterns in students' responses. The findings reveal that students generally perceive collaborative learning as beneficial, enhancing their academic understanding, self-confidence, and communication skills while fostering social interaction and cooperation. However, challenges such as uneven participation and insufficient teacher facilitation were also noted. These results suggest that integrating collaborative strategies within independent learning can improve student engagement and outcomes if supported by effective instructional design. The study implies that educators should balance individual autonomy with structured collaboration to maximize learning benefits and recommends further research on teacher roles and cross-subject applications of collaborative learning.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, education has increasingly emphasized the importance of preparing students with skills that go beyond academic knowledge. Among these skills, the ability to work collaboratively and take charge of one's own learning has become crucial, especially in the context of 21st-century demands. Independent learning, which focuses on students' ability to take responsibility and initiative in their learning process, has been widely promoted as a way to develop learner autonomy and critical thinking. However, learning independently may also bring challenges such as isolation or a limited range of perspectives. To address these issues, collaborative learning strategies are seen as a valuable complement to independent learning. By working together in small groups, students can share ideas, offer feedback, and learn from each other in a supportive environment.

The integration of collaborative learning into independent learning environments is not simply a combination of two methods; it is a strategy that seeks to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes. According to Barkley et al. (2012), collaborative learning involves students working in small groups to solve problems and complete tasks collectively, rather than individually. This approach encourages communication, teamwork, and shared responsibility. Jacobs and Tan (2015) further explain that collaborative learning allows students to exchange information, ask questions, and clarify their understanding, which leads to deeper learning. When students are involved in such group activities, they are also developing essential social and cognitive skills that are useful in real-life settings.

At the same time, independent learning remains a core aspect of modern education. It refers to the process where learners manage their own learning goals, make decisions about resources, and monitor their progress. This learning model supports student autonomy and responsibility. However, for independent learning to be more effective, collaboration can be used as a tool to increase motivation, promote interaction, and reduce the feeling of isolation. Slavin (1995) and Johnson & Johnson (2002) highlight that the structured collaborative tasks lead to better academic achievement and stronger interpersonal skills, particularly when students feel positively connected to one another and accountable for their contributions.

Understanding students' perceptions is an important part of evaluating how well

collaborative strategies support independent learning. Perception, as described by Wood (2015), is an active and interpretative process through which individuals make sense of their experiences. Walgito (1990) adds that perception is influenced by internal factors such as emotions and prior experiences. In this context, exploring how students perceive collaborative learning in relation to their independent study habits helps educators understand what works well and what challenges may arise.

This study focuses on senior high school students in Medan and seeks to explore their views on how collaborative learning strategies support their independent learning in English language classes. It aims to investigate what students think about the integration of these two approaches, how they experience both benefits and difficulties, and what improvements might be made in practice. By connecting theoretical insights with real classroom experiences, this research hopes to contribute to the development of more effective and student-centered learning environments that balance independence with collaboration.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore students' perspectives on the use of collaborative strategies in supporting independent learning at SMA Negeri 7 Medan. The case study approach was chosen to focus on real-life learning situations within the school environment, allowing the researcher to consider the social and educational contexts that influence student interactions. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, which served as the main research instrument. The questionnaire was designed based on relevant theories and previous studies on collaborative and independent learning. It included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather a range of responses. The closed-ended items used a Likert scale to measure students' attitudes, frequency of participation, perceived benefits, challenges, and level of independence during collaborative activities. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions allowed students to express their opinions, share experiences, and provide suggestions in their own words, offering richer insights into their perspectives. The questionnaire was reviewed by educational experts to ensure its validity and clarity, and a small pilot test was conducted to refine the items based on student feedback. Data from the responses were analyzed descriptively to identify common themes, patterns, and

variations in students' views. This method allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how collaborative learning strategies are perceived and experienced by students within an independent learning framework.
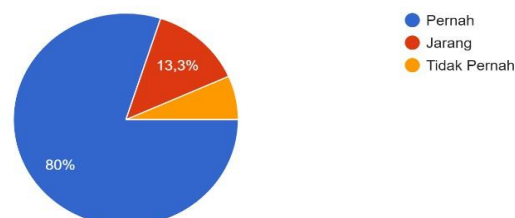
RESULTS

The research question in question is related to students' perspective on the independent learning strategy in SMA Negeri 7 Medan. The results were obtained through questionnaires, both closed-ended questions and open- ended questions obtained from students of SMA Negeri 7 Medan.

The questionnaires used, both closed-ended questions and open-ended questions, have a total of 14 questions with a total of 15 subjects filling them in. The results that have been obtained are displayed through a pie chart that contains the percentage of answers of each question given. After knowing the results, the researcher will interpret the results based on the percentage of the close-ended question and the answer of the open-ended question.

Chart. 4.1

1. Seberapa banyak kamu terlibat dalam collaborative learning?
15 jawaban

The first question in the study was *"How much are you involved in collaborative learning?"*. The results show that a total of 80% of students have contributed to collaborative learning. Furthermore, the results showed that 13.3% of students rarely engaged in collaborative learning and as many as 6.7% of students never engaged in collaborative learning.
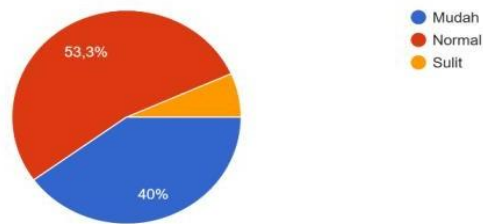
Chart. 4.2

The second question in the study is *"How easy or difficult is learning in collaborative learning?"*. The results showed that a total of 53.3% of students considered learning in collaborative learning to be not too easy or difficult. Furthermore, the results showed that 40% of students found it easy to learn in collaborative learning and as many as 6.7% of students found it difficult to learn in collaborative learning.

Picture. 4.1

The third question in the research is in the form of an open-ended question *"Why do you think learning in collaborative learning is easy or difficult?".* The results obtained have a variety of answers such as collaborative learning is easy because there is a possibility to explore and practice cooperation, help each other, exchange ideas, and provide opportunities for students to think.
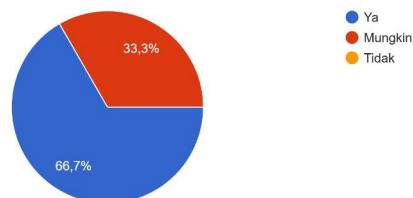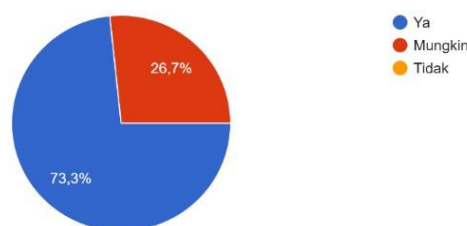

Chart. 4.3

The fourth question in the study was "*Does collaborative learning improve your understanding of a topic?*". The results showed that a total of 66.7% of students considered collaborative learning to improve their understanding of a learning topic. Furthermore, as many as 33.3% of students felt doubtful whether collaborative learning was able to improve understanding of a topic. Finally, none of the students considered that collaborative learning did not improve their understanding of a topic.

Chart. 4.4

5. Apakah collaborative learning meningkatkan kemampuanmu dalam menyampaikan opini?
15 jawaban

- Ya
- Mungkin
- Tidak

26,7%

73,3%

The fifth question in the study is "*Does collaborative learning improve your ability to express opinions?*". The results showed that a total of 73.3% of students thought collaborative learning could improve their ability to express opinions. Furthermore, as many as 26.7% of students doubted whether collaborative learning could improve their ability to express opinions. Finally, none of the students considered that collaborative learning did not improve the ability to express opinions.

Chart. 4.5

6. Apakah collaborative learning meningkatkan kepercayaan terhadap diri sendiri?
15 jawaban

- Ya
- Mungkin
- Tidak

33,3%

60%
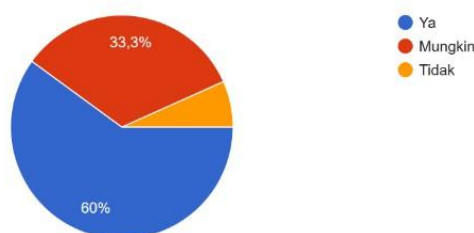
The sixth question in the study is "*Does collaborative learning increase self-confidence?*". The results showed that a total of 60% of students thought collaborative learning could increase self-confidence. Furthermore, as many as 33.3% of students felt

doubtful whether collaborative learning could increase self-confidence. Then, as many as 6.7% of students considered that collaborative learning could not increase self-confidence.

Chart. 4.6

7. Apakah collaborative learning membuatmu mampu menghargai pendapat murid lain?
15 jawaban

- Ya
- Mungkin
- Tidak

93,3%
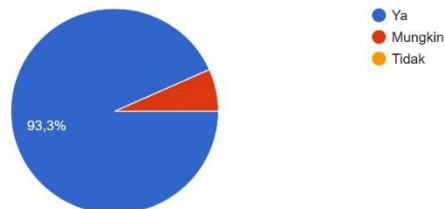
The seventh question in the study is *"Does collaborative learning make you able to appreciate the opinions of other students?"*. The results showed that a total of 93.3% of students thought that collaborative learning could improve the ability to respect the opinions of other students. On the other hand, 6.7% of students felt doubtful whether collaborative learning could improve the ability to appreciate the opinions of other students. Lastly, none of the students considered that collaborative learning was not able to improve the ability to appreciate other students.

