saga: *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*
Vol. 5 No. 1, 2024
P-ISSN: 2715-7512; E-ISSN: 2716-0246
doi:10.21460/saga.2024.51.159

GROUP WORK FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF SIMPLE PAST MATERIALS AND DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS

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Received: 14 November 2022 Accepted: 27 April 2023

Abstract

The teaching-learning process at schools has been a big challenge after the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the various schemata before going to new material, material understanding, and social activities. This study tried to discover whether group work is effective in helping the students better understand the materials and being more active and sociable in class. This study was conducted for the sixth grade of SD Tarakanita Bumijo Yogyakarta in July-August 2022. This study would implement group work by conducting heterogeneous groups. The data gathered came from combined observation data, a quantitative questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, and reflection notes. After the data were analyzed, it was found that 1). this group work activity was influential in helping the students to get a better understanding of the material; 2) with this activity, the students learned, helped, and encouraged each other during the study time and project test time; 3) this group work activity was able to create good bonds for the students and their friends. They were not picky in socializing. They also felt closer after the group work. They learned together, helped each other, and most did not argue or fight during the group work. This research recommended that the teacher set the rules as clearly as possible to avoid the students playing around and set an exemplary communication environment before starting the group work.

Keywords: *Group work, Heterogeneous group, Observation, Quantitative data*

INTRODUCTION

Covid 19 pandemic has influenced all aspects of life, including education. During the pandemic, teachers and students were forced to have a limited teaching-learning process at home. Teachers should also find ways to enable students to learn effectively at home. In addition, engaging with transitioned and simplified curriculum in online or hybrid classes significantly impacted the stu-

dent's abilities. Not all students could absorb the lesson well during the online class. The learning process results vary and differ. Those who had access to educational resources differed from the ones who did not. They also developed less socialised personalities that influenced their relationship with their teachers and friends. This statement is per the situation that happened, especially in classes 6A and 6B at SD Tarakanita Bumijo. Based on observation conducted in two weeks, the students in both classes had various understandings of a lesson, even from the review materials. The material discussed was the development of Simple Past with to be, which had been taught previously in 5th grade. Regarding social skills, some remained silent or needed to mingle better with their friends.

The rapid change in the teaching-learning process will continue once we reach a new era after the pandemic. Today, teachers should find ways to provide better and proper teaching activities to balance the students' loss during the pandemic. Teachers should also consider the way sixth graders develop. Some of the sixth graders' characteristics are understanding abstract thought and solving problems more logically. Though they still have egocentric thoughts, they start to understand other people's perspectives. They want to solve their problem and work more freely. In addition, they like to make peer groups to play together. Some of them can tolerate and work together better than others (Astuti, 2016). As there are two significant problems dealing with cognitive and socialization after the pandemic, teachers should provide opportunities for students by actively involving them in the teaching process (Davis, 1993). In addition, Hall and Hewings (2001) suggested that learning a language is a process that develops through interaction between learners, teachers, texts, and activities. Thus, a collaborative environment helped students to be more active and creative (Murphy et al., 2005). One possible technique to be applied is group work.

Group work is a discussion of academic work that allows students to organize their thinking by comparing ideas and interpretations with each other and to express their understanding of a subject (Dunkin, 1987). Brown and Lee (2015) stated that group work is a generic term covering a multiplicity in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language. There are four benefits of group work:

1. Group work generates interactive language.
2. Group work offers an embracing effective climate.
3. Group work promotes learner responsibility and autonomy.
4. Group work is a step toward individualizing instruction.

There are some more benefits of group work. Nelson-LeGall (1992) stated that engaging in activity and social support, in this case from friends, made the students think they could perform the task. Encouragement within the group is essential to keep them going and enhance their participation. In addition, Webb (1982) also mentioned that this group work lead the students to a higher level of thinking skills. When students usually listen and pay attention to the teacher and do the task, group work enables them to share their ideas, discuss, solve problems, and give and receive feedback from their group friends simultaneously.

However, some problems might be considered in group work, like the possible distraction, the ideal number in a group, and grouping itself. An Oracle study showed that the number of

distractions in English and Math lessons differs based on their task. The students might have 80% distraction as they work individually. When they work as a class or a registered group, they have 12 % distraction; when they work co-operative or in a small group, they have 9% distraction. Thus, the lowest level of distraction was found when the students were working in a group (Galton & Williamson, 1992).

