

ENCOMPASSING HIGH-PROFICIENT STUDENTS IN HELPING LOW-PROFICIENT STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH IN INDONESIAN ENGLISH PRIMARY CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

Copland et al. (2014) report that a large number of teachers deal with students at various phases of learning and with diverse individual requirements; students are frequently viewed as weak in language learning. This paper tries to find out the answer to how can teachers involve the high-proficient students in supporting low-proficient students in Indonesian English primary classes? The investigation of this topic can provide English teachers with strategies for encouraging student interactions between students of varying English proficiency levels. In addition, it provides a variety of techniques for maximizing the English learning experience for pupils of varying proficiency levels. In this paper, it is argued that incorporating positive interaction throughout the learning process is beneficial for the support of low-proficient students by high-proficient students in Indonesian English primary classes. Some of the ways it can be achieved is through peer learning, cooperative learning, and digital learning, among other methods. Our curriculum may require consideration of positive student interaction and the inclusion of materials on incorporating positive student interaction in English language learning through various Teacher Professional Development program methodologies. Additionally, Elementary English teachers in Indonesia should master teaching techniques that integrate positive student interactions.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching, Different Proficiencies, Elementary School English*

INTRODUCTION

It is common for students in an English classroom to have varying levels of English proficiency. Some students attend private English language classes outside of school as one of the contributing factors (Copland et al., 2014). This is also the case with some students in Indonesia. Being comprised of pupils of varying English proficiency is either a boon or a curse. If English teachers do not consider this, it is likely that students with high English proficiency will continue to improve while students with low English proficiency will remain at their current level of English proficiency. In addition, according to Barrow and Markman-Pithers (2016), children with inadequate English skills are less likely to flourish in school and beyond. This statement is somehow true and is also pertinent to Indonesian students. We now live in an age of inevitable globalisation and English is the

language of most of its processes. If students do not master English, there is a possibility that they will be unable to acclimatise to a rapidly changing globalised world and continue to fall behind.

In English Proficiency Index Ranking data (2019), English First placed Indonesia on 61st place with a score of 50.09, placing it far behind its neighbors (Singapore at the 5th place and the Philippines at the 20th place). This finding demonstrates how far behind Indonesia is in English Proficiency. As school is the primary source of English instruction for most Indonesians, it is essential that we examine how we can enhance our English from a school perspective (Copland et al., 2014). A large number of teachers work with students at various stages of learning and with diverse individual needs, and students are frequently viewed as weak in language acquisition. Therefore, it is essential to accommodate the various developmental stages of children in order to maximise language learning benefits. It is such a productive environment for primary pupils if they can learn in harmony despite having varying levels of English proficiency. Regarding this, the purpose of this paper is to answer the question, "How can teachers involve high-proficient students in supporting low-proficient students in Indonesian English primary classes?" Simply put, the query will be how students with varying levels of English proficiency can collaborate to improve their learning experience and outcomes.

The findings may be significant because it provides elementary school English teachers with methods for incorporating student interactions into lessons, particularly interactions between students with varying English proficiency. The investigation may also aid English instructors in employing appropriate pedagogies to maximise the English learning experience for students of varying proficiency levels and in accommodating the students' varying levels of proficiency.

In this essay, I will contend that high-proficient students supporting low-proficient students in Indonesian English primary classes can benefit from positive interaction throughout the learning process. It is essential to remember that positive interaction benefits students of all proficiency levels. This essay, however, focuses on how it benefits students with limited English proficiency. I will begin by discussing and analysing three major themes where interaction between students of

varying proficiency levels can occur. The discussion and implications for practise, policy, and research will then follow.

Before continuing on to the next section of the article, it is necessary to define certain terms. First, proficiency is defined as "the ability to use language in real-world situations in a spontaneous interaction and non-rehearsed context in a manner acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language" (ACTFL, 2012). Commonly, proficiency is measured by a score. In my experience, 75 out of 100 is the most common passing grade for students. Second, because this article is intended for Indonesian contexts, it is necessary to learn English with an emphasis on the Indonesian term. In Indonesian primary institutions, the Ministry of Education and Culture requires the teaching of three languages, one of which is English as a foreign language. In a 40-week academic year, English is taught for 46.67 hours, or up to 2 times 35 minutes (70 minutes) per week (Zein, 2017). Thirdly, because this investigation depends on student interaction, particularly peer interaction, it is necessary to define peer tutoring. Peer tutoring, according to Topping (2005), as cited by Korner and Hopf (2014), "involves people from similar social groups who are not professional teachers helping each other learn and learning themselves in the process" (p.1041). Fourthly, the results of the students' English instruction as measured by their oral and written literacy. It includes both transactional and interpersonal exchanges in oral communication (ACSF, 2012). Written literacy is characterised by a set of skills, knowledge, and strategies related to the ability to shape written language in accordance with purpose, audience, and context (ACFS, 2012).

METHOD

In the course of this investigation, database searches were conducted. Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) was the principal database used. The search was restricted to articles published after 2010. Several keywords, including "student interaction AND Indonesia," "peer learning in elementary English," "digital learning AND interaction," and a few other pertinent keywords, were utilised. There were numerous articles from diverse contexts. The irrelevant ones were eliminated, and the relevant ones were selected. Additionally, references

from outside the database were involved. Three major themes were derived from the search: peer learning, cooperative learning, and digital learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Peer Learning: The Involvement of Friends in Learning

Peer learning is one of the most prevalent methods in Indonesia for accommodating students to work together on a task or for incorporating students' varying levels of comprehension. In my experience as a student, there was one English instructor who administered a pre-semester examination. The pre-test score was used to form groupings, with each group containing at least one high achiever and three low achievers. Various duties were assigned to the groups for the remainder of the semester. However, I also have had a greater number of encounters in which teachers tended to organise students arbitrarily and without consideration. They would only assign pupils to one group or arbitrarily divide the class into groups of four, five, or six without proper consideration. My first experience illustrates more effectively how peer learning should be integrated. This paper will concentrate more on a heterogeneous group of students in a single class.

Peer learning is highly dependent on student interaction. Without interaction, it would be nearly impossible for the learning process to proceed. Since groups of students are typically comprised of students with varying levels of proficiency, there is a chance that some students may not feel secure being less proficient than their peers. This occurs in English classes as well. Elementary students are more likely to experience anxiety when (1) they believe their peers perform better in English than they do, (2) they are called upon to speak in English, and (3) they believe they will be left behind; however, interaction with others can help reduce feelings of frustration or anxiety regarding limited performance or fear of negative evaluation (Liu & Chen, 2014). Even though this study was conducted in Taiwan, the findings are pertinent to elementary schools in Indonesia. In Indonesia, elementary students are comparable to those described in the study, particularly the difficulty faced by low-proficient students when placed in groups, notably those with high-proficient students.

As with peer-to-peer learning, peer-to-peer tutoring benefits from positive interactions. Marieswari and Perma (2016) investigate whether tutors' and mentees'

achievement indicators improved as a result of the peer tutoring process. Both tutors and tutees in the experimental group showed a significant improvement in learning once obtaining the content through peer tutoring, paralleled to the control group students who were taught in a usual manner. In addition, the study demonstrates that the tutoring method of instruction produces exceptional results in the tutoring procedure. The findings of this investigation are encouraging. It appears that students are more comfortable learning from one another than from their instructor. This does not imply that instructors are poor educators. However, it is also crucial to consider the students' level of comfort with English instruction. Even though the context of the study is India, there are similarities in the students' general conditions, such as their varying levels of proficiency and the ways in which instructors can make students feel uncomfortable during classroom instruction.

Assessment is an integral component of learning. It measures the extent to which students have mastered the desired learning outcomes. Peers can also be involved in assessment. Studies have demonstrated that it can have positive effects. According to a study by Hung et al. (2016), students agreed that peer assessment benefited their English learning, helped them comprehend instructors' expectations, and enhanced their oral presentation skills. In this study, students learned English indirectly by observing the performance of their peers and assigning scores as assessors, as opposed to directly. In addition to self-assessment, Harrison et al. (2015) argue that peer assessment should be taught from an early age. Through self- and peer-assessment, the skills of being critical, creative thinkers, effective communicators, and collaborative team employees are developed in a personal, productive, and efficient manner, they added. Despite the fact that the contexts of both of these studies are distinct from Indonesia, these findings are applicable to its English pedagogy. Indirectly, they will spark interaction among the students, and the students will learn English in a manner other than the traditional one.

All of the aforementioned study findings pertaining to peer involvement appear applicable to the Indonesian context. In the preceding, Liu and Chen (2014) describe the difficulties Taiwanese elementary students had with peer learning and how interactions between peers can aid in overcoming these obstacles. However, it may be challenging for English teachers in Indonesia to motivate students with

limited proficiency to participate in group activities. As Liu and Chen note, the high achievers may 'intimidate' the low achievers to the point where they remain mute in the group. According to Marieswari and Perma's (2016) study, elementary students feel more secure learning with their peers than with their teachers. It is essential that teachers have the ability to make students feel at ease when learning English. In addition, peer assessment is not widely utilised in Indonesia. Therefore, the implementation may require some time to be executed properly.