Picture. 4.2

8. Menurutmu, apakah semua pelajaran dapat dilakukan secara collaborative dengan murid lain?

The eighth question in the study was in the form of an open-ended question *"Do you think all lessons can be done collaboratively with other students?"*. The results obtained have various variations of answers such as all subjects can be done collaboartive because they can understand each other who have different opinions. However, the results obtained showed that many students did not agree with the question. Their answers are supported by several reasons such as not all subjects are suitable for collaborative learning such as science subjects and are more suitable for social subjects, materials that are more effective are studied individually, and each subject has its own goals, materials, and needs.

Picture. 4.3

9. Menurutmu, apakah semua guru dapat menerapkan collaborative learning dengan baik?

The ninth question in the study is in the form of an open-ended question *"Do you think all teachers can implement collaborative learning well?"*. The results obtained have various variations of answers such as all teachers can apply because they only need to direct students into groups. However, the results showed that many students did not agree with the question. Their answers were supported by several reasons such as students also playing a role in the success of the implementation of collaborative learning, teachers who did not monitor and asked for collaborative learning because they wanted to rest, the need for special skills in managing cooperation and group dynamics, and some teachers who discriminated against their students.

Picture. 4.4

10. Menurutmu, kenapa guru dapat atau tidak dapat menerapkan collaborative learning dengan baik?

The tenth question in the research is in the form of an open-ended question *"Why do you think teachers can or cannot implement collaborative learning well?"*. The results obtained have various variations of answers such as teachers cannot implement collaborative learning because students are used to doing work individually and the emergence of distrust in the environment, teachers' difficulties in building trust between students, teachers who do not know what collaborative learning is, teachers who rarely apply collaborative learning, lack of experience, teachers do not monitor activities, Teachers have not been able to manage the classroom, and students who cannot be invited to work together.

Picture. 4.5

11. Menurutmu, peran apa saja yang harus dimiliki oleh setiap anggota kelompok?

The eleventh question in the study is in the form of an open-ended question *"What do you think each group member should have?"*. The results obtained have various variations of answers such as in the group there must be those who have roles as chairs, scribes, and voicers, presenters, material writers, and readers of the material, answer seekers, opinions, and explanations of the material.

12. Seberapa mudah atau sulit kelompokmu bisa diajak kerja sama untuk menyelesaikan tugas?
15 jawaban
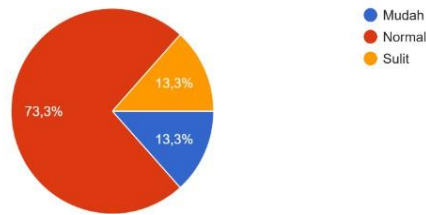
The twelfth question in the study was *"How difficult or difficult is it for your group to work together to complete the task?"*. The results showed that a total of 73.3% of students considered the invitation to cooperate in groups to complete tasks within normal limits.

Furthermore, as many as 13.3% of students found the invitation to cooperate in a group to complete a task difficult to do and as many as 13.3% of students considered the invitation to cooperate in a group to complete a task easy to do.

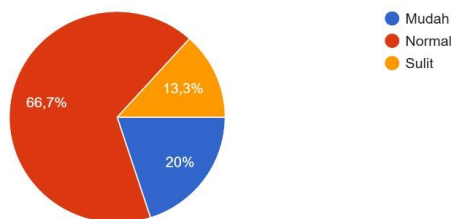13. Seberapa mudah atau sulit kelompokmu menyampaikan opini ketika berdiskusi?
15 jawaban

Chart. 4.8

The thirteenth question in the study was *"How easy or difficult is it for your group to express opinions when discussing?"*. The results showed that a total of 66.7% of students considered it normal for their group to express their opinions when discussing. Furthermore, as many as 20% of students found it difficult for their group to express their opinions when discussing and as many as 13.3% of students found it difficult for their group to express their opinions when discussing.

Picture. 4.6

14. Menurutmu, kenapa kelompokmu mudah atau sulit dalam menyampaikan opini?

The fourteenth question is in the form of an open-ended question *"Why do you think your group is mudh or difficult to express opinions?"*. The results obtained have a variety of answers such as group members can express opinions easily because of good public speaking, easy to understand, mutual respect and openness, and already know each other. However, some students find it difficult for their group members to express their opinions due to ego, lack of confidence, lack of trust in others, self-resentment, pressure, rarely forming groups, fear of being wrong, unheard opinions, lack of involvement between students, and differences in family and educational conditions.

