

PROCEEDING

EFL Theory & Practice: Voice of EED UKI

**English Education Department (EED)
Collegiate Forum 2015-2018**

Editor

Parlindungan Pardede

**Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
FKIP UKI
2019**

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“EFL Theory and Practice: Voice of EED UKI”

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PREFACE

English Education Department Collegiate Forum (EED CF) is an academic forum organized by the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Kristen Indonesia (EED FKIP UKI). Initiated in 2008 by Mr. Parlin Pardede Dean of FKIP UKI, the event was held bi-monthly in every even month. It aims at providing a friendly and open opportunity for the faculty, students, alumni, and English teachers to share ideas, research findings, and experiences in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field. It is expected that the forum can cater the interested parties an innovative and exciting opportunity to share, care, and collaborate for developing their professionalism in EFL learning and teaching.

Following related parties' recommendation, starting from 2015 the papers presented in the forum will be compiled and published in a proceeding in every four years. This proceeding, therefore, includes the 24 articles presented in the forum from 2015 to 2018. Since the presentation in this forum is voluntary, every resource person is free to decide the EFL topic he or she presents. Consequently, the articles in this volume cover a broad theme. Despite the broad theme, the topics covered in the articles do represent current hot issues in EFL, such as learning and teaching methodology and strategies; language skills, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar development; curriculum, evaluation and assessment matters; language research methodology, and the implementation of technology in EFL.

On behalf of EED FKIP UKI, I would like to offer my appreciation all faculties, students, alumni, and fellow English teachers who had contributed in EED CF along 2015-2018. My special thanks should go to Parlindungan Pardede whose hard work in editing the articles in this proceeding has made this publication possible.

Finally, I hope each article in this proceeding can inspire every reader as it had inspired the audiences when it was presented in EED CF.

Jakarta, July 26, 2019

English Education Department Chairperson,

Hendrikus Male

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Improving EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Using Small Group Discussion¹

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Abstract

Various studies have shown that the small group discussion (SGD) technique is very effective to facilitate reflection, develop students' engagement and confidence, and increase comprehension. This action research was conducted to improve students' reading comprehension by implementing the small group discussion (SGD) technique and to investigate their perception of reading and the use of the SGD. The participants were 25 tenth grade students of SMK 17 Agustus 1945 Jakarta. The action research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle was carried out in five 100-minute sessions. To collect data, two sets of test, observation sheets, and two questionnaires were employed. The results showed that SGD improved students reading comprehension. The mean score of the students in the pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2 was 59.52; 68.32; and 89.44 respectively. Moreover, the students' attitudes towards reading comprehension also changed from a negative one to a positive one. They also enjoyed learning to read using the SGD technique.

Keywords: small group discussion, action research, reading comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is essential in real life and in learning. It is important in real life because people with better reading comprehension skills obtain greater opportunities for brighter career promotion (Wei, Cromwell & McClarty, 2016; Bhatia & Bremner, 2012). Additionally, Davis (2012) stated that reading is essential for it is fundamental to function in today's society, a vital skill in finding a good job. It also develops the mind and the

¹This article was presented in The UKI English Education Department Bimonthly Collegiate Forum held on Friday, August 14, 2015

imagination and helps discover new things. Reading is important for learning because it supports their learning process. Pardede, (2010) proposed three reasons. Why reading is important for EFL learners. First, students can usually perform at a higher level in reading than in any other skills. They can comprehend written materials beyond their ability to discuss orally or in writing with equivalent accuracy. This can undoubtedly increase their motivation to learn. Second, reading requires very minimum necessities. Different from speaking which requires opportunities to interact with a sparring partner, or from writing which needs a lot of guidance and time to practice, reading necessitates only text and motivation. Third, reading is a service skill. After learning how to read effectively, students will be able to learn effectively by reading. By reading, learners can develop their knowledge of grammar, discourse organization, vocabulary, and culture.

