Improving English Teaching in Universitas Islam Indonesia: Implementation of Cooperative Learning

Anita Dewi

Academic Staff of Center for International Language and Culture Studies (CILACS)
Universitas Islam Indonesia
Jl. Pattimura no. 7 Kotabaru Yogyakarta – Indonesia
Phone/Fax: +62 274 514779
Email: cilacs@uii.ac.id

Student of M.Ed. TESOL International
Faculty of Education, Monash University
Wellington Road, Clayton, VIC 3800 – Australia
Phone: +61 3 9905 2819
Fax: +61 3 9905 5400
E-mail: info@education.monash.edu

nitamsi@yahoo.com, asdew1@student.monash.edu.au

IMPROVING ENGLISH TEACHING IN UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INDONESIA: IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

ABSTRACT

Even though cooperative learning is quite a recent paradigm in the field of English teaching especially in English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) classes, it is actually not new for Indonesians. The concept, which relies on individual contributions upon communal achievement, is similar to the concept of *gotong royong*, which is undoubtedly an innate belief of Indonesians. The concept of *gotong royong* itself is frequently defined literally as mutual help. However, it is actually more than mutual help, since it also requires all society members' participations in any event, for the sake of the community. This literature study is aimed at investigating the applicability of cooperative learning technique in the teaching of English in Universitas Islam Indonesia. The paper will be presented in the order of discussion on cooperative learning, followed by elaboration of *gotong royong*, and summed up by relevancies of the two concepts. It is possible that this technique also suits the teaching of other subjects, since the concept of cooperative learning and *gotong royong* would also facilitate the students in going into real life phenomena and experience. Nevertheless, the implementation of this method requires large scale and systemic changes to be ideal in nature.

INTRODUCTION

There are challenges faced by English teachers nowadays, which can be successfully overcome by a curriculum and an instructional approach based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The belief of language as a communication tool is the fundamental point and emphasis of this teaching approach, without putting aside other aspects and functions of the language itself. A systematic and compatible technique of CLT is needed in order to achieve a better learning.

Within this issue, certain aspects need to be considered in choosing the most appropriate and applicable technique(s) for a certain context. Putting the situation mentioned above into account, this paper argues that Cooperative Learning (CL) is the most applicable and suitable technique for the teaching context of Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) first year student English classes. There are two main supporting arguments in this claim. First, even though cooperative learning is quite a recent paradigm in the field of English teaching, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, it is actually not a new thing for Indonesians. The second supporting argument is that in fact the concept, which is believed to be a part of Communicative Language Teaching method, is similar to the concept of *Gotong Royong*, which is philosophically believed by Indonesians. In general, as stated by results of an educational research, "cooperative learning with undergraduate students can lead to greater cognitive involvement, somewhat greater activation, and higher levels of motivation" (Peterson & Miller, 2004, p. 132).

Thus, this paper will be initiated by providing details of the teaching context. It is then followed by the theoretical understandings of the concepts of Cooperative Learning and *Gotong Royong*. At the end, this paper proposes some possible practices adopting Cooperative Learning concept, which can be applied in the teaching context.

TEACHING CONTEXT

A specific teaching context is covered within this piece of writing. The context includes English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes of a specific Indonesian tertiary education - Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII). This university is a private Islamic university, one of the most prominent and oldest universities in Indonesia in general and especially in Yogyakarta, which is famous as "the city of student" in the country. The students involved in the English teaching context discussed in this paper are first year students. The classes themselves tend to be English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in nature, even though they are not pure ESP classes. The class size is about 30 students per class. Students are from non-English department, consisting of students from various faculties (Adnan, Raharjo, & Abdurrachman, 2003):

1. Faculty of Economics, covering three majors: Accounting, Economics, Management
2. Faculty of Law
3. Faculty of Civil Engineering and Planning, covering three majors: Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Environmental Engineering
4. Faculty of Industrial Technology, covering five majors: Chemical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Information Technology, and Mechanical Engineering
5. Faculty of Islamic Studies, covering three majors: Islamic Economics, Syari'ah, and Tarbiyah
6. Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Science, covering three majors: Pharmacy, Chemistry, and Statistics
7. Faculty of Psychology
8. Faculty of Medicine

In terms of backgrounds, students come from various socio-cultural backgrounds. It is due to the fact that Java, especially Yogyakarta, is the centre of education for the whole country. Thus, students come from all over Indonesia. Related to their places of origin, several consequences occur. The first consequence is that in contrast to urban students who are very much exposed to English, students who come from rural areas hardly had exposure to it. Secondly, the levels of language are also various, starting from basic to higher intermediate with almost no advanced. Moreover, different prior educational backgrounds also play an important role, as private, public, and boarding high schools apply distinct policies.

The English classes occupy four credits, which are divided into two credits in the first semester and two credits in the second semester. Each credit is defined as one fifty-minute lecture, which means that each student will go to a one-hundred-minute lecture, once a week, for twelve weeks in a row each semester.

In terms of purpose of study, UII students mainly possess "goal-oriented" (Widdowson, 1978, in Robinson, 1991, p. 7) purpose to get study achievement or get good jobs; rather than "user-institution/society's desire" (Mountford, 1981 in Robinson, 1991, p. 7), "process-

oriented" (Widdowson, 1981 in Robinson, 1991, p. 7), "personal" (Berwick, 1989 in Robinson, 1991, p. 3), or "lacks" (Robinson, 1991, p. 3) purposes.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

As an approach, Communicative Language Teaching aims for the goal of survival in the real world.   In other words, the emphasis is on the functional aspect, which is to use the language and do things with the language.   The language being used is bound to the context within which it exists, in order to facilitate interaction.   Related to it, in terms of language teaching, one of the prominent issues is the use of authentic materials.   Another issue is the role of the teacher, which mainly shifts from information provider into guide and skill monitor.

The notion of communicative language ability has gone through approximately half of century.   As a linguist, Chomsky (1965, in Hedge, 2000, p. 45) proposed that there is a distinction between knowledge ("competence") and use ("performance") of the language.   He stated that the focus is on the knowledge of the language system. Meanwhile, from a sociolinguist point of view, Hymes (1972, in Hedge, 2000, p. 45) asserted that speakers need social and cultural knowledge in order to understand and use linguistic forms.   There were also other influences in the 1960s and 1970s as suggested in Hedge (2000, p. 46) in the form of the development of ESP as a fulfilment of professional and academic needs of English language users and in the form of a functional syllabus created by council of Europe. Moreover, Hedge (2000, pp. 46-55) categorised competences in communicative language into "linguistic competence", "pragmatic competence", "discourse competence", "strategic competence", and "fluency".

All aspects of the competence mentioned above result in certain effects for the classroom, related to its focus and content.   The focus of the class is no longer on form, but on meaning. Meanwhile, the content in the classroom is determined by the learner.   In the context of Universitas Islam Indonesia, the content is determined by the "goal-oriented" needs – being successful in the study and getting a significant and relevant job position.

In fact, negotiation of meaning exists between speakers, or in other words learners.   An information gap is also created, since what is heard by the learners are new and unpredictable.   However, as Hedge (2000, pp. 60-61) suggested, the teacher still needs to make sure that there are chances for the students to develop accuracy.   Hence, it can be inferred that there is a close relationship between the language and the content of the subject, which is one of the features of ESP.

In order to facilitate dual ends of classes – the language and the content, serious considerations have to be done related with classroom management and interaction in the classroom.   Due to the large size of each class, students are mainly allocated in pairs or small groups.   It is expected that by grouping, students will get more opportunities to be active learners of the language and to actually use the language.   This is in accordance with what has been suggested by Hedge (2000, pp. 62-67). Hedge claimed that group work is advantageous, especially for speaking and writing.   He also stated that in doing so, the teacher plays distinct roles such as discussing the advantages with students familiar with group work, designing seating arrangements, and training for group work.   However, he also

claimed that teacher still acts as the ultimate organiser, which means that he/she must assure positive learning outcomes for students, be responsible for any contact with outsiders, and be the arbiter of standards.

The way of managing classrooms results in various interaction patterns within the classes. Interaction patterns involved in the classes are mainly in the form of group activities as compilation of individual tasks. The old-fashion "teacher questions, students answer" interaction is not much conducted anymore, since the emphasis of the subject is no longer merely on the linguistic aspects. Lecturing activity is mostly conducted when students feel difficulty in digesting the materials. Class discussion and presentation are highly encouraged, as these activities are thought to be facilitating students in achieving their goals.

The interaction patterns mentioned above are actually included in patterns of interaction of a communicative language class suggested by Penny Ur (1996, p. 228). The patterns proposed by Ur are: "group work", "closed-ended teacher questioning" (IRF), "individual work", "choral responses", "collaboration", "student initiates, teacher answers", "full-class interaction", "teacher talk", "self-access", and "open-ended teacher questioning".

According to the same expert (Ur, 1981, p. 7), group work possesses some pluses and minuses. One of the group work advantages is that it "increased participation". Secondly, group work also "frees the teacher from her usual role of instructor-corrector-controller, and allows her to wander freely round the class". Group work makes "peer-teaching" possible, so that students can exchange the language and content. On the other hand, the disadvantage of group work is that there is a tendency for the group to become uncontrollable. In UII context, it is especially true in the case of first language (L1) usage and passiveness of some class members.

From another perspective, the adoption of A to F grades with Grade Point Average (GPA) system in the university level also avoids the spirit of individual competitiveness among students. It is due to the fact that students are not faced with "ranks" in the university level, unlike how they have experienced since primary to high schools. This brings about "fresh air" to the teaching of language, since "selfishness" to simply gaining better score than others does not happen as much as in primary and secondary education levels. This situation is in fact in favour to English classes, regarding the nature of language as a communication tool which requires students to be in interaction with others in the learning process.

It is in accordance with "individualized learning" and "cooperative learning" teaching structures, two of three structures argued by Adams and Hamm (1990, pp. 29-30). The first structure he proposed is "individualized learning", where task completion is a matter of individual responsibility. The second structure is "competitive learning" with students possess equal opportunity to win or lose. The last one is "cooperative learning", with the unique characteristics of every single student being responsible for a task that would determine the success or failure of the whole group. Furthermore, Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec (1993, in Putnam, 1997, pp. 11-18) proposed critical components of CL, which are "positive interdependence", "individual accountability", "cooperative skills", "face-to-face interaction", and "group reflection and goal setting".

In supporting those critical components and other aspects of cooperative learning mentioned above, two major issues occur. First is the issue of authentic materials and tasks, whereas the second one is the issue of cultural appropriateness of the communicative approach.

GOTONG ROYONG **IN INDONESIA**

Coping with the two issues emerged in applying a communicative approach, especially cooperative learning, the local context has to be highlighted. In the case of Indonesia, both issues would be closely related with a value held by the people - *Gotong Royong*.

The concept can be literally translated as "mutual assistance". Actually it has a deeper meaning, e.g. in society "It calls up images of social relations in a traditional, smoothly working, harmonious, self-enclosed village on Java, where labour is accomplished through reciprocal exchange, and villagers are motivated by a general ethos of selflessness and concern for the common good" (Bowen, 1986, pp. 545-546).

As Bowen (1986, p. 546) suggested in his article, *Gotong Royong* has the deepest meaning as "a philosophy of life that takes the collective life as the most important". In fact, this concept has long become national belief and formed national identity of Indonesians in general, not merely of Javanese.

In line with the fact that Cooperative Learning (CL) is relevant to Indonesian value of *Gotong Royong*, in the next section I would try to employ the theory of Cooperative Learning and apply it in Indonesian real life learning situation. To provide a clear picture of the concept implementation, I would narrow down the practice into my current and future teaching context – Universitas Islam Indonesia first year students English classes.