Based on the findings of the questionnaire, the majority of students showed a positive perception of collaborative learning strategies in supporting independent learning. For example, 80% of students felt actively involved in collaborative learning and 73.3% felt that this activity improved their ability to express opinions. Most students also stated that collaborative learning made them appreciate their friends' opinions more and increased their self-confidence. This reflects a positive perception as explained by Ahmadi (1999), namely the acceptance and recognition of perceived objects and actions that show agreement with applicable norms. Student responses show that they not only understand the benefits of collaborative learning, but are also willing to apply them actively, which is a characteristic of positive perception. This positive perception arises because students feel that there is social support, meaningful interaction, and a sense of mutual need in the group.

Based on the questionnaire, students also mentioned various advantages of collaborative learning strategies, such as improving understanding of the material, providing opportunities for exchanging ideas, strengthening cooperation, and developing self- confidence. As stated in Picture 4.1 and Chart 4.4–4.6, students felt that this activity provided space for exploration of ideas and greater involvement in the learning process. They also considered that by working together, each group member could help each other and understand the material more effectively. This strengthens the theory of Barkley et al. (2012) and Johnson & Johnson (2002) which emphasize the importance of social support, individual responsibility, and active involvement in collaborative learning as a means of increasing learning independence. However, students also noted several limitations and challenges in its implementation. In Picture 4.2–4.4, some students mentioned that not all subjects are suitable for collaborative learning, especially exact subjects. They also mentioned that some teachers were unable to manage collaborative learning well due to

lack of skills or motivation. Other challenges include difficulty in unifying opinions, dominance of certain members, lack of trust, to ego and disengagement of some students. This reflects the weaknesses as mentioned by Mustopa & Rama (2024), namely the complexity of group management, the longer time required, and the inequality of contributions between members. Even so, students still showed readiness to overcome these challenges, indicating the positive potential of this strategy if well designed and facilitated.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study reveal that most students at SMA Negeri 7 Medan view collaborative learning as a helpful strategy in supporting independent learning. Their responses indicate a strong engagement with collaboration, with 80% actively participating in group activities and 73.3% acknowledging that these interactions enhanced their ability to express opinions. Additionally, many students reported improved understanding of the subject matter (66.7%) and increased self-confidence (60%) through collaborative experiences. These findings highlight that the students are not only aware of the benefits of collaborative learning but are also experiencing meaningful cognitive and personal growth as a result. Importantly, students expressed that collaborative learning encourages the exchange of ideas, teamwork, and mutual respect reflecting the social nature of learning emphasized in constructivist educational theories. Their ability to assess when collaboration is appropriate such as preferring group work in humanities but individual work in sciences demonstrates a mature, context-aware approach to learning. These insights align with existing research, such as the work of Haerun Nisa et al. (2023), which found that collaborative learning enhances higher-order thinking skills in line with the goals of the independent curriculum. Similarly, Fatima et al. (2024) noted that collaboration boosts participation and idea sharing, a pattern echoed in this study as students valued the opportunity to engage and contribute during group tasks. The findings also support Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, emphasizing that learning is deeply influenced by social interaction. Studies like those by Abulhassan and Hamid (2021) and Aini et al. (2022) confirm that collaboration not only improves language acquisition but also reduces anxiety, an effect reflected in the increased confidence reported by students in this study. Moreover, parallels can be drawn with research by Zaka et al. (2019), who

observed positive student reactions to collaborative learning in flipped classrooms, where a balance of autonomy and group work was appreciated. These shared insights across studies suggest that integrating collaboration into independent learning models leads to a more effective, student-centered learning environment. The significance of these findings lies in their practical implications for teaching and curriculum development. First, they suggest that collaborative learning is not in conflict with independence but rather supports it by providing social structures that reinforce student autonomy. Second, teachers and curriculum planners should purposefully include collaborative elements in independent learning settings such as peer-led discussions and group tasks to promote active engagement and the development of critical soft skills.

Lastly, the challenges identified by students, such as uneven participation and lack of teacher support, point to the need for professional development that equips educators with strategies for managing collaborative activities effectively. By addressing these concerns, schools can better harness the benefits of collaboration to enhance both academic achievement and student growth in 21st-century learning environments.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that collaborative learning plays a crucial role in supporting independent learning among students at SMA Negeri 7 Medan. The integration of collaborative strategies enhances students' academic understanding, communication skills, and self-confidence, demonstrating that independence in learning benefits greatly from social interaction and peer support. However, the research also revealed challenges such as unequal participation and the need for more effective teacher facilitation, which can limit the full potential of collaborative learning. These limitations suggest that while collaborative learning is valuable, it requires careful planning and guidance to be successful. Future research is recommended to explore how teachers can best support collaborative activities and how these strategies might be adapted across different subjects and educational contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insight into the long-term effects of combining collaborative and independent learning on student outcomes. Overall, this study highlights the importance of balancing autonomy with collaboration to prepare learners for the complex demands of the modern world.

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