Despite the high importance of reading in education and in real life as well, EFL students, including Indonesian students, generally have difficulties in reading. Deporter and Hernacki (1999) even stated that reading is anxiety for students so that many of them found reading very difficult. Iftanti's (2012) study revealed that although the students of the English Department of five state universities in East Java had a positive view of reading, they did not have good English reading habits.

The tenth graders of SMK 17 Agustus 1945 also faced problems in reading. In daily learning, they seemed uninterested. The majority tended to be passive, disengaged, and got bored in the middle of teaching and learning process. Determining the mind ideas seemed to be troublesome for them. They also had problems in distinguishing the topic sentence from the supporting sentences, skimming, and scanning. The condition was worsened by the predominated teacher-centered approach. The teacher usually discussed the text with the whole class and asked the students just to translate the words by themselves to comprehend to text. Consequently, the students found it very difficult to get the meaning of passages they were reading, as shown by their low score in reading comprehension. Considering such condition, the present researcher concludes that in order to help EFL learners master reading, the teaching and learning approach should be transformed into the student-centered one. In this action research, small group discussion (SGD) was implemented to attain the aim. SGD was selected because various studies have confirmed its effectiveness to promote students' involvement in learning. Wu (2008) posited that SGD could stimulate students to be involved in the active process of constructing knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension, in its basic sense, is the process of understanding and interpreting texts in order to get some specific or detail information. Grabe and Stoller (2002: 9) stated that reading is the ability to draw meaning from the written text and interpret it appropriately. Reading comprehension is viewed as the ability to understand the meaning or idea sent by the author through a text completely. Besides as the process of understanding and interpreting texts, these definitions also imply that reading is an interactive process which involves the reader the texts, and the writer. In reading, the reader attempts to understand and interpret the ideas conveyed by the writer through

the texts (Murcia and Olshtain, 2000, p. 119). The reader decodes the message by recognizing the written signs, interpret the message by assigning meaning to the string of words and understand what the writer's intention was.

To effectively get the meaning of the text, readers should fulfill three things: (1) identify and understand the words in the text or word recognition, (2) construct and understand the words, and (3) coordinate the words and interpret them so that there is an accurate understanding. Leipzig (2001). This is in line with Nation (2001: 339) and Richard and Bamford (as cited in Harmer (2001: 210) who stated that a text can be understood by the reader when it is written using specialized vocabulary and grammar that exist at the level of the readers' ability. In addition, Grabe (2010, p. 277) claimed that understanding main ideas and exploring the organization of text are essential for good comprehension. Considering these, reading comprehension is apparently a complex activity (Schmitt 2010, p. 216) in which readers should not only possess a certain amount of vocabulary and grammar mastery and master the skills of finding the main ideas but also engage in processing the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and discourse levels. Therefore, to make sure that a student can read effectively, Brown (2004, p. 206) suggested the teacher include his understanding of the basic ideas, expressions, idioms, phrases in context, grammar, supporting ideas, and vocabulary in the evaluation of reading skills.

Burns, et.al. (1984) identified four levels of reading comprehension: literal, interpretative, critical, and creative. Literal comprehension involves getting information that is directly stated. Interpretive reading involves "reading between lines" for making an inference. Critical reading involves evaluating of written material. Creative comprehension involves formulating and rethinking ideas. The literal reading is the simplest level but a prerequisite for higher-level reading. In literal reading, the reader aims only to understand the information explicitly stated in the texts. To succeed literal reading one needs the ability to recognize and recall facts; identify the main idea and supporting details; categorize, outline, and summarize the information; and use context clues. Interpretative comprehension is the process of deriving ideas that are implied rather than directly stated. It requires the reader to go beyond the information given by the writer. Like in a literal reading, inferences in interpretative reading are made in the main idea, supporting details, sequence, and cause and effect relationships. However, interpretative reading requires the reader to read between the lines and make inferences about things not directly stated. It could also involve interpreting figurative language, drawing conclusions, predicting outcomes, determining the mood, and judging the author's point of view.