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

In applying CL, Prabhu (1987, in Hedge, 2000, pp. 58-60) suggested a typology of activities as basis materials. The first type is "information-gap activity", which involves decoding/encoding, selection of relevant information, completeness, and correctness. The second type is "reasoning-gap activity" covering inference, deduction, practical reasoning, perception of relationships or patterns, comprehending and conveying non identical information involving reasoning. The last type is "opinion-gap activity", which consists of identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, attitude in response to a given situation.

In accommodating all of those activities, some methods of CL can be applied, either as separated units or as integration. English classes in Universitas Islam Indonesia have tried to accommodate CL methods, both integrated with non-CL methods and with other CL methods. Conceptually stated, there are five individual methods of CL: the "Learning Together Model" (Johnson & Johnson, 1989 in Putnam, 1997, pp. 135-139), the "Structural Approach" (Kagan, 1990 in Putnam, 1997, pp. 139-144), "Student Team Learning" (Slavin, 1995 in Putnam, 1997, pp. 144-148), and "Group Investigation" (Sharan & Sharan, 1992 in Putnam, 1997, pp. 148-152).

In UII context, the followings are sample applications of:

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a. "The Learning Together Model"

Task   : Writing an argumentative genre
Level   : 1styear law students
Procedure :

1. Students are paired and given a task with alternative topics. Choices of topics have to be different between partners.
2. Student A explains which topic she wants to write on and what he/she is going to write. Student B listens to student A and asks necessary questions, then makes an outline for student A's writing.
3. The reverse version of step 2.
4. Materials search step, which is conducted individually in the library. Attention should also be given to materials which might be useful for the partner.
5. Both students work together in writing the first paragraph of both writings.
6. Students continue writing individually.
7. After finish writing, the students proofread each other texts, correct mistakes, and suggest revision as needed.
8. Both students revise their works based on their partners' suggestion.
9. Students read each others' writing again and sign on their partners' work as a guarantee of no more mistakes.

Even though students do peer-correction in each pair, the teacher is still responsible in providing correction and help. Assessment is given by subtracting total score with errors made by oneself and his/her partner. Thus, each student is responsible for the success of him/herself and his/her partner.

b. "The Structural Approach"

Task   : Personal Information Interview
Level   : 1styear students of all faculties on first meetings
Procedure :

1. Students are paired by the teacher.
2. Each student is given a personal information form.
3. Students are to interview their partners and fill in the table with information about their partners.
4. Each student introduces his/her partner to the whole class.

This activity is usually great for "breaking the ice", since students usually do not know each other in the first meetings.

c. "Student Team Learning" in Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT) form

Task   : Reading for specific information
Level   : 1styear student of any faculty
Procedure :

1. Class presentation
   The teacher presents techniques of reading for specific information by introducing wh-questions that can be answered using the technique and types of answers.
   The teacher also provides examples of the use of this specific technique in real life situations, such as in reading ads, dictionary, etc.
2. Teams.
   Students are divided into groups. In groups, students practice the technique by answering sample questions from the teacher based on a certain text.
3. Games.
   The teacher divides according to the number of groups. Students are given a different text with two or three minutes to read it. The students are then instructed to work in groups, looking for answers of wh-questions uttered by the teacher. The teacher read one question at a time. Students are only given ten seconds to look for each answer and write it in correct spelling on the board. Students are not allowed to write the answer on the board when the ten second time is up. It goes on until ten to twenty questions. The answers are discussed at the end of round. Each correct answer deserves a point, and a group with the highest point is the winner.
4. Tournament.
   In the following weeks, the teacher would put students in competition among members of tables. It would be conducted individually through writing, to control the level of noise. Students are then assigned to various tables depending on their achievement. The levels of reading texts are increasing from time to time.
5. Recognition.
   Students with improving scores are given exemption from homework. However, the homework exempted is usually review materials.

