FRESHMEN AND THIRD GRADE STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS ON THEIR SOFT SKILLS ACQUIREMENT IN THE USE OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

It is said that soft skills are needed to have a successful life and career for students and can be trained in classroom by conducting collaborative learning. Then, polytechnic students have collaboration learning in their English classroom activity which is useful for their soft skills achivements. However, the students which have different level can have different perceptions on it. This research tries to compare students' perceptions on their soft skills acquirement in the use of collaborative learning in English classroom in a state polytechnic. The first group is the freshmen, meanwhile the second group is the third grade students of Diploma 3. The study employs a qualitative research design, which is a case study. The data are gained from questionnaire, then observation and interviews are used to triangulate the data. The findings show that the freshmen perceive that they acquire soft skills in 90.9%, meanwhile the third graders are in 84.9%. This concludes that freshmen soft skills acquirement is higher than the third graders. It is recommended that collaborative learning method should be continued to develop the students' soft skills, and the type of collaborative learning should be more appropriate for different grades of students.

Keywords: Soft skills, Collaborative Learning, English classroom

A. INTRODUCTION

Students of Polytechnic nowadays are urged to have not only the hard skills but also the soft skills. In order to develop the students' soft skills, it is likely that it can be learned and improved in varied activities of curricula besides the extra-curricula in higher educational education.

Furthermore, Bandung Polytechnic for Manufacturing (Polman Bandung) now is really concerned about the students' soft skills since they contribute more to an individual's ultimate success or failure than technical skills or overall intelligence (Goleman in Quieng, 2015). In fact, students' soft skill achievement has been one aspect that becomes a goal in quality objectives of Polman Bandung each year. The soft (competency) skills that are monitored in Polman Bandung are

motivation, flexibility, willingness to learn, integrity, relationship building, and teamwork & cooperation (Muhammad, Ariyani, and Sadikin, 2014). It is expected that students having developed soft-skills, will have good capacities in those and other aspects that are helpful for the students to face their real life situation.

Eventhough there is a low correlation between soft skills score and Grade Point Average (GPA), it can also mean that the soft skill and hard skill of students, both aspects, should be developed in the appropriate portion since the workplace todays needs people with a good hard skill, which usually is reflected in the GPA, and also high soft skills, dealing with interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills so that graduates of Polman Bandung will be successful (Sadikin, et.al., 2015).

A method that can develop the soft skills is collaborative learning because it emphasizes the learning aspect of working together (Ingleton, Doube, and Rogers, 2000). Then, the teaching of English in Polman Bandung has also employed the Collaborative Learning methodology for some topics in many classrooms. The use of collaborative learning gives contribution to the acquirement of students' soft skills in the polytechnic (Permata, 2016). However, it is likely that different levels of students can imply different perspective. Therefore, this study tries to discover more about the soft skills acquirement in collaborative learning in English Classroom according to freshmen and third graders perceptions.

B. SOFT SKILLS

Soft skills, the employability skills that speak to a worker's interpersonal skills and character, rose in early 1990s as a critical component of worker productivity with the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) (ODEP, 2009). According to Szul (2002) soft skills are defined as nontechnical skills, abilities, and traits required to function in a specific employment environment and can be placed in categories:

1. Problem solving and other cognitive skills invole identifying problems and formulating and evaluating alternative solutions by weighing risks and benefits.
2. Oral communication skills include the ability to speak well and listen well.

3. Personal qualities important to job performance include self-esteem, self-management, responsibility, and motivation.

4. Interpersonal and teamwork skills are those needed to negotiate with others, to participate as a member of a team, to serve clients and customers in a way that meets their expectations, and to resolve conflicts maturely.

Then, according to Widhiarso (2009), Soft skills are a set of skills that influence how we interact to others, and it covers effective communication, creative thinking, team building, and other skills related to individual personality capacity.

Furthermore, there are specific skills came out as the most important ones stated in 2011 by Wilson-Ahlstrom, et al. in Queing (2015), they are: communication, relationships and collaboration, critical thinking and decision making, and initiative and self-direction, which they are also can be called as soft skills.