The second level, critical reading is "an active and purposeful process of comprehending, questioning and evaluating printed material and in order to react intelligently to the writer's ideas" (Pardede, 2007), It concerns with why the author says what he or she says. Critical reading is always called the highest level of comprehension because it requires the reader to use some external criteria from his/her own experience in order to evaluate and judge the quality of the information, the values of the writer's use of language, and the writer's reasoning, simplifications, and generalizations. To do so, the reader should note the evidence of the writer's bias, his qualifications, his point

of view, intent and truthfulness. In short, the reader should react emotionally and intellectually to the texts. Creative reading requires the reader's involvement with the information presented as he uses it to formulate, create or rethink ideas of his own; to find solutions to a problem; or to get a new way of looking at something from the ideas gleaned from the text. In addition to the requirements for critical reading, creative reading also necessitates one to use his imaginations.

Since reading comprehension is a complex process which requires a reader to construct meaning while or after interacting with a text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience (Klingner et al, 2007), students need teacher's help to master it. Pardo (2004) recounted that teachers are an important supporting factor for students to become competent readers. They are required to teach decoding skills, help students build fluency, build and activate background knowledge, teach vocabulary words, motivate students and engage them in personal responses to the text.

Small Group Discussion

A small group is a small member of human working together through interaction whose interdependent relationship allows them to achieve a mutual goal (Kenz and Greg, 2000). In the educational context, SGD is one of the cooperative learning techniques in which not more than five students work together to answer questions from their teacher, solve problems, or just exchange ideas about their reading process and responses to texts (Serravello in Yuliasari, 2014). According to Lee & Ertmer (2006), group discussions are hypothesized as a potential technique which contributes to increased learners' self-efficacy, and self-efficacy increases confidence which leads to the improvement of performance. This is verified by Driscoll's (2000) who stated that learners gained confidence and improved their performances when they observed models who initially showed the same fears as themselves, but who gradually reached mastery levels of performance. In addition, Koschmann, Kelson, Feltovich, and Barrows (as cited in Lee & Ertmer, 2006) posited that meaningful SGD can facilitate cognitive benefits through the students' engagement in deep reflections on their ideas.

Brewer (1997) listed several advantages of using SGD: it enables the students to decide the pace they want to take based on their interest, ability, motivation, and needs, (2) the students do not have to be discouraged to express themselves, and (3) the students will have greater chance to use the language activity. Ur (1981) described that in a small group discussion, the students would be able to learn from each other. They might also correct each other's mistakes, help out with a needed word and teach each other some non-linguistic material through the content of the discussion. In spite of these advantages, there were also several problems that normally occurred during the implementation of SGD technique: (1) students are unprepared, (2) naturally quiet students do not participate, (3) some students dominate the conversation, (4) students may share inaccurate information, and (5) it is hard for the teacher to grade (Brewer, 1997).

To make certain that the small group discussion works well, an effective teacher is essential. McCrorie (2006) proposed 10 criteria teachers should fulfill to be an effective tutor using SGD. These criteria include that the teachers (1) are enthusiastic, (2) have

organized the session well, (3) have a feeling for the subject, (4) can conceptualize the topic, (5) have empathy with the learners, (6) understand how people learn, (7) have skills in teaching and managing learning, (8) are alert to context, (9) are teaching with preferred teaching style, and (10) have a wide range of skills in their teaching repertoire, including questioning, listening, reinforcing, reacting, summarizing, and leadership.

In relation to that, teachers should make some preparations before leading an SGD, Lubis (1985) suggested the following six ways to prepare an SGD in a classroom: (1) Divide the class into small groups of three to six people each group; (2) Give each group a different topic; (3) Have one student in each group to write down the important points as the group having the discussion; (4) Allow the groups to discuss their topics for at least ten minutes; (5) Have one student in each group to be a spokesman who will report the result of the group discussion in front of the class; (6) Allow the students to deliver questions to the one speaking in the front.