This game usually makes the class exciting, since students are eager to compete and they will run back and forth to the board to write the answers. Students are not only getting used to the technique, but also try to spell correctly, as wrong spellings mean wrong answers. Tournament and recognition are rarely applied in UII, since it tends to de-motivate students in their language learning. Having used to individual competitive situation since primary to high schools, the students need a "change" in atmosphere, in which they are not "compared" to each other.

d. "Group Investigation"

Level   : 1st year law students
Procedure :

1. The teacher poses a topic – "polygamy". Based on the broad topic, the students determine sub-topics, e.g. religious point of view, polygamy for women vs. men, what the law says about polygamy, etc. They are then grouped according to their interests.
2. Each group starts planning their investigation and divide each member's area of sources.

3. Each group member conducts investigation, followed by group discussion on the findings.
4. Each group prepares for presentation.
5. Presentation time with question and answer sessions.
6. Teacher and students evaluation. The teacher would ask each student to come up with one specific question about polygamy, which would randomly be chosen as one of the questions in the class test.

In the process, four components are actually involved, as stated by Sharan and Sharan (1992, in Putnam, 1997, pp. 148-152): "investigation", "interaction", "interpretation", and "intrinsic motivation".

A combination of cooperative learning techniques can also be applied. Below are two examples of integrated CL techniques in UII context:

Lesson Plan 1

Objective   : By the end of the session students should be able to write a narrative genre
Level   : 1styear Medical Student
Topic   : Health disorder/illness
Procedure   :
The teacher explains to the class that in this unit they will write a narrative essay from the point of view of a patient. Each student will write one of the followings:
1. A day in the life on a patient with health disorder/illness (e.g. cancer, heart disease, etc.)
2. My most memorable experience as a patient with health disorder/illness
3. My most frightening experience as a patient with health disorder/illness
4. Any other suitable first person narrative framework suggested by students

The teacher then explains that in pairs the students will use the library to do research on a health disorder/illness, in which each pair will work on a certain illness they agree upon. During their research, students are expected to look for information covering setting, characters, and plot of their stories about the health disorder/illness.

Class Discussion
In the initial class discussion, the teacher shows the students how they can come up with categories related to their choices of topic. In doing so, the teacher selects one topic, for example obesity, and asks students to utter whatever they know about obesity. The students' ideas are then put on the board. Based on those ideas, the teacher can write down several categories that are possible to be used in the search, such as: symptoms, diet, life style, reasons for being in the condition, how to overcome it, etc.

The teacher explains that these categories can be used in whatever health disorder/illness they are going to write on.

Since the class consists of approximately 30 students, the teacher provides 7 alternative topics. Each student chooses a topic to write on. He/she is then assigned to a linguistically heterogenous pair by the teacher.

Using an individual working sheet and the categories, all members record their own prior knowledge on the topic selected. Members of each pair compare their lists and question additional information they would like to gain. This list would then be used as a guide in reading for specific information in the library.

As a group, each pair of students would look for information in the library. Each member of the pair, however, will search different books/references than their partner to generate broader results. Students would then write their findings on their individual sheets. After searching in the library, students share their findings and answers to the self-generated questions with their partners. Then, each pair would join another pair who is researching the same illness. In this group of at least four people, students compare their findings.

Teacher then selects at least a student from each illness topic to briefly present their findings to the class. Students can also share unanswered questions, so that possible input from others who are not doing the same topic is also welcome.

The teacher then introduces a narrative genre. The features of this genre are to be explicitly exposed to the students, so that they would have sufficient understanding on the matter. A sample narrative composition should be delivered, so the teacher can point out how the students can use their information in writing narratives. Students are then assigned to individually write their first draft as homework, using the ideas gathered during their research. Before doing so, however, the teacher must help students who still have unclear idea, especially related to the genre, e.g. setting, characters, and plot, by explaining the matters clearly.

On the next meeting, the essays are peer-reviewed by group mates. After being reviewed, the essays are returned to the authors for revision. When revisions have been made, proofreading is needed, which would be carried out by the same group mate.

Next, students are assigned to find another reader, who is not doing the same topic. It is aimed as feedback, in terms of whether the text is understandable and influential to the reader. Of course, this can also act as spreading information about a certain illness/health disorder. The other reader's name is put under the essay as editor as a means of recognition and control of conduct.

