

IMPROVING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH GROUP LEARNING

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Abstract

The study aims to find out how to improve students' language skills by using a group learning model. The development of language skills can be done with a variety of techniques, one of which is the application of group learning techniques. The province of group learning is viewed from two paradigms, namely psychological and social paradigms. In this group learning process, the teacher acts as a motivator, facilitator, mediator, and evaluator. The stages used in this group learning are the group formation stage and the presentation stage. The presentation stage includes preparation and preparation of learning units (*Planungsphase*), implementation stage (*Durchfuehrungsphase*), and summary and feedback stage (*Anwendungsphase*). The application of group learning techniques was carried out on 3rd semester students in the German language education study program in the *Sprechfertigkeit* course using the *Netzwerk B1* textbook. Based on the results of the study, it shows that the group learning model can improve students' language skills.

Key words: language skills, group learning, German

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana cara meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa siswa dengan menggunakan model pembelajaran kelompok. Pengembangan keterampilan berbahasa dapat dilakukan dengan berbagai macam teknik, salah satunya dengan penerapan teknik pembelajaran kelompok. Provinsi belajar kelompok ditinjau dari dua paradigma, yaitu paradigma psikologis dan paradigma sosial. Dalam proses pembelajaran kelompok ini, guru berperan sebagai motivator, fasilitator, mediator, dan evaluator. Tahapan yang digunakan dalam pembelajaran kelompok ini adalah tahap pembentukan kelompok dan tahap presentasi. Tahap presentasi meliputi persiapan dan penyusunan unit pembelajaran (*fase Planung*), tahap implementasi (*fase Durchfuehrungs*), dan tahap ringkasan dan umpan balik (*fase Anwendungs*). Penerapan teknik pembelajaran kelompok dilakukan pada mahasiswa semester 3 program studi pendidikan bahasa Jerman mata kuliah *Sprechfertigkeit* dengan menggunakan buku ajar *Netzwerk B1*. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa model pembelajaran kelompok dapat meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa siswa.

Kata kunci: keterampilan berbahasa, belajar kelompok, bahasa Jerman

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of foreign language learning in Indonesia, especially German, is an effort for the Indonesian people to be able to absorb and follow the development of science and technology in the

world. This effort also forms quality individuals who are ready to face the era of globalization. In fact, there are still some problems faced by German learners. The problem of language teaching, especially foreign languages, is very complex. Many

factors are interrelated in supporting the success of foreign language teaching. In addition to linguistic and non-linguistic factors, teaching techniques also play an important role and determine the result of the language teaching and learning process itself (Mannahali, M., 2022; Mannahali, M., Azizah, L., & Hasmawati, H., 2021; Mannahali, M., Hasmawati, H., & Achmad, A., 2020).

These problems can be overcome by applying a learning model that suits the needs of students. For this purpose, teacher creativity is needed in choosing and using appropriate teaching techniques as an alternative to develop foreign language skills. One of the learning techniques that has developed since the 1960s that positions the learner as the centre or target of learning is group learning. Group learning gives students the opportunity to improve their writing skills actively in their learning groups, resulting in cooperation and shared responsibility for understanding the material. In essence, cooperative learning is an attitude or behavior of working or helping others in a cooperative structure in groups consisting of two or more people where the success of the work is influenced by the involvement of each group member (Harianto, H., Dalle, A., & Anwar, M., 2021).

Group learning can improve students' cognitive learning outcomes (Dewi, S. G. M., & Gunawan, H., 2019). In addition, group learning can train students to work together, contribute ideas in constructing concepts, and solve problems through socialization (Anitra, R., 2021; Girsang, F. B., 2020). Group learning emphasizes activities and interactions among students to motivate and help each other master the subject matter in order to achieve maximum achievement. The essence of group learning is that each group formed must have heterogeneous skills (high, medium, and low) where each group member

can exchange ideas and take responsibility. This, in turn, will create a healthy learning atmosphere for the achievement of common goals where the teacher acts as a facilitator. (Andira, A., Hasmawati, H., & Mantasiah R, M. R., 2020).

Group learning, or more commonly referred to as cooperative learning, refers to a variety of teaching methods where students work in small groups to help each other learn the material presented (Slavin, 2009:4). He further asserts that cooperative learning can help make differences into learning materials rather than problems. In group learning, students learn together, contribute to each other's thoughts, and are responsible for the achievement of individual and group abilities (Slavin, 1987). Jauhar (2011:52) expressed a similar opinion that group learning is one of the learning strategies that involves a few students as members of small groups with different levels of ability who can work together to complete tasks until all members of the group master the subject matter. Furthermore, Anita Lie (2000) calls this cooperative learning with the term *gotong royong* learning, which is a learning system that provides opportunities for students to work together with other students in structured tasks that can only run if a group has been formed and in which students can work in a directed manner to achieve the specified goals.

The benefits of implementing group learning are that it can reduce educational gaps, especially in the form of individuals, and can develop social solidarity among students (Trianto, 2009:57). For this purpose, in group learning, the teacher acts as a facilitator, mediator, director, motivator, and evaluator. (Isjoni, 2011). As a facilitator, the teacher functions as a bridge to a higher understanding that can create a comfortable classroom atmosphere, provide resources or facilities that can help smooth learning, and

foster students so that they can become a useful learning resource for others.

As a mediator, the teacher acts as a mediator, linking the subject matter learned with the real-life situation in the field. As a director-motivator, the teacher plays a role in guiding and directing the course of the discussion so that students can be motivated to express their opinions and can work well together among fellow group members. Furthermore, as an evaluator, the teacher assesses teaching and learning activities not only in terms of results but also in terms of the process.

To achieve maximum results in group learning, Anita Lie (2009: 31) suggests five elements that must be applied, namely: (1) positive interdependence, which means that students feel that they must work together to achieve goals and are bound to each other. (2) Students have the responsibility to help friends in need; (3) Promotive interaction means that students must help each other, provide information to each other, remind each other, trust each other, and motivate each other. (4) Communication between students in the group (5) Group processing, that is, the group discusses how to achieve the goal well.

There are several important reasons why group learning occupies a major line in educational practice, among them: there are positive effects caused by the development of relationships between groups, acceptance of academically weak classmates, and increased self-esteem. In addition, there is a growing realization that students need to learn to think, solve problems, integrate, and apply their skills and knowledge, and that group learning will create a wider interaction between students and other school components (multi-way traffic communication).

Some research results that have shown the effectiveness of group learning

include those conducted by Dewi, M. C., and Reza, M. (2020); Yasir, M., Suarman, S., & Gusnardi, G. (2017); and Wahyuni, R. (2016), which show that group learning is effective in improving learning outcomes. Furthermore, according to Bell Bom in Schifferk (1980), whose results show that learning in small groups provides good results not only in learning outcomes but also in emotional aspects, Pica and Doughty (1995) in Mannahali (2015: 47) in their research on the comparison of learning outcomes between teacher-centered and small-group-centred teaching showed that speaking activities in the target language were done more by students in small groups than directly with the teacher.

The description above, supported by relevant research results, indicates that group learning techniques make a very positive contribution to improving students' language skills. Thus, group learning techniques can be an alternative in efforts to develop language skills, especially in foreign languages, including German.

Language skills are learned to provide students with provisions for living their lives, especially in the aspect of communication. Speaking skills are one of the language skills that must be optimally developed. This is because speaking skills are used orally every day.

Speaking, according to Abbas (2006: 83), is essentially a communication process using sounds produced by the speech organs in which there is a transfer of messages from one source to another. Speaking is a language skill that is preceded by listening activities (Tarigan, 2008: 3). Related to this, Ghazali (2010) explains that oral communication includes transactional and interactional use of language for the purpose of exchanging information.

Functions and Objectives of Group Learning

The functions of group learning can be divided into two categories: Psychological function. The application of psychology in learning recognizes the importance of the development of the cognitive domain for the student learning process, and professional teachers greatly benefit from mastering the deeper psycho-physical development of students as a developmental stage of the significance of the development of the creative domain in each learner (Anwarudin, K., & Akbar, G. S., 2022).

Psychologically, learning in groups is very meaningful for learners because every human being has a natural tendency to form a group. In relation to language learning, especially foreign languages, this tendency can be activated because they feel they are in a group where they are accepted, recognized, and not isolated. They can work together with someone and learn from other group members. Psychologically, working together in a group can increase the intellectual and emotional participation of foreign language learners.

Social Function. The development of social relationships in group learning can occur through nonverbal communication relationships that can encourage productive activities. Related to this, Kurnia, R. D. (2014) explains that the benefits of group learning are mainly for the completion of difficult tasks that cannot be done by individual learners. Grouping in class gives learners the opportunity to practice the foreign language they learn together, correct each other's work, and discuss everything related to the language they learn.