Various current studies focusing on the use of the SGD to develop students' reading comprehension revealed the technique's effectiveness. Ahmad (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study to investigate the effectiveness of using SGD to improve junior high school students' reading skills. The results showed that SGD effectively improved the school students' reading skills. It also increased the students' motivation and participation and built up their responsibility as well. Siswanti, Ngadiso, & Setyaningsing (2012), carried out an action research using SGD to improve students' reading comprehension at *SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro*. The research findings show that the use of SGD could improve students' reading comprehension. In addition, SGD could be used to improve the class situation.

METHOD

This study employed the action research design. It was conducted in two cycles in two months, April to May 2015. The participants were 25 students of the class of X AP 1 at SMK 17 Agustus 1945, Jakarta. To collect the data the researchers employed test and non-test techniques. The test technique was a pre and two posttests used to measure the reading comprehension achievement of the participants. The pre-test was administered before the action, while the first posttest (posttest I) was conducted at the end of cycle 1, and posttest II, at the end of cycle 2. All of the three tests were constructed in objective tests. Each test consisted of three short passages and 25 questions. The non-test is a questionnaire and observation sheet. The questionnaire was used to collect data concerning the response of the students of the using of mind mapping. The questionnaire was administered three times, i.e. before the action research, at the end of cycle 1, and at the end of cycle 2. The observation sheet was used by a collaborator to record the activities and. All data were analyzed employing the descriptive analysis technique. The success indicator of this action research was the participants' achieving of the mean score of 70.

FINDING

Initial Condition

As shown by the results of the pretest, none of the participants got a good and excellent score category. The majority got the fair category, and the rests got a low category. This indicated that the participants had low performance in reading comprehension (see table 1).

Table 1.

Score Range of Students' Pretest

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
Excellent	85 – 100	0	0%	59.52
Good	75 – 84	0	0 %	
Fair	55 –74	19	76 %	
Low	0 – 54	6	24 %	
Total		25	100%	

In addition to the participants' low reading comprehension performance, most of the students also disliked reading English texts. Based on their responses to the questionnaire administered before the action research, 84% of them did not like reading English texts and 76% viewed reading comprehension difficult (see table 2).

Table 2.

Data Obtained through the Pre-Action Questionnaire

No	Statements	Yes		No	
		Total	%	Total	%
1	I like reading English texts.	4	16%	21	84%
2	Reading comprehension is difficult.	19	76%	6	26%

2. Action

The actions of Cycle 1 were conducted in six meetings on April 7th, 10th, 14th, 17th, 21st, and 24th. The first meeting began by introducing and practicing SGD technique. To make certain the students could implement the technique, a simulation was carried out. The simulation was conducted by dividing the participants into six groups. Five of the groups consisted of four members and the fifth had five members. The activities ran as follows: (1) the members of each group read the assigned text individually; (2) in their group, all members exchange the ideas they got based the reading; (3) in their group, all members worked together to answer the questions (related to main idea, topic sentence, supporting detail, the meaning of unfamiliar expressions) provided by the teacher; (4) each group told their answers to the whole class.

Using the five groups while conducting the simulation, the real action research started on April 10th. Although some of the students still looked hesitant to practice SGD, most of them seemed quite enthusiastic. The learning process became better and better as the students had been more and more adapted to SGD implementation. At the end

of the fifth session, posttest I was administered. After that, the participants filled in the questionnaire aimed to collect their view after completing the first cycle.

3. Observing

As shown by Table 3, the learning activities using mind mapping in cycle 1 managed to improve the participants' reading comprehension. After completing cycle 1, no more student got the low-level score. The mean score had even increased to 68.32 (from 59.52 in the pretest). However, 84% of the participants still got the fair level score. Thus, cycle 2 was planned to make further improvement of the students' reading comprehension.

In line with the improvement of their reading comprehension performance, their view of reading comprehension also changed. The majority (80%) now liked reading English texts. A greater number (84%) had even viewed reading in enjoyable. Those who viewed reading comprehension is difficult has been lowered in number. In addition, the participants seemed unfamiliar with SGD practice before participating in this action research. After using it in five sessions, 20% of them still found unenjoyable. More than a half (60%) still even found reading comprehension difficult although they have used SGD (See table 4). These findings indicated they need more practice using the technique.