Soft skills training and improvement for students can be done in the formal approach. It would be to incorporate soft skills subjects into a programme's curriculum (Schulz, 2008). So, soft skills can be improved in curricula in an educational institution. Then, Schulz states that on lower levels, a course that requires students to do a bit of research and to present their results to the class afterwards has been proven as being quite effective.

So, soft skills can be trained and improved in the educational situation which it will be useful for the future of the students. As it is stated by Widhiarso (2009), soft skills give benefit to career development and professional ethics.

C. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

In Collaborative Learning, students have to work in a group. In fact, students in polytechnic perceive Collaborative Learning as learning activity that is very useful for them (Permata, 2014). In this case, the students not only learn English content material, but also it is potential that they train and improve their soft skills.

There are three main reasons for adopting group work or Collaborative Learning, as stated by White (2007); 1) group work or Collaborative Learning is

an effective form of learning; 2) it promotes teamwork skills that employers require and value; and 3) efficiency in the use of staff time. So, one of advantages that we can have from implementing the Collaborative Learning is about to promote the teamwork skills.

Morover, the Collaborative Learning also shares a sense of the social nature of learning, and emphasizes a social approach to the development of learning skills, work skills, and life skills (Ingleton, Doube, and Rogers, 2000). Therefore, this method improve the social skill too.

Ingleton, Doube, and Rogers (2000) say Collaborative Learning is learning that occurs as a result of interaction between peers engaged in the completion of a common task. Students are not only 'in' groups, they 'work' together in groups, playing a significant role in each other's learning (Ingleton, Doube and Rogers, 2000).

Collaborative Learning (CL) can be conducted in group work. Small groups of around five students provoke greater involvement and participation than larger groups, and they are small enough for real interpersonal interaction, yet not so small that members are over-reliant upon each individual (Harmer, 2001). However, some researchers suggest that the group should consist of three or four students.

D. RESEARCH METHOD

The study used descriptive method. Data were obtained from questionnaire and interviews with some students in Bahasa Indonesia to minimize the mistakes and error in gaining data. The questionnaires were collected from 2 freshmen classes and 2 classes from third grades conducting CL in their English classroom which were coming from the same Study Program.

In the learning process, the classroom activities used CL. Since there were normally 24 students in a class, they work in a group of 4 students, or at least 3 students. For the freshman students, they had to do a bit of research concering their competency which is technic, especially manufacturing process. Their topics were about machines, tools, etc. They utilized the library, internet, books, modules, and even asked the content to their instructor in workshop. Then, they

had to present the content to the class using the powerpoint presentation file, and all students had to speak during the group presentation. This procedures were done by all groups. Doing a bit of research and to present their results to the class has been proven as being quite effective in improving soft skills (Schulz, 2008). It is expected that the students' soft skills are trained, besides they gain the speaking score and group score from the presentation result.

Meanwhile, for the third grade students, in each group they had to make a unified paragraph, furthermore they had to be able to present about the structure of it, structure of each sentence including its type. Then, they also presented the content by using the powerpoint presentation file which each student had to speak.

The questionnaire was used to determine the students' perception on their Soft skills acquirement in CL conducted in their English classroom. It used a likert scale which the students had to choose one option for each statement that is in accordance with their perception (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Then, in findings and discussions section they are grouped into Agree and Disagree.

Items in the questionnaire are taken from Szul's four categories on Soft Skills (2002), which are:

Items for Problem solving and other cognitive skills
- made problem solving easier
- identifying problems and formulating and evaluating alternative solutions (Making consideration and decision)
-stimulate creative thinking
-improve creativity
Items for Oral communication skills
- the ability to speak well
- public speaking ability
-the ability to understand nonverbal communication
- the ability to listen well
Items for Personal qualities important to job performance
-self esteem

-self management

-responsibility

-motivation

Items for Interpersonal and teamwork skills

- participate as a member of a team (focus to the group rather than individual)

-actively participate in the group work

-getting friends

- resolve conflicts maturely

The questionnaire was administered after the CL had been conducted in several meetings (6 meetings). All students answered the questionnaire. Meanwhile, classroom observation and interviews were used to justify the data obtained from the questionnaire.

E. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the results show valuable information on students' perceptions on their soft skills achivement in CL. There were 46 questionnaires from the freshmen students and 45 questionnaires from third grade studens as participants. The questionnaire gained information about the soft skill achivement in the CL classroom. The findings are discussed below:

1. **Problem Solving and other Cognitive Skill**

Based on the findings, the answers from the students are shown in the table below:

CL:	Freshmen		Third Graders	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Make problem solving easier	95.7%	4.3%	93.5%	4.3%
Make consideration and decision	93.5%	6.5%	87.0%	10.9%
Stimulate creative thinking	89.1%	10.9%	89.1%	8.7%
Improve creativity	89.1%	10.9%	87.0%	10.9%

According to the data, the freshmen perceived that their soft skills in terms of the problem solving and other cognitive skills were acquired through the CL in 91.8%. Meanwhile the third grade students perceived it in 89.1%. So, the gap was only in 2.7%.

Category	Freshmen	Third Graders	Gap
Problem solving and other cognitive skills	91.8%	89.1%	2.7%
Average	90.5%		

Students in both levels said that the burden of the task felt lighter because they worked together in a group. They could share opinions to their friends on specific contents in the group work. During the group work, students could use variety of sources so that they shared opinion and even argued each other's opinion to improve the writing. This is a prove that CL fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas (Gokhale, 1995).

A student explained that by the use of CL, ideas came easily. It was because when someone didn't have any idea, the group mates could have an idea to be shared and discussed. However, in another situation, having many ideas in a group could also make a longer work time. In general both freshmen and third graders perceived similar opinion about the aspect of problem solving and other cognitive skills.

2. Oral Communication skills

The table below shows the result of oral communication skills.

CL improves:	Freshmen		Third Grades	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
The ability to speak well	97.8%	2.2%	95.7%	2.2%
Public speaking ability	89.1%	10.9%	87.0%	10.9%

The ability to understand nonverbal communication	93.5%	6.5%	87.0%	10.9%
The ability to listen well	95.7%	4.3%	93.5%	4.3%

Based on the data, it can be seen that both Freshmen and Third Grades agreed that they gained Soft skills in area of oral communication skills in more than 90%, and the gap was 3.2%.

Category	Freshmen	Third Grades	Gap
Oral communication skills	94%	90.8%	3.2%
Average	92.4%		

According to the result, from four categories of soft skills, in both students levels, the category that gains the highest percentage was the oral communication skills. Some experts think communication skills and presentation specifically are must needed skills, because English for Specific Purposes learners will not survive in an industrial rapidly moving world if they lack of the essence of this skill which is the most important (Mousawa & Elyas, 2015). So, from this view the method of CL in the classroom, including the group presentation, is very beneficial for students' communication skills in all levels of students. English classroom has a very high potencial to be a curricula activity developing students' soft skills, especially the communication skill.

However, according to a research focusing on alumni of the polytechnic, the alumni communication skill reached 79% (Muhammad, et.al, 2016) which was one of the lowest score had by them. So, it is much lower than the score gained by students in CL activity. This shows that the communication skill needs to be improved better and continously in order to cover the need of students in their future job situation.

3. Personal qualities

In the next table, it shows the findings on soft skills acquirement on students perception in category of personal qualities important to job performance.

CL improves:	Freshmen		Third Grades	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Self esteem	93.5%	6.5%	89.1%	8.7%
Self management	87.0%	13.0%	78.3%	19.6%
Responsibility	80.4%	19.6%	69.6%	26.1%
Motivation	82.6%	17.4%	78.3%	19.6%

Here, 85.9% freshmen agreed that they acquired soft skills in personal qualities important to job performance, meanwhile the third grades were in 78.8%.

Category	Freshmen	Third Grades	Gap
Personal qualities	85.9%	78.8%	7.1%
Average	82.4%		

According to results, the percentage in personal qualities important to job performance gained the lowest level compared to other soft skills categories. This is in line with a study in the Polytechnic concerning eight dimensions of softskills which one of the findings was the aspect of motivation had one of the lowest achivements which was 2.99 in scale of 4, although it was still in moderate score (Sadikin, et.al., 2016). Meanwhile, the previous research in the Polytechnic targeting to the sophomore students also stated the similar finding; motivation gained the lowest achivement compared to other five aspects of softskills which was 2.33 in scale of 4 (Ariyani, 2013).

Another point is, the gap between the freshmen and third graders in area of personal qualities was also high. It was in 7.1%, which the third graders were below 80%. Meanwhile according to a research focused on alumni, the motivation, one of personal qualities, was in 79.08% (Muhammad, et.al., 2016). It was close to the score gained by the third grader students, but different to the freshmen. This implies that the motivation, or generally the personal qualities, of the students of polytechnic was decreasing at least in their own perpectives. It needs specific way to boost up the motivation of students at least making it in

stable position.

However, both freshmen and third graders said that low achiever students got support from the peer in the group, and also it gave motivation to make the best performance. In CL the task was the responsibility for all members, different with the individual task which was a responsibility of oneself. However, the 'free rider' students sometimes occured in the activities which it led to not improving the personal qualities.

4. Interpersonal and teamwork skills

Regarding the soft skill acquirement in area of interpersonal and teamwork skills, the table below shows the students' perception.

In CL:	Freshmen		Third Grades	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Focus to the group rather than individual	89.1%	10.9%	82.6%	15.2%
Actively participate in the group work	91.3%	8.7%	60.9%	37.0%
Getting friends	91.3%	8.7%	87.0%	10.9%
Resolve conflicts maturely	95.7%	4.3%	93.5%	4.3%

So, it can be seen that in acquiring soft skill in interpersonal and teamwork skills 91.8% of freshmen students agreed, in the other hand, 81% of third grades agreed. Meanwhile, the gap between the freshmen and three graders in interpersonal and teamwork skills was the highest one (10.8%), although their percentage were still above 80%.

Category	Freshmen	Third Graders	Gap
Interpersonal and teamwork skills	91.8%	81%	10.8%
Average	86.4%		

According to the questionnaire result, some students thought that it was difficult getting members (of the group) to actively participate in tasks. A freshman said that not all of the members in his group wanted to work hard, and eventhough the person did a work, he still didn't really understand the task, and he was dependent to another student. This shows that a low achiever student could make himself doing fosilization or becoming a passive member in his group. In this situation, the individuals may fall into passive (fossilized) whereas other may dominate (Harmer, 2001).

According to observation, the freshmen seemed more enthusiastic to give more effort in the groupwork, meanwhile the third grader students seemed not really enthusiastic in giving effort in the group work. It can be seen in aspect of 'actively participate in the group work', the gap was in 30% which the third graders were lower than the freshmen. One student of third graders said that because they had known each other personalities, which they met everyday, and also they felt exhausted with final project that they have, they did the work only as needed.

However, being as the third graders means that they have wider range of tolerance. They didn't have personal problem with their friend or peer in group. Meanwhile, in group of freshmen sometimes egoism showed, and they were still adaptive to each other.

Generally many students said that it is more fun in CL since they can share their knowledge to friends. Students showed their tolerance and the mature thought to their friend's lack.

F. CONCLUSION

The findings show students' opinion that they acquire Problem solving and other cognitive skills (90.5%), Oral communication skills (92.4%), Personal qualities important to job performance (82.4%), and Interpersonal and teamwork skills (86.4%) by the use of CL in their English classroom.

However, the higher acquirement is gained by the freshmen in all categories of soft skills compared to the third graders. Moreover, the biggest gap is in Interpersonal dan teamwork skills proving that it needs special treatment and

appropriate technique to make sure that the third grader students will achive interpersonal and teamwork skills during collaborative learning in English classroom. Making them to actively participate in group work and to have eager/enthusiasm in doing the learning program is a way to help them train the specific soft skills.

As a recommendation, in giving CL for third graders, there are specific aspects that need to be noticed, for example make sure that all students will actively participate in the group. This can be reached by giving more careful procedures to the group and motivation to all students.

Then, the students' perception from freshmen and third graders to their soft skill acquirement is still in a high percentage (87.9 %). This concludes that generally the students perceive that CL improves their Soft Skill acquirement. This recommends that it should be continued to develop the Polytechnic students' soft skills and should be improved appropriate to the learner level.

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