Some problems might occur before and during grouping. Some students only wanted to work with friends they liked. Some who didn't have close friends might have yet to have their group. Some students were bossy, some were good leaders, and some were silent. That is why the chance of unequal working distribution was big, and some students with a weaker understanding might be left behind. Since there were differences in schemata, material understanding, and ways of socializing after the pandemic, teachers need to arrange groups and set the rules to create an effective study environment.

First, the teacher should remind the students that they work as a group and that what they achieve is not an individual but a group achievement. They should also take responsibility (Gödek, 2004).

Second, the teacher should arrange the group work. Research showed by Barr and Dreeben (1977) showed that teachers could arrange a group structure to avoid inappropriate talk. A study by Bennet (1993) showed that a standard group consisted of four or five students. Three students could isolate one student from joining the discussion, and more than five students made the task monitoring harder. The author also divided the group into two: homogenous, with almost the same ability students, and heterogeneous, with different students' abilities. Homogeneous groups brought advantages to high-level students. A heterogeneous group brought advantages to students with weaker understanding and, at the same time, created better interaction. That is why this study conducted heterogeneous groups.

Third, the teacher is a facilitator and supervisor. The group works with teacher supervision worked more successfully than the one the teacher did not help or supervise. In short, this study applied the three rules of group work.

Thus, this study tried to discover whether group work is effective in helping the students better understand the materials and be more active and sociable in class. Thus, the study aims to answer these questions :

1. Does group work give the students a better understanding of the material?
2. How does group work make the students have a better understanding of the material?
3. How does group work affect the student's relationship with their friends?

This study was conducted for the sixth grade of SD Tarakanita Bumijo Yogyakarta in July-August 2022. This study may contribute to giving a modified way to implement group work in primary schools, especially in Indonesia, and it may enrich existing research sources in English Language Teaching.

METHODS

This study implemented group work by conducting heterogeneous groups of four and five students. The teacher chooses the captains of the group, and they choose their friends based on the lottery. So the group consisted of high-level understanding and lower-level understanding students. According to Bennet (1993), heterogeneous groups brought an advantage to students with weaker understanding and, at the same time, created better interaction. It brought an effective exchange of opinion and collective thought, and the development of socio-cognitive conflict and problem-solving are expected in this group.

The students would have the same task, discuss, and work together to create the product and solve the problem. At the end of the group work, the students would reflect and share their feelings about the group task process. The teaching-learning steps are :

1. The teacher set the rules for the group work. Setting the rule is essential to highlight the bond of group work with clear rules like the score is a group score, so one's mistake is a group mistake, help each other, and many more.
2. The students and teachers review the use of simple past with to-be.
3. Six groups consisting of 4 students are assigned to work in a group. The group will study together for some time.
4. The group then will make ten numbers of fill-in-the-blank test paper; they should also make the key answers. The teacher will observe and assist them if they need help or check.
5. Each group will submit the test paper and randomly assign one of the other groups' test papers. Next, they will work together to solve the test paper.
6. The solved test paper is returned to the group that made it to be checked and scored.
7. After announcing the score, the students will share their experiences and feelings when assigned the task.
8. The students then fill in the questionnaire consisting of grading and open-ended questions, to individually answer these questions :
   a. Does group work give the students a better understanding of the material?
   b. How does group work make the students have a better understanding of the material?
   c. How does group work affect the students' relationship with their friends?
9. The author will score and analyze the data of the questionnaire.

This study combined qualitative and quantitative research. By combining these two methods, it was expected that more data could be analyzed and interpreted, leading to more effective results. In this study, the questionnaire was used to gather numerical data, while observation and reflection were used to see the behaviour and inputs.

Quantitative Questionnaire

Quantitative research sets out to gather data using measurement, analyze this data for trends and relationships, and verify the measurements made. Thus, quantitative data is used to analyze numerical data. In this study, the data was converted using the 5 Likert scales to acknowledge the Group Work activity. The five scales were described as follows:

Strongly Agree	(SA)	score 5
Agree	(A)	score 4
Average	(AV)	score 3

Disagree	(D)	score 2
Strongly Disagree	(SD)	score 1

The five-scale conversion used a Criterion-Referenced Test developed by Widoyoko (2009), as presented in the table.