Table 3.

Score Range of Students' Posttest 1

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
Excellent	85 – 100	0	0%	68.32
Good	75 – 84	4	16 %	
Fair	55 – 74	21	84 %	
Low	0 – 54	0	0 %	
Total		25	100%	

4. Reflecting

Based on the data obtained in cycle 1, the researchers reflected that SGD was very potential to employ to improve respondents' reading comprehension. It managed to increase the participants' reading comprehension performance and changed the negative views of most of them to positive one. However, since the number of the participants who had negative views to reading skills were still big, the researcher planned to carry out cycle 2. To make the activity in cycle 2 more effective, and based on the feedback provided by the observer, the researchers decided to make two changes to the action procedure. First, the number of the SGD group members would be made smaller by forming the class into eight groups. Thus, instead of having six groups, there would be eight groups in cycle 2. Seven group would have three members and the other one would have four. Having smaller number of members, everyone in each group was expected to be more active. Second, the last activity in the procedure used in cycle 1 would be changed into group presentation using power point slides.

Table 4

Data Obtained through the Post-Action 1 Questionnaire

No	Statements	Yes		No	
		Total	%	Total	%
1	I like reading English texts.	20	80%	5	20%
2	Reading comprehension is difficult.	10	40%	15	60%
3	I enjoy learning using SGD	20	80%	5	20%
4	After learning using SGD, I still find reading difficult.	10	40%	15	60%
5	SGD is a good way to improve reading comprehension.	20	80%	5	20%

Report of Cycle 2***1. Planning***

As indicated previously, the action plan of cycle two was designed similar to that of cycle 1. However, the membership of the working groups was reshuffled and reduced in order to have each member more active and engaged. In addition, the last activity of every session was changed into group presentation using power point slides. Thus, the activities in cycle 2 run as follow: (1) the members of each group read the assigned text individually; (2) in their group, all members exchange the ideas they got based the reading; (3) in their group, all members worked together to answer the questions (related to main idea, topic sentence, supporting detail, the meaning of unfamiliar expressions) provided by the teacher, and put the results into power point slides; (4) each group made a presentation in front of the class using power point slides.

Table 5.

Score Range of Students' Posttest 2

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
Excellent	85 – 100	17	68%	89.44
Good	75 – 84	8	32 %	
Fair	55 –74	0	0 %	
Low	0 – 54	0	0 %	
Total		25	100%	

2. Acting

Cycle 2 was carried out in five sessions, i.e. on May 1st, 5th, 8th, 12th, and 15th. The learning process during cycle 2 was more conducive than in cycle 1. Most students were now enthusiastic and engaged.

3. Observing

As shown by Table 5, the learning activities using SGD technique in cycle 2 managed to improve the participants' reading comprehension. After completing cycle 2, no more student got the low and fair level score. The majority (68%) had even got an excellent level, while the rests got a good level. The mean score had even increased to 89.44

Table 6

Data Obtained through the Post-Action 2 Questionnaire

No	Statements	Yes		No	
		Total	%	Total	%
1	I like reading English texts.	25	100%	0	0%
2	Reading comprehension is difficult.	0	0%	25	100%
3	I enjoy learning using SGD	25	100%	0	0%
4	After learning using SGD, I still find reading difficult.	0	0%	25	100%
5	SGD is a good way to improve reading comprehension.	25	100%	0	0%

The implementation of SGD technique in learning reading comprehension in cycle 2 managed to significantly change the students' attitude to reading English texts, view of reading comprehension, and view of SGD. As shown by Table 6, every student now liked reading English texts, enjoyed using SGD, and believed SGD is good to use to develop reading comprehension. No more students viewed reading comprehension difficult.