In addition to these functions, group learning also has its main purpose, which is for learners to learn in groups with their friends by respecting each other's opinions and giving others the opportunity to express

their ideas by expressing their opinions in groups. From this, it can be concluded that there are three central concepts that characterize group learning, as stated by Isjoni (2010:21), namely: group rewards, individual responsibility, and equal opportunity to succeed. Thus, with group learning, students can potentially achieve success in learning in addition to thinking skills and social skills.

Group Learning Steps

Group formation can be done in various ways, for example, based on serial numbers, through games or lotteries, directly by the teacher, and in various other ways. What needs to be considered is the equal distribution of the abilities of group members so that the balance of the abilities of each group is relatively the same and can facilitate group activities.

Presentation Stages

There are three stages in the implementation of group learning oriented to the meaning and purpose of teaching, namely: (1) *Planungsphase*, which is the preparation and preparation of teaching units; (2) *Durchfuehrungsphase* (implementation stage), which is the stage of presenting lessons that have been arranged in lesson units; and (3) *Zusammenfassungsphase* (summary stage or feedback stage), which includes the preparation of a summary of the lesson and evaluation of the implementation of teaching as input for improving the next teaching.

Schiller divides the presentation stage in group learning into *Einfuehrungsphase* (introduction stage), *Sprachverarbeitungsphase* (presentation stage/training stage), and *Anwendungsphase* (application stage). This stage is closed with the transfer stage, which is the stage of application and the

development of broader language abilities and skills.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the effectiveness of group learning in enhancing language skills, with a specific focus on learning to speak German. The data was gathered by observing the implementation of group learning models among 3rd-semester students. Subsequently, a descriptive analysis was conducted to present and interpret the data. The study primarily examines the teaching practices of German language lecturers during the learning process. These observed behaviors were then analyzed and interpreted in line with established linguistic theories. The aim is to gain insights into how group learning can positively influence language acquisition and foster improved language proficiency, particularly in the context of learning to speak German. By utilizing a qualitative methodology, this research endeavors to shed light on the dynamics of group learning and its impact on language skills development. The findings are expected to provide valuable contributions to the field of language education and inform educators on effective teaching practices that can facilitate language acquisition in a collaborative learning environment. Ultimately, this study aims to offer valuable insights into optimizing language learning strategies and enhancing the overall language learning experience for students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The application of this group learning technique was carried out on 3rd semester students in the *Sprechfertigkeit* (speaking skills) course. Based on these three stages, the following is a detailed description of the group learning model in teaching speaking skills by taking one of the themes, namely

Freizeit (leisure time), from the *Netzwerk B1* textbook (as the main handbook for lecturers in teaching language skills). The teaching of the theme in the above three stages is as follows.

Einfuehrungsphase (Introductory Stage)

This stage involves providing activities that lead the learners into the subject matter to be learned. The activity in this stage is to ask questions to the learners that can lead them to enter the topic to be learned, in this case, the theme related to *Freizeit*. This aims to provide opportunities for them to express their ideas and to provoke courage in passive students, as well as to repeat previously known German language knowledge. Example:

In der Schule haben Sie Pause nachdem Unterricht, was machen Sie in der Zeit? ,

(After the lesson, you take a break. What do you do during the break?)

In this example exercise, students are given a case that is experienced in everyday life and, in groups, are free to express their respective opinions. They can also present pictures of situations related to the theme. Then ask questions about the theme of the picture shown, for example:

Was sehen Sie auf dem Bild? (What do you see in the picture?)

Was machen die Leute? (What are the people doing?)

In this exercise, students discuss in their groups what is contained in the picture displayed.

The exercises in this study provide students with a valuable opportunity to engage in group discussions and express their opinions freely. Through collaborative group

work, students support and complement each other's ideas, particularly in terms of vocabulary and grammar usage. This group learning process proves to be beneficial for both improving speaking skills in a collective setting and honing individual speaking abilities.

After gathering the students' responses, the lecturer consolidates the information related to the theme "Freizeit" (leisure activities). To enhance clarity and facilitate the understanding of activities linked to the theme, the lecturer creates an associogram, a visual representation, which is then populated with the students' answers. This associogram serves as a keyword reference during the practice stage. By using this associogram, students can effectively recall and reinforce the vocabulary and concepts associated with leisure activities. It becomes a valuable tool for practicing and reinforcing language skills, ultimately leading to enhanced communication abilities in German.

Overall, these group exercises and the utilization of the associogram create an interactive and engaging language learning experience. The activities foster effective communication, cooperation, and a deeper understanding of the topic, resulting in an improved learning outcome for students.

Presentation or Practice Stage (*Sprachverarbeitungsphase*).

During the comprehension and practice stage, the teaching approach shifts from a lecturer-centered model to a group learning setting. The primary objective of this stage is to train students to practice speaking in simple situations, known as "minimal situations." Here, students begin applying their language skills in guided conversations, starting with basic interactions.

The classroom becomes a dynamic space where students engage in interactive

group activities. Each group is tasked with completing exercises based on the associograms provided earlier. The role of the lecturer transforms into that of a facilitator and motivator, providing support and guidance to the groups.

The activities center around answering questions related to the keywords presented in the associograms. Students take turns answering questions posed by their fellow group members as well as by members of other groups. This interactive approach encourages students to actively participate, express themselves, and engage in meaningful language practice. Through these conversational exchanges, students develop their ability to apply the newly acquired language skills in real-life situations. The practice stage fosters a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable using the language and receiving constructive feedback from their peers.

By employing group learning during the comprehension and practice stage, students benefit from the collective wisdom and support of their peers, which enhances their speaking skills and boosts their confidence in using German for everyday communication. This collaborative approach also fosters a sense of camaraderie among students, creating a positive and motivating language learning experience.

Application and transfer stage (*Anwendungsphase*).

During this stage, students engage in various exercises aimed at honing their speaking skills by utilizing new ideas creatively while employing correct and precise grammar, vocabulary, and expressions. The focus is on developing independent speaking abilities while still adhering to the theme being learned. The lecturer provides minimal verbal assistance, encouraging students to plan and

conceptualize their discussions autonomously, ensuring that the content aligns with the communication's purpose.

Students are presented with exercises such as composing dialogues based on given situations or dialogue models, which they then act out through role play. They are also assigned tasks that involve pro and contra discussions on specific themes. Through these exercises, students are trained to speak creatively and freely, employing all their language skills in real-life communication situations.

During the pro-and-contra discussions, the goal is to enhance students' capacity to express ideas and comment on themes both within their own group and when interacting with other groups. The lecturer organizes the discussion and serves as a supervisor, but verbal assistance is kept to a minimum. At the conclusion of the exercise, the lecturer summarizes the outcomes and discusses any mistakes that occurred. As the transfer stage is reached, students are expected to communicate independently, expressing their thoughts coherently and effectively. Verbal assistance is eliminated to allow students to concentrate on expressing their concepts based on their linguistic abilities. This training facilitates the development of authentic communication skills for real-life situations.

As the final part of the learning series, the lecturer reviews the material discussed and provides feedback on the students' mistakes before concluding or summarizing the subject matter covered. This approach empowers students to become proficient and confident speakers in German, equipped with the ability to communicate effectively and authentically in various contexts.

CONCLUSION

Effective and well-planned implementation of group learning can

significantly contribute to the development of learners' language skills. Group learning offers numerous opportunities for learners to practice the language together, fostering cooperation and overcoming individual weaknesses. It also encourages active participation, engaging learners both intellectually and emotionally, without the pressure of interacting solely with their close friends. However, successful implementation of group learning is not without challenges. It requires teachers to be creative, dedicated, patient, and possess high-level teaching skills from the preparation stage through to the implementation stage. Several key considerations are vital when applying this technique:

- a. Theme Selection: The chosen theme should be familiar and interesting to the learners, making it relevant and engaging for group discussions. Real-life daily situations often work well as themes for group learning.
- b. Exercise Format: The exercises selected must align with the learners' language abilities, the specific language skills being taught, and the available time allocation. Tailoring exercises to suit the learners' proficiency levels ensures they can fully participate and benefit from the activities.

By carefully addressing these considerations, teachers can create a dynamic and fruitful group learning environment that effectively supports the development of learners' language skills. When learners feel motivated and encouraged in their language practice, they are more likely to build confidence and fluency in expressing themselves in real-life contexts. Group learning thus becomes a valuable tool in enhancing language acquisition and

promoting meaningful communication among learners.

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