



Exploring EFL Teachers' Experience Using Small Group Discussion in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract : *Studi ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman guru Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) dalam menerapkan diskusi kelompok kecil (SGD) untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa di SMP di Karawang, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan inkuiri naratif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan satu guru Bahasa Inggris yang berpengalaman dalam menerapkan SGD. Analisis tematik mengungkapkan beberapa temuan utama: (1) SGD meningkatkan keterlibatan dan kepercayaan diri siswa, (2) mendorong pembelajaran antarteman dan pemahaman teks secara kooperatif, (3) meningkatkan pemahaman melalui penciptaan makna kolaboratif, (4) menggeser peran guru dari instruktur menjadi fasilitator, dan (5) menghadirkan tantangan terkait ukuran kelas, keseimbangan partisipasi, dan penilaian. Para guru mengatasi tantangan ini dengan membentuk kelompok heterogen, menetapkan peran, dan mengintegrasikan evaluasi sejawat. Temuan ini mendukung gagasan bahwa SGD tidak hanya meningkatkan pemahaman membaca tetapi juga keterampilan komunikasi dan kerja sama tim. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa diskusi kelompok kecil, jika dirancang dan dipandu dengan cermat, dapat mendorong pembelajaran aktif dan meningkatkan hasil membaca EFL. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk mengeksplorasi SGD dalam konteks yang lebih luas dan mengembangkan strategi penilaian yang efektif untuk pembelajaran berbasis kelompok.*

Keywords: *Diskusi Kelompok Kecil, Pemahaman Membaca, Guru EFL, Pembelajaran Sebaya, Pembelajaran Kolaboratif*

Abstrak : This study explores the experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in implementing small group discussion (SGD) to enhance students' reading comprehension at junior high schools in Karawang, Indonesia. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with one English teachers experienced in applying SGD. Thematic analysis revealed several key findings: (1) SGD increased student engagement and confidence, (2) promoted peer learning and cooperative understanding of texts, (3) improved comprehension through collaborative meaning-making, (4) shifted teachers' roles from instructors to facilitators, and (5) presented challenges related to class size, participation balance, and assessment. Teachers addressed these challenges by forming heterogeneous groups, assigning roles, and integrating peer evaluation. The findings support the idea that SGD enhances not only reading comprehension but also communication and teamwork skills. The study concludes that small group discussion, when thoughtfully designed and guided, can foster active learning and improve EFL reading outcomes. Future research is recommended to explore SGD across broader contexts and develop effective assessment strategies for group-based learning.

Kata kunci: Small Group Discussion, Reading Comprehension, EFL Teachers, Peer Learning, Collaborative Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most crucial skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It does not merely involve decoding words, but also interpreting meaning, making inferences, and constructing understanding from texts (Ahmada, 2020). In Indonesia, reading comprehension remains a major challenge for EFL learners due to limited vocabulary mastery, lack of exposure to authentic reading materials, and insufficient motivation to read in English (Hezam et al., 2022). Many students also struggle with unfamiliar grammar structures,

abstract topics, and low confidence when faced with complex texts (Ramadhianti and Somba, 2023).

To overcome these issues, EFL teachers have been encouraged to adopt interactive and learner-centered approaches that promote collaboration and critical thinking. One of the most effective methods is Small Group Discussion (SGD). This strategy allows students to work in small, cooperative groups to analyze texts, share interpretations, and negotiate meaning collectively (Harmer, 2001). Through SGD, students develop not only reading comprehension but also communication and teamwork skills, as they learn to express opinions, listen actively, and respect others' perspectives (Johanna et al., 2023).

Previous studies have shown that SGD encourages active participation and promotes peer-assisted learning. Maslina (2020) found that students became more confident and communicative when learning in groups, while Rizwan and Rachmijati (2021) reported that group discussions improved comprehension and vocabulary retention. Similarly, Christianti et al. (2023) emphasized that group interaction enhances understanding and provides a supportive environment for struggling learners. However, while much research focuses on students' outcomes, there is still limited exploration of teachers' experiences, strategies, and challenges in implementing SGD in Indonesian EFL classrooms (Larasati, 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring EFL teachers' experiences in applying small group discussion to teach reading comprehension. The study investigates how teachers perceive its effectiveness, manage classroom challenges, and adapt their facilitation techniques. Understanding these experiences is essential to provide insights for both classroom practice and teacher development in the Indonesian EFL context.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative narrative inquiry design, which allows an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences in implementing SGD. Narrative inquiry focuses on personal stories as data, capturing the complexity of teaching practices and the meanings teachers attach to their experiences (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2002). This approach was chosen because it provides space for teachers to share authentic reflections about their classroom realities, challenges, and pedagogical reasoning.

The participants were one experienced English teachers from junior high schools in Karawang, Indonesia. Teacher has more than five years of experience teaching reading comprehension using SGD. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure participants were information-rich and had substantial experience implementing SGD (Larasati, 2023).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, lasting 45–60 minutes each. The interviews covered topics such as lesson planning, group formation, facilitation techniques, challenges encountered, and perceived student outcomes. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken to document classroom context and non-verbal expressions.

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, definition, and reporting. Key themes were derived from the teachers' narratives, focusing on recurring patterns in their experiences and reflections. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking and peer debriefing were conducted to verify interpretations and enhance credibility.

3. RESULT

3.1 Increased Student Engagement and Participation

Teachers observed that SGD made students more engaged and motivated compared to individual reading tasks. In a group setting, students felt more comfortable sharing opinions and asking questions. One teacher noted:

“When students work individually, they are often passive. But when they are in groups, they are more confident to express their thoughts.”

Teachers also mentioned that assigning roles such as leader, note-taker, and presenter helped encourage equal participation and accountability within the group.

3.2 Peer Learning and Knