

## Students' Cognitive Perspective on The Implementation of Cooperative Learning in an Indonesian EFL Classroom

<sup>1</sup>Nida Fauziah, <sup>2</sup>Arini Nurul Hidayati, <sup>3</sup>Nita Sari Narulita Dewi, <sup>4</sup>Fuad Abdullah  
<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Universitas Siliwangi

Corresponding e-Mail: [thissnida@gmail.com](mailto:thissnida@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning is a method in which students with different learning abilities are conditioned to work together to achieve the same learning goals and maximize their learning process. This study aims to explore the cognitive perspectives of students in their experience when learning English in the classroom using the cooperative learning method. The data collection technique used was semi-structured interviews conducted on three students as participants in this study. The data was processed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The findings of this study indicate positive perspectives based on students' learning experiences using cooperative learning methods. For example, students can find partners who can support and increase the effectiveness of learning English and the emergence of responsibilities in learning achievement.

**Keywords:** *cognitive perspective, cooperative learning, EFL.*

### INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning (hereafter CL) refers to a variety of learning methods where students with different learning abilities work together in small groups to enhance better in the classroom and to accomplish their shared learning goals as the core of learning and teaching activities (Tran et al. et al., 2019; Setiawan & Ismaniati, 2018). CL is also described as an educational methodology based on a small group of heterogeneous students who work together (Canabate et al., 2019). Gathering heterogeneous students in one group can encourage their interpersonal relationships with other students. The discussion in the group stimulates their trust and confidence, and elaboration on how they share ideas, ask some questions, add some explanations, and give some reasons. All of this is tied to cooperation. It is also supported by Johnson and Johnson (2011) that in cooperative learning, students of each group must have the trust that they have the same learning goals or shared goals. Cooperative learning is believed to benefit and positively impact teachers and students (Saborit et al., 2016; Surian & Damini, 2014; Kyndt et al., 2013)

Hsiung's (2012) study supported the idea that cooperative learning could promote more effective learning conditions than individualistic learning. Adequate learning conditions could be shown as the students are engaged and attacked with material or tasks and focus on learning and accomplishing it with their group members. It means each student can fulfil their needs and accomplish their

learning goals. Whereas in the EFL context, the need or the goal is to utilize the use of English as the target language, Astuti and Lammers (2017) brought the good news that their study showed cooperative learning has a significant contribution in promoting second and foreign languages. CL tends to bring significant benefits to help EFL learners accomplish their learning goals by allowing them to elaborate on their knowledge and use the target language through group discussion. The study by Gudinge (2018) shows that cooperative learning puts the teacher and students into a joyful atmosphere during the learning-teaching process and promotes motivation. In addition, cooperative learning helps the teacher apply the appropriate method in managing classroom activity. Recognizing the types of learners or students is a good thing to do for teachers before starting the lesson.

Since CL is a beneficial and essential method in students' learning, CL is close to the cognitive view of learning, which provides more opportunities for students to build up and evaluate their knowledge (Yassin et al., 2018). It is also supported by Casey and Goodyear (2016) that cooperative learning can help learners achieve the four primary learning outcomes: cognitive, social, affective and physical. In cooperative learning, students are supported in expressing their knowledge. Thus, they can share information with others and receive new information from others, which is the basis of CL in supporting students in building their knowledge. It is also included in CL essential elements that Johnson and Johnson (2011) formed. CL assists promotive interaction, which occurs when students share information, help, support, encourage, and praise each other. The process stimulated the students to gain meaningful knowledge and information as learning goals or outcomes. For those reasons, CL is convincing and proven to have a significant role in enhancing students' learning outcomes, disclosing vast opportunities for students to build their knowledge through intense interaction.

Related to several studies showing that CL significantly affects students' learning, the present research intends to participate in its field. Even though many relevant studies conducted on CL show favourable results, they still get little scholarly attention on revealing how the CL method works (Astuti & Lammers, 2017). The motive of the present study is to raise the phenomena of cooperative learning in the context of EFL in secondary school students. The present study intends to explore the students' cognitive perspective on cooperative learning implementation in EFL classrooms. The cognitive perspective itself refers to the way students build their knowledge through the interaction in CL. It is a descriptive case study that focuses on describing the cognitive perspective of students on implementing cooperative learning in the classroom.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### *Cooperative Learning and Its Types*

Cooperative learning (CL) is the instructional use of small group of students where students can work together and utilize their own learning and also others' (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 2013). CL is also described as an educational methodology based on small group of heterogeneous students who work together (Canabate et al., 2019). Johnson and Johnson (2011) also stated that in cooperative learning, students of each group must have the trust that they have same learning goals or shared goals. So that, it can be concluded that cooperative

learning method gathers students into group in order to accomplish their goals by utilizing the cooperation in group.

Gudinge (2018) believes that cooperative learning is included into pedagogical method which the roots is from the sociocultural perspective. Vygotsky's theories (1896-1934) which developed perspective of learning claimed that learning is social event that takes places when people do the interaction to each other. That is the strong reason why Gudinge believed that Vygotsky's theories have formed and supported cooperative learning. Vygotsky's theory also believed that every individuals are unique learners and the social context where learning take places brings significant impacts for the learners (Gudinge, 2018 p. 8).

Regarding to the area of cooperative learning research, Johnson and Johnson also had give plenty contribution about the CL research. Despite of their plentiful studies about CL, Johnson and Johnson since 2009 set the basic elements or characteristic of cooperative learning through their research. The first formula is positive interdependence which refers to the condition when all the each members of the team can reach the learning goal can only be said that the team can achieve a goal (Canabate et al., 2019). It means that there is no succes if there is a member of team who still in trouble to reach the goal. That is the main point of positive interdependence. The second is individual accountability. This can be defined that the students have responsibility to strive for the team and also for the development of themselves individually. The third essential element of CL is promotive interaction which occurs when students share information, help, support, encourage and praise each other (Johnson and Johnson, 2011). Fourth, interpersonal and small-group social communication. In addition to the abilities of academic subject, in CL students are promoted to know the other members well to get effective communication. Hence, they can understand and support each other to achieve the goal of the team. The fifth is group processing. The group has to work and to be functioned properly (Canabate et al., 2019). In this case it means that the excellent communication and cooperation system are required. Thus, the team can achieve the learning goal satisfactorily.

The related studies of cooperative learning have widely acknowledged that cooperative learning has significant contribution in promoting second and foreign language (Astuti & Lammers, 2017). This method serve vary advantages in educational field included in language teaching and language acquisition. The study of Johnson and Johnson (2011) also asserted that cooperative learning has powerful effects and shows positive results such as greater efforts to achieve, more positive relationship between students, and greater psychological health.

The study of Gillies (2004) and Ajaja (2010) believed that cooperative learning is the suitable method to actively promote each other learning of students . It also examined that cooperative learning could promote effective learning condition than individualistic learning (Hsiung, 2012). Cooperative learning suggests students to help one another in learning the content, solving the problem and finishing the tasks given (Slavin, 1996; Tsay and Brady, 2010). Their cooperation will lead them to accomplish their shared learning goals. Thus, it indicates that cooperative learning is able in stimulating students various performance in learning and teaching process.

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2013) argued that where there are found students work autonomously on their own and involve into enjoy and fun competition it can be confirmed that they learn cooperatively with others. It indicates that a CL approach in teaching is able to help teacher to create positive atmosphere among students to become active participant in

learning process (Webb, 2009). It proves that the process of teaching and learning is change of behaviour, whether involving knowledge, skills or attitudes (Djamorah and Zain, 2006).

Hence, as the empirical studies mentioned it clearly can be concluded that CL has many advantages for both students and teachers as educators. Cooperative learning method is able to help teacher more flexible to manage the classroom activity and build positive academic atmosphere. For students, cooperative learning is really helpful to promote their individual accountability and also in supporting each member of the group. So that, it can build positive and healthy relationship among students.

According to Johnson and Johnson (2011), there are three types of cooperative learning that is formal, informal, and base groups. The three types of that cooperative learning classified by time period of its application in classroom activities or certain goals.

In formal cooperative learning, to achieve shared goals and complete specific tasks students work together from one class period to several weeks. Johnson & Johnson asserted that in this type of cooperative learning, the teachers have tasks to: 1. Make a number of pre-instructional decisions; 2. Explain the task and the positive interdependence; 3. Monitor and intervene the learning; and 4. Assess and process to identify how well the group are well functioned .

While informal cooperative learning consists of students working together to achieve the certain goals in temporary groups that last a few minutes to one class period (Johnson et al., 2008). In this condition, students involved into a few minutes group discussion. This informal cooperative learning also can be helpful to set or recharge the mood of conducive learning at class and students to be more focus to the teachers' material demonstration.

The last is cooperative base groups which are the long-term and heterogeneous cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2011). It consists stable membership who carry responsibilities to support, encourage and assist each other in order to make academic progress and develop socially and cognitively in healthy ways (Johnson et al., 2008). It illustrates that in cooperative base groups they have schedule to meet regularly such as daily or weekly until the end of the semester or even the school.

In conclusion, the types of cooperative learning can be distinguished by the period of its application in learning activity such as only for several weeks, certain minutes or hour at class until for the long-term use with routine or regular schedule until the end of semester or even the school. In addition, cooperative learning types also can be seen by each target in learning such as to mentor the several materials or chapters, only to build or recharge positive and conducive mood in class until to encourage and assist each other to make significant academic progress. This study actually discovered kind of formal and informal CL implementation at classroom. In formal CL implementation, clear and tight targets are pointed by the teacher for students improvisation on their learning performance. Meanwhile during informal CL implementation, the teacher flexibly can change the group and any kind of situations at class in order not only too achieve the learning goals but also to recharge class learning atmosphere.

### ***Cooperative Learning Implementation in EFL Classroom***

Gibbon (2015) argued that well-designed group work provides many advantages in terms of language acquisition and social development for EFL learners (Gudinge, 2019 p.12). It tends that CL is appropriate method to apply in EFL classroom due to its supportive characteristics to support students to achieve their learning goals. Supported by Astuti and

Lammers' (2017) study which showed that CL has significant contribution in promoting second and foreign language. This method provides benefits and opportunities for EFL learners to utilize the English as the target language.

In cooperative learning, the students are conditioned to work together in order to accomplish their own learning and shared learning goals. These kind of activities requires students to share knowledge to their friends in order to achieve their group certain goals by talking together and exchanging information (Lotfy, 2012; Tuan, 2010). In fact, when there are interactions among students, it means they learn to share opinions, ask question (Mercer, Wegerif, and Dawer, 1999). It shows that cooperative learning stimulates students into communicative activities by talking each other, discussing shared learning goals and exchanging information.

Within cooperative situation, students individually seeks beneficial both for themselves and all other group members (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 2013). Their study also stated that in order to achieve their own goals or even shared goals, the students discuss material to be learned, help and assist each other, and it is also included encourage each other to work hard. Listiadi (2019) classified that there are six best principles of cooperative learning that can be the guidance in students activities during cooperative learning:

- Each students in the group is responsible for everything that is done in the group and always try to work together (Kupczynski, 2012).
- Each students in the group have to know that all group members have the same goals.
- Each students in the group have to share the same duties and responsibilities among group members (Gence, 2016).
- Each students in the group will be subject to evaluation.
- Each students in the group shares leadership and requires skills to learn together during the learning process.
- Each students in the group will take responsibility for the materials handled in the cooperative group.

Students activities in cooperative learning shows that students have the responsibility to accomplish the shared learning goals in group also to help others learning and understanding the material. Everything done by the group is the responsibility of students individually of the group as the result of their well cooperation. Students' engagement and positive dependence during CL implementations are also showed in this research. The cooperation conducted foster their each learning performances in many aspects including academic performances, their own responsibilities and also interpersonal relationship.

### ***Students' Cognitive Perspective on Cooperative Learning Implementation***

The main point of cognitive approach is it focuses on how students making knowledge more meaningful and how they organize new information relate to their prior knowledge (Yilmaz, 2011). Cognitive perspective leads to the way students' get the essential of absorbing new information and knowledge in order to build up their prior knowledge. As cited by Corebima and Leasa (2017), Slavin added that cognitive perspective focuses on the interaction which occurred among students in the group. That process of interaction which foster the learning process and student' academic.



Considering cooperative learning as the helpful and essential method in supporting students' learning goals and outcomes, Yassin et al., (2018) stated that CL is close to cognitive view of learning. It is explained that CL gives more opportunities for students to evaluate and build up their knowledge. Corebima and Leasa (2017) believed that social interaction occurred in cooperative learning provides significant benefits in cognitive achievement. In the interaction process, it occurs exchanging information and supporting each other which can enrich and enhance students' motivation, knowledge and academic achievements. It is even Johnson and Johnson (2011) agreed by stating on CL essential elements he formed that CL provides promotive interaction which occurs when students share information, help, support, encourage and praise each other. The process stimulated the students to gain more meaningful knowledge and information as their learning goals or outcomes. For those reviews of the plenty of research, CL has significant role in enhancing students' learning outcomes in cognitive perspective that is disclosing wide opportunities for students to build their own knowledge by the intense interaction occurred.

## **METHOD**

This present study is a descriptive case study that describes an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003). It is a qualitative study with a descriptive case study approach that aims to get an in-depth understanding of a single case of the researcher (Gog, 2015). The further findings will provide a descriptive explanation of the focus target of the research, which can answer the formulation of the problem. Descriptive case study design typically involves the researcher taking the data by focusing on individual and group interviews with semi-structured interviews as the guidelines (Bradway et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). It is appropriate that the present study chose individual interviews to collect the data and provided semi-structured interviews as the interview guidelines.

The research was conducted in a junior high school in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. This school was chosen because of three considerations: (1) The teacher often uses cooperative learning in this school; (2) The students with cooperative learning method treatment by the teacher have positive academic progress and attitudes. There were three students, with an average age of 13 to 14 years old, of different genders and levels, as the participants in this research were interviewed. The levels are divided into high, medium and low of students' academic performances in English learning. The recruitment of the students followed the school's ethical clearance.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews to get the information regarding research questions. Alvehus (2013) stated that the interviewer should prepare open-ended questions to open the discussion and avoid yes or no questions (Gudinge, 2019, p. 13). *Bahasa* were used in the interview to make communication more accessible for the students. The procedures for collecting the data: First, the researcher asked for permission from the school and concerned parties, who are the participants. After getting permission and agreement, the researcher collected the data through interviews with the students by visiting their houses individually because face-to-face learning at school was still not allowed due to the pandemic. The data from the interview were transcribed. Then, the data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) theme analysis. This kind of analysis provides flexibility for the researcher to discover the most suitable themes that represent the study's findings and aims.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Discovering Partners as a Supportive System in Learning Development*

#### *Promotive Interaction*

For some students, to accomplish learning target or learning goals and fulfil their learning needs are quite difficult. They sometimes are harder to finish the tasks or even to understand the material given by the teacher. CL gives them opportunities to achieve their learning goals.

#### Excerpt 1

“Yes, I found more difficult if I do learning only by myself. But it got easier if my friends help me moreover in group discussion.”

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

#### Excerpt 2

“.....learning by group is more pleasant..we can help each other..we just can share our answers”

(Semi-structured interview, P1/Female, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

P2 (second participant), after being questioned about individualistic learning, he confessed that it is more difficult when he sometimes had to learn the lesson by himself. At the same time, P1 (first participant) also admitted that learning by group is more pleasant as they can help each other. She also can share her thought to all group members. It is indicated that CL facilitates students to help each other the main thing is to accomplish their learning goals. That is compatible with Gillies (2004) and Ajaja (2010) asserted that cooperative learning is the suitable method to actively promotes each other learning of students. On the other hand, Hsiung (2012) also supported, CL could promote effective learning condition than individualistic learning. It was proven by what P2 and P3 had experienced:

#### Excerpt 3

Q: What do you feel when you are learning in group with your friends?

“It is make us easier to do the task”

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

#### Excerpt 4

Q: What do you feel when you are learning in group with your friends?

“ ...we can learn and help each other with friends”

(Semi-structured interview, P3/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

There was noted that P2 and P3 experienced that their friends in their group are kindly help them to finish the task and make them easier to understand the lesson. The vary interactions

and “helping each other” activities occurred widely assist them to develop their learning outcomes. It is supported by Casey and Goodyear (2016) that CL is able to help learners achieve the four basic learning outcomes: cognitive, social, affective and physical. Yassin et al., (2018) emphasized that CL is close to cognitive view of learning due to CL gives more opportunities for students to evaluate and build up their knowledge.

#### *Positive Interdependence and Group Processing*

As the place where heterogenous gathered, CL certainly consists of students with /different ability. They are demanded to work together to accomplish the shared learning goals. It is even Johnson and Johnson (2011) asserted that in CL, each students in a group must have trust that they have same learning goals or shared goals to accomplish. Thus, they can start to do cooperation to achieve it.

#### Excerpt 5

Q: How did the cooperation run in your group during learning?

“...we can ask how to do this, how is the way to finish this..we complete each other..if there are anyone still wrong, we correct them”

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

#### Excerpt 6

Q: What advantages do you get when you are learning in group?

“I know more.....my knowledge...I don’t know initially the things then I ask for help from other friends so that I knew then. I can expand my knowledge”

(Semi-structured interview, P3/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

The data showed the positive interdependence elements of CL. It pictured that students take advantages for themselves from working on group. So that, they keep working with their group to accomplish their learning goals. It is line with Canabate’s et al., (2019) statement that positive interdependence refers to the condition when the the group succeed achieve the goal can only be said if all the each members can reach the learning goals. It potentially build eager desire to utilize their best teamwork to cooperate each other by helping and motivate each other.

#### Excerpt 7

Q: How do your friends in group help you?

“They immediately helped..from the beginning till the end..Zia said..San, this is the first words, it’s the second, it’s the third, it’s the fourth, it is the fifth..oh I see, I answered. She said “okay if you’ve already understood you can try it by yourself, if there are still the things you don’t understand you can ask me again”

(Semi-structured interview, P3/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

The experience of P3 (third participant) pointed that through CL, he can freely ask for help to other group members. The data showed CL disclosed wide opportunities for all students from different abilities to improve their performance and get better learning



outcomes. As cited by Leasa and Corebima (2017, p. 2), Pham affirmed that CL allows high and low ability students to motivate and help each other which directs them to improve their academic performances. It is equitable so that all students can take it chance to enhance their academic performances and learning outcomes.

Excerpt 8

Q: Can you give the example what kind of help do you get from your friends?

“Hmmm...it is such when there is a word we don't know the meaning of it.. for the example..what is the Bahasa of school?..It is 'sekolah'..other group members informed us..hmm yes, it is just they let us know the meaning of words that we don't know yet..”

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author's Translation)

Excerpt 9

Q: Can you give the example what kind of help do you get from your friends?

“I often found new vocabularies”

(Semi-structured interview, P1/Female, taken on August 2020, Author's Translation)

The data showed that the students get new informations and knowledge or give informations they knew through group interaction. It pointed P2 and P1 students could get some of new vocabularies they had not known yet from their friends during cooperative learning activities in classroom. It is one of main essential elements of CL defined by Johnson and Johnson (2011) that is promotive interaction occurs when students share information, help, support encourage and praise each other. Learning process in CL condition stimulated students to gain more meaningful information and knowledge as their learning goals or outcomes.

***Improving Self-Accountability in Learning English***

Accomplishing tasks together through work in group is able to ease the barriers and difficulties faced by the students. Throughout the process of learning in CL condition, the students not only strive for the achievement of their group but they also have valuable opportunity to improve their own ability on self-learning further.

Excerpt 10

Q: What happened after your friend was helped by other group members?

“...so, my friend..he can do it by himself later on..after he was given example or the meaning of the words he didn't understand..for example...he is ordered to arrange the sentences...if other friends had informed him the meaning of each words then he can do it by himself later..he became happy because he could do it by himself ”

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author's Translation)

Excerpt 11

Q: so..if you had been given the explanation, you can do it by yourself?

P3: Yes, I really thought like that. I have to be able to do it later

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author's Translation)

It is what Johnson and Johnson (2011) defined about individual accountability that is the responsibility to strive for the team and also for the development of themselves individually. The data showed that it is clearly assisted in CL. Within cooperative learning condition, students seek beneficial both for themselves and all other group members (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 2013). The students are encouraged to have responsibility to understand the lesson and finish the tasks given. Thus, further they can apply or use the information and knowledge they had received during work in group when they have to do it by themselves.

Excerpt 12

“So it just like that.. my friends can do it by themselves..for example if she was asked to come forward by the teacher when it’s our group’s turn..we asked her to represent our group to come forward. And. she didn’t fear anymore because she got confident that she can do it..because we helped them”

(Semi-structured interview, P1/Female, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

P1 (first participant) confessed that helping their friends make them more confident to do kind of tasks by themselves. It is line with Listiadi’s (2019) statement that in CL principles, the students must have the responsibility to learn the tasks together but they also have responsibility to do it individually. In short, by the assistance of their group members, the students got more confident to accomplish the task given without being fear or hesitate anymore. Thus, they are able to enhance their academic performance and their self-ability.

Gibbon (2015) argues that well-designed group work provides many advantages in terms of language acquisition and social development for EFL learners (Gudinge, 2019, p.12). Within group work, social interaction skill is also needed to improve.

Excerpt 13

Q: What can you do during the learning with group?

“we do discussion and question-answer each other in group”

“we sometimes give advices to each other”

(Semi-structured interview, P1/Female, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

Excerpt 14

Q: Why do you think that learning in group is better?

“...because we can share our opinion in group, strenghten tolerance and friendship”

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

Excerpt 15

“Hmmm..ya it is just like...let’s we ask Susan first or the other..later on we do it together”

(Semi-structured interview, P2/Male, taken on August 2020, Author’s Translation)

The data showed that working on group through CL gives them more opportunities and encourage them to interact each other and express theirselves freely. The interactions occurred

foster their social interaction ability. Corebima and Leasa (2017) believed that social interaction occurred in cooperative learning provides significant benefits in cognitive achievement. Indeed, CL assist the students improve their cognitive achievement by means of improving their social interaction skill ability.

CL showed that vary interaction and activities occurred during the classroom activities provides beneficial for students to develop and improve their self-ability. The data pictured CL brings students to the experience of how they get and sense the responsibility in self-learning, more confident to do the tasks by themselves and encourage themselves to improve their social interaction skill. Further, it leads them to the improvement of cognitive or academic performances.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the result of this research, the students' cognitive perspective during the implementation of cooperative learning in EFL classroom showed positive outcomes. It was covered by two findings: (1) Discovering Partners as Supportive System on Learning Development, and (2) Improving Self-Accountability in English Learning. It showed that CL facilitates the students learning positively and effectively. In conclusion, CL provides significant role in students' learning academic performances. The students' cognitive perspectives displayed that through CL, they get many advantages related to their English learning process. During CL implementation, they discovered supportive system in their group and they could utilized the opportunities to improve their self-accountability in learning English.

The possible suggestions for the future research are provided to develop this field of study. First, this study could be developed by involving more participants to broaden the perspectives towards cooperative learning that also could make broader comparison. Inviting more students by different grades or even different school will present varies perspectives. The second is the future research can involved classroom observation to collect the data. It is able to enrich the data and increase empirical insight by entering directly the classroom activities.

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