Indonesian English teachers are one of the most important factors for implementing the aforementioned findings in the context of Indonesia. Consequently, later in the implications of this study, some actions that elementary English teachers can take will be outlined. Different contexts may influence the implementation in some manner; for instance, the composition of the students and the total number of students in a classroom may not be identical. The number of pupils will logically affect the implementation mechanism if there are too few or too many. In the context of Indonesia, particularly in rural areas, classrooms may contain more than fifty students. Managing the implementation of peer learning will undoubtedly be a major task for teachers.

Maximizing Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a well-known instructional method in Indonesia. The government has supported the application of cooperative learning since the issue of the Process Standard of Primary and Secondary Education in Decree of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 41 Year 2007 for the 2006 curriculum (Astuti, 2016). Despite the fact that numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of implementing cooperative learning, its implementation in Indonesia is not yet well-established. Astuti (2016) contends that hegemony may be the reason why inexperienced instructors in Indonesia do not implement cooperative learning. In addition, she mentioned the absence of a community of cooperative learning practitioners. This investigation presents studies that demonstrate how cooperative learning precludes positive outcomes despite these limitations.

As students are placed in groups for cooperative learning, interactions are expected during group activities. There can be both high and low achievers within

the same group. Chia-Ling and Ya-Fung (2017) argue that the cooperative learning strategy is appropriate for both high-achieving and low-achieving students based on their learning attitudes. This means that cooperative learning does not affect the achievement of pupils from either group because both groups demonstrated the same learning attitude. Teachers should therefore not hesitate to implement cooperative learning.

Murtono (2015) argues that there are interrelationships between the use of cooperative learning models and language logic ability in determining reading ability. In this Indonesian context study, the CIRC, STAD, and Jigsaw methods of cooperative learning were examined. Reading ability is affected differently by all three methods. In other words, the results of this study suggest that the use of cooperative learning methods to improve students' literacy skills is advantageous. Thus, student interaction appeared during cooperative learning activities.

Problem-based learning is one of the cooperative learning strategies. Chen and Chang (2014) assert that "a critical issue in cooperative PBL environments is that learners frequently cannot seek out appropriate learning partners to conduct effective cooperation or interaction learning due to incomplete social interaction and individual characteristics information" (p.98). Moreover, as they note, investigating the social rank of individual learners in the cooperative PBL environment encourages learners to engage in more active peer interactions.

However, Chan (2014) contends in his Hong Kong-based study that students' perceptions of cooperative learning were generally positive, although it was complemented by emerging difficulties in working together, which led to disagreements, feelings of being ignored, and frustration. According to him, the cause could be the disequilibrium of power structure caused by heterogeneous aggregation in cooperative learning. In addition, Ghufhron and Ermawati (2018) asserts that cooperative learning (1) requires significantly more time to implement, (2) requires the active participation of both students and teachers, (3) is difficult to manage, and (4) requires more preparation. These two findings must be considered as a counter to the implementation of cooperative learning. In accordance with the findings of peer learning, instructors must ensure that students are comfortable in

heterogeneous groups prior to implementing peer learning in the Indonesian context.

Digital Learning and Peer Involvement

The advent of the digital age has had a profound impact on numerous aspects of life, including education. Numerous educational digital platforms exist today to aid students' digital learning. In language learning settings, a wide range of technologies have been incorporated to enhance the learning of students with varying proficiency levels and to increase student engagement in order to minimize the challenge of proficiency differences (Huang et al., 2017). Several studies have demonstrated the advantages of student interaction in relation to the use of digital platforms. In one of the studies, Danby et al. (2018) found that when children give instructions and monitor each other's activities, it fosters problem-solving and collaborative peer cultures that result in the sharing of knowledge and objectives. It was also discovered that through digital games, children collaborated to solve problems that required considering each other's perspectives into consideration and knowledge sharing.

Digital storytelling is an additional form of digital language acquisition in English. Numerous studies have examined the role of digital narrative. Yamac and Ulusoy (2016) assert that digital storytelling fosters a learning community by enhancing student interactions and boosting their writing motivation. Huang et al. (2017) examined how pairs of students with various language proficiency levels engaged in EFL collaborative digital storytelling activities, as well as their engagement pattern, language learning strategies, and storytelling performance. It has been discovered that pairs with one pupil of high proficiency perform well. This study demonstrates how integrating students with varying levels of language proficiency can benefit those with limited English proficiency. Liu et al. (2018) demonstrate that, in general, the results of a digital narrative performance task on language learning indicate that students who worked collaboratively performed better than those who worked individually, especially in terms of their knowledge test scores and scores for autonomous learning. Moslem and Abbas (2018) investigate the effect of the immersive multimedia learning strategy on peer support in reading and speaking production skills. It is fascinating to note that the results of

this study indicate that low achievers benefit from this approach, particularly in terms of their oral English proficiency improvement. These results indicate that, when working in groups, students increased their interaction in discussing or developing concepts, which has positive effects on multiple dimensions.

Despite positive results, there are a few aspects to consider from the findings. The majority of studies involve a limited number of participants. A larger number of participants may produce distinct results. The implementation in various contexts and with a larger number of students is subsequently questionable. Different contexts may have an impact on future implementation, especially in Indonesian contexts. For example, the investigation conducted by Moslem and Abbas (2018) focused on college students. Implementing the study with elementary school pupils may produce distinct results.

Discussion

Tamah (2017) argues that the cognitive development of students is a consequence of their social activity. Therefore, it is essential to consider the social interaction of students in addition to the content of the learning. Students' English and social interaction skills improved significantly as a result of their interactions with one another, as did their proficiency in the English language. Interaction between language learners is a characteristic shared by peer learning, cooperative learning, and digital learning, as revealed by this research.

As the lack of cooperative learning implementation in Indonesia is revealed in this essay, it is unfortunate that English instructors in Indonesia revert to the traditional teacher-centered method of instruction. Referring to Tamah's (2017) statement, it can be inferred that the cognitive development of the students is not optimal. Therefore, elementary English teachers in Indonesia should be able to implement student-centered teaching strategies, particularly those involving positive student interaction.

Looking back at how the Indonesian government allocates hours for English lesson in elementary schools at the outset of the article, it is clear that the amount is inadequate. Seventy minutes per week does not appear sufficient to learn English. However, if the lesson is meticulously and thoughtfully planned, Indonesian

primary English teachers might still be able to provide their students with a beneficial learning environment.

Digital education is generally underutilised in Indonesia. Particularly in rural areas, very little infrastructure exists to facilitate digital learning. As the nation develops, these findings can serve as a guide for incorporating digital learning into enhancing students' proficiency and promoting positive student interaction.

Although there are limitations in this literature study, it should not be viewed as a detriment to the positive results. Using these findings can assist English teachers in designing a novel learning environment for students with varying proficiency levels. Given the diverse backgrounds and English proficiency levels of Indonesia's elementary students, the teacher can implement these findings to their pedagogy and achieve the same positive results.

Implication

This paper generates several implications. First is for the Indonesian policymakers. By modifying the current English curriculum, it would be advantageous for students if more emphasis was placed on positive student interaction. It would be extremely beneficial if the government's Teacher Professional Development Programme include materials on incorporating positive student interaction into English language learning via a variety of methods. The second implication is for practise, specifically for English teachers in Indonesia. Teachers of English in Indonesia should implement instructional strategies that encourage positive student interactions. Implementation obstacles may arise, but it is the responsibility of English instructors to maximise the students' potential. The conclusion is the implication for future research. There are few studies on positive student interactions in the Indonesian context, particularly in English Language Teaching. Regarding how promising the studies on various contexts are, research in Indonesian contexts may provide different insights based on the characteristics of Indonesian students compared to research in other contexts.

CONCLUSION

According to Huang et al., (2017), "English proficiency difference among students is a challenging pedagogical issue in EFL classrooms worldwide" (p.95).

Due to the global nature of the problem, this diverse proficiency should not be taken for granted. The various English proficiency levels of students should be taken into account and utilised as an opportunity to enhance learning for all students. The results of this study indicate that the involvement of peers has many positive effects.. Although there may be challenges and limitations in applying some of the findings of this study in Indonesia, particularly digital learning, the previous findings are quite assuring, and if they are applied well and reinforced by all key factors, they may develop the pedagogy of English learning in primary schools in Indonesia. Eventually, it may aid in improving Indonesia's English Proficiency Index ranking, and more importantly, a good English learning for all proficiency level in elementary schools in Indonesia.

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