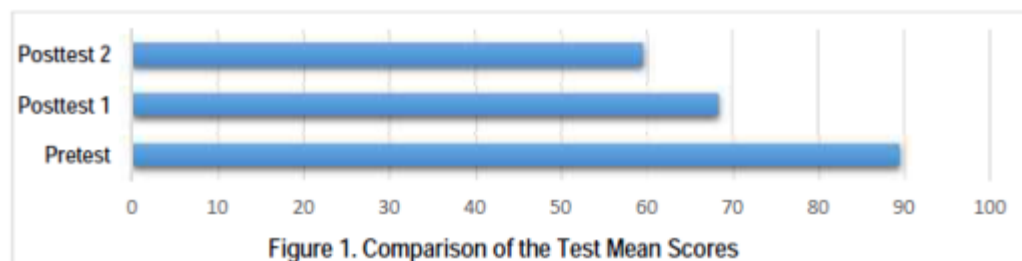
4. Reflecting

Based on the data obtained in cycle 2, the researcher reflected that SGD is a very effective technique for improving students' reading comprehension. Although this action research was conducted only in two months, it managed to increase the students' reading comprehension performance and significantly changed their views of reading from a negative to a positive one. They were also enthusiastic to learn collaboratively using SGD technique.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that SGD technique could effectively enhance the students' reading comprehension. Before participating in the action research, the majority of the participants did not like reading English texts and had poor reading comprehension. As seen from their responses in the pre-action questionnaire, only 16% liked reading English texts and 76% believed reading comprehension is difficult. After they participated in the reading activities using SGD in two cycles, all of them liked reading English texts and no more student believed reading comprehension difficult. In terms of performance, the steady increase of the mean scores from the pretest to the posttest 1 and posttest 2 (see Chart 1) revealed that SGD technique effectively enhanced the students' reading comprehension performance.

These findings verified the hypothesis that group discussions can contribute to increased learners' self-efficacy, and self-efficacy increases confidence which leads to the improvement of performance (Lee & Ertmer, 2006). It in line with Driscoll's (2000) findings that learners gained confidence and improved their performances when they observed models who initially showed the same fears as themselves, but who gradually reached mastery levels of performance.



Seeing from the development of the students' reading comprehension performance and view towards reading and SGD as well, cycle 2 was more impactful. The reason for this is that the students needed time to adapt to implementing SGD. In addition, the reduction of the group members into three students "forced" every student to engage in the group discussion. Thus, the better they could implement SGD and the more engaged students in the discussion, the more opportunities they got to employ their cognition and thinking skills. Consequently, their comprehension increased. Koschmann, Kelson, Feltovich, and Barrows (as cited in Lee & Ertmer, 2006) posited that meaningful SGD can facilitate cognitive benefits through the students' engagement in deep reflections on their ideas. When one exchanged ideas and considered others' perspectives, he is prompted to reflect on their existing ideas as well as to integrate new ideas into his existing knowledge.

By comparing the three mean scores obtained from the three tests assigned in this study (see Figure 1), it is very obvious that SGD is a very effective technique teacher could use to improve the students' reading comprehension. It can be hypothesized that the more skillful the students in implementing the technique, the better their reading performance will be. The implementation of SGD increased the students' engagement in reading and collaboration in learning. This is in line with the findings of Siswanti, Ngadiso, & Setyaningsing (2012) and Ahmad (2013).

CONCLUSION AND SUGESSTION

Based on the findings and discussion presented in previous sections, it can be concluded that the implementation of SGD technique was successful to improve the reading comprehension performance of the students of X AP 1 at SMK 17 Agustus 1945, Jakarta. SGD implementation also changed the students' view on reading English text from unenjoyable to enjoyable. In relation to this, the researchers suggest teachers use SGD technique as an alternative in teaching reading comprehension.

Since this study is an action research involving a class of tenth graders of SMK, the details could not be generalized to other groups of students. Future studies, therefore, are recommended to modify some aspects of the materials, activities, media, and strategy used in this study to suit the conditions of the target groups.

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