Lesson Plan 2
The following is an integration of CL techniques, teacher-led instruction, and individual learning. According to Sharan (1994, p. 206): "an integrated combination of all these techniques, each of which serves a different purpose in a well-structured language teaching unit, is the basis for the Integrated Groupwork Model and makes the methodological connection between content and process". It means that every single activity plays a different significant role within the whole session. The following example is adapted from Sharan (1994, pp. 207-209) and Allen (2006, pp. 11-21), with some modification according to UII context:

Objective   : By the end of the session students should be able to use vocabulary prominent to "franchise", use functional expressions to express agreement and disagreement, and reading for specific information.
Level   : 1st year Management Students
Topic   : Franchise
Procedure   :

The teacher asks the students to individually brainstorm the word "franchise".   Then, in groups of four to five students, each group of students develops a list of words, which will be reported to the whole class.   It is meant as a means to vocabulary building.

The next activity is in the form of group competition.   Each group is given two pictures – a franchise company and a non-franchise company, both of which exist in town.   In groups, students are asked to identify the differences between the two.

After differences are identified, vocabulary building activity is carried out through "Student Teams-Achievement Divisions" (STAD) technique (Bejarano, 1987 in Sharan, 1994, p. 200). Each student is given a worksheet, in which some discussion questions related to the previous pictures identified are provided.   In this case, the pictures facilitate the learning process in terms of supplying students with contextual understanding.   A cloze with a supply of word bank on the topic can be used as assessment of the learning process.   After that, the groups exchange their essays, mark and correct the closes, and calculate group scores.

The next activity is aimed at reading for specific information, as well as understanding new words in context and gaining knowledge of "franchise" itself.   In this case, the   teacher provides a reading text with the topic of "franchise", containing words that have just been acquired.   The jigsaw method is employed in this stage, in which expert groups read the same passage with different tasks/focuses.   This activity is then wrapped up by reporting group results to the class.

After each group reports to the whole class, a discussion group is conducted, in the form of "fishbowl" (Sharan, 1994, p. 208).Three groups are formed, which will function distinctively.   The first group members seat in the centre of the room and given 5 cards each, containing expressions to be used in discussion.   This group will then perform a discussion on "franchise", using the expressions provided in the cards.   Students put down a card, whenever the expression within each card is used appropriately.   The first student run out of card is the winner.

Meanwhile, group 2 students are to be seated around group 1 members. Their duty is to monitor how group 1 members use the expressions and the language.   Group 2 members must warn group 1 member who makes mistakes in speaking and record every linguistic problem occurs.   Group 3 members sit behind group 2.   Their duty is to observe and write difficulties occurring in group 1 discussion and identify the causes.

After the discussion is over, each group is given 5 minutes to prepare group report.   Group 2 and 3 are to report their findings about group 1 discussion.   After each report, the teacher would   conclude   the   activity   by   emphasising   on   the   importance   of   expressions,   peer correction, and conversation strategies.

By   the   end   of   these   activities,   students   are   quite   armed   with   content,   vocabulary,   and expressions for the closing activity, which is simulation of deciding whether the franchise existence in town is to be approved or rejected.   Students will be assigned to play various roles – the government   official, the   prominent figure in   society, the franchise company representative,   the   consumer   right   organisation,   and   the   local   company   representative. Situation and roles are described, then students can prepare for their roles in their "expert groups" (Sharan, 1994, p. 209).   After preparation, each student would go to their "home

groups" (Sharan, 1994, p. 209) and start doing the simulation.   Class discussion can be activated after "home group" discussion.

CONCLUSION

Cooperative Learning as a technique of Communicative Language Teaching Approach is proven to be applicable and suitable in improving the teaching of English at Universitas Islam Indonesia, regardless its being relatively a new paradigm in EFL.   It is in fact supported by the Indonesian spirit of *Gotong Royong*, which is literally translated as "mutual assistance" and is truly aiming at cooperation in achieving shared goals.

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