Table 1. Referenced Criterion dan and Scoring

Quantitative Data	Score		Criteria
	Formula	Average Score	
5	$X > \underline{Xi} + 1{,}8\ S_{bi}$	$X > 4{,}2$	Strongly Agree
4	$\underline{Xi} + 0{,}6\ S_{bi} < X \leq \underline{Xi} + 1{,}8\ S_{bi}$	$3{,}4 < X \leq 4{,}2$	Agree
3	$\underline{Xi} - 0{,}6\ S_{bi} < X \leq \underline{Xi} + 0{,}6\ S_{bi}$	$2{,}6 < X \leq 3{,}4$	Average
2	$\underline{Xi} - 0{,}6\ S_{bi} < X \leq \underline{Xi} - 0{,}6\ S_{bi}$	$1{,}8 < X \leq 2{,}6$	Disagree
1	$X \leq \underline{Xi} - 1{,}8\ S_{bi}$	$X \leq 1{,}8$	Strongly Disagree

Description:

$\underline{Xi}$ (*Average Score*) = ½ (*Max score* + *Min score*) = ½ (5 + 1) = 3

S_{bi} (*Standar Deviation*) = ⅙ (*Max score* - *Min score*) = ⅙ (5 - 1) = 0,67
X = *Empirical score*

Average formula:

$$\text{Average} = \frac{\textit{average score}}{\text{number of indicators}}$$

First, the formula worked to find the average score from the range score. Second, as the questionnaire indicators had been set, the average that played as the minimum score was found with the formulation. The standard deviation was the possible dispersion of the set of values. In this research, the group work would be stated as successful in helping students understand the materials and socialize better with a minimum score of "3.4" with an "Agree" predicate.

Observation

Observation has the fundamental function of seeing through behaviours during the activity. The teacher observed what happened before, during, and after the activity and took notes. In this study, observation was beneficial to see how the students interacted in the group, solved the problem, managed time, problems that appeared, and their strategy to finish the project. As the teacher has set the rules, their obedience can be seen from the observation. The data gathered from the observation proceeded to see the behaviour pattern and answer this study's problems.

Reflection

According to Goldie (2008), a reflective learning style can increase engagement with learning that surrounds complex relationships between clinical facts, clinical practice, and professional identity. Clandinin and Cave (2008) stated that reflection in the teaching-learning process was a learning environment, both physical and emotional space, that promoted students' awareness. In this study, the students took time to reflect and reflect on what they have done in group work activities. They answered the guided questions and freely wrote whatever they felt or got during

the lesson. The data gathered from the reflection answered the study problems and would be used as inputs and feedback for the teacher for the next group activity or other activities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Activities

There were 62 students from 2 classes participated in this research. However, due to time limitation, the teaching-learning and testing steps were changed as follow:

Table 2. Changed Steps

Previous Steps	Adjusted Steps
Step number 4: The group then will make ten numbers of fill-in-the-blank test paper; they should also make the key answers. The teacher will observe and assist them if they need help or check.	Step number 4: The group then will make 10 numbers of fill-in-the-blank test paper; they should also make the key answers. The teacher will observe and assist them if they need help or check. The teacher then gives a score to the test paper they made.
Step number 6 : The solved test paper is returned to the group that made it to be checked and scored.	Step number 6 : The teacher graded the test paper. Next, the score of the test paper created by the students and the score of the answer sheet were combined to create the average score.

The time needed to be more because the students only had 70 minutes to study in a group and do the group work. Thus, the activities were adjusted.

Does group work give the students a better understanding of the material?

Based on the result of questionnaires 1-3, with an average score of 4.26, It was concluded that this group work activity was successful in helping the students have a better understanding of the material. The students could understand the material, and they had better scores. Since the group work project was to create test papers and keywords, the students felt they could deliver the task well. This finding follows Brown and Lee (2015) stated that some benefits of group work were generating interactive language, embracing affection, and individualizing instruction that supports the activity. In addition, Bennet's (1993) study found that heterogeneous groups helped the weak understanding of students. Furthermore, supervision from teachers would help create successful group work that resulted in better scores.

How does group work make the students have a better understanding of the material?

Based on the result of questionnaires numbers 4-5 with an average score of 4.33, the observation during group work activities helped the students better understand the materials. The students helped each other during the study time; the ones who mastered the materials helped the ones who did not. They reminded each other of the proper form of the Simple past. They also encourage each other to make proper test questions or answer correctly.

The results from the reflection questionnaire stated that group work learning and testing is fun as the students encourage, teach, and mentor each other. In this case, the heterogeneous group worked well, as how Bennet (1993) stated.

One student stated that what was more exciting was creating the test paper itself. It strengthens Murphy et al.'s (2005) theory that stated collaborative environment helps students to be more active and creative.

One student stated she became braver in voicing her opinion. Some students stated that as captains, they felt more responsible, and one captain stated it had boosted his social skills and leadership. He continued that this activity gave a unique spin on tests other than sitting in the classroom and doing the test by answering the questions provided. Brown and Lee (2015) stated that group work is a generic term covering a multiplicity in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language with some benefits: Group work generates interactive language, embraces affective climate, promotes learner responsibility, and autonomy, and a step toward individualizing instruction, thus, how the students reflected on the activity following Brown's and Lee's (2015) statement.

How does group work affect the students' relationship with their friends?
Based on the result of questionnaire number 6-8, students' reflections on the questionnaire, and the observation notes. It was concluded that this group work activity was able to create a good bond for the students and their friends. They helped each other, and most did not argue or fight during the group work. They also felt closer after the group work.

One student stated that she did not master the material. However, surprisingly, her male friends patiently helped her to understand the materials, and others encouraged her to make the test questions. She felt happy when her group of friends clapped happily to congratulate her. Another student also stated that he felt happy knowing that his friends trusted his lead, and he learned how to be responsible in the group. The noisy members he thought would make a fuss turned out to be supported ones too. One of the smart students stated, that the group work activity did not make his score better, as he almost always had great to perfect sores, but it taught him to be more patient in assisting other friends who had difficulties and helping them made him happy.

Those reflections' findings followed Brown and Lee (2015), stating that some benefits of group work were generating interactive language and embracing affection. According to Gödek (2004), group work also helped shy or silenced students to join conversations and discussions. This collaborative work made the students get closer as they worked toward the same goal. Thus, they become more sociable. After some weeks of observation, the students changed attitude was observable. They were not picky with their friends, and they had better interactions.

CONCLUSION

One important note before conducting the group work is to set the rules as clearly as possible. The rules set in this research were: the score is a group score, so one's mistake is a group mistake, help each other, and penalty score for not accomplishing the task and messing around. These rules made the students aware of teamwork.

Based on the questionnaire, reflection, and observation data, group work gave the students a better understanding of the material. The students had a better understanding as in the group work, they helped each other during the study time, and the ones who mastered the materials helped the ones who had not. They reminded each other of the proper form of the Simple past.

They also encouraged each other to make good test questions or answer correctly.

Nevertheless, there were some points to be considered in conducting group work. First, the group activities can be varied based on the students' needs. Second, The time should be set longer, or the task can be more straightforward. Furthermore, as most students enjoyed this activity, teachers may consider group work in teaching-learning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire and Observation Results

Table 3. Questionnaire Recap

No	Statement	Average Score	Predicate
1.	Group work makes me understand the materials better.	4,14	Agree
2.	I got a good or better score in Group Work.	4,35	Agree
3.	I was able to make and answer questions in Group Work.	4,27	Agree
4.	I'm happier when I study and do my tests with Group Work.	4,46	Agree
5.	I worked well with my group mates.	4,24	Agree
6.	Our group members help and support each other in doing our tasks.	4,33	Agree
7.	Our group members fought when we did the tasks.	1,42	Disagree
8.	I am closer to my friends after Group Work activities.	4,14	Agree

Appendix 2. Observation Recap

Table 4 Observation Recap

1.	Before grouping, some students only want to sit and interact well with their good friends.
2.	Set clear rules: the score is a group score, so one's mistake is a group mistake, help each other, penalty score for not accomplishing the task and messing around. These rules made the students aware of teamwork.
3.	After grouping they have to sit with the group with the member they chose. Not all members were their good friends and they had to work on the group.
4.	Surprise fact: one or two captains didn't choose some of their good friends to be in the group, they chose the ones who can work well, potentially avoiding being noisy.
5.	The captains helped with the learning review. Students in the same group helped each other to understand the materials and reminded each other of the materials.
6.	Some captains encouraged the students who had less understanding to give more ideas for the test paper.
7.	Some students who previously had less understanding of the material got a better understanding. Some of them happily jumped when they could make question-and-answer questions correctly.
8.	The students were trying hard not to be noisy.
9.	Some students are proactive in checking their progress and ask the teacher if they don't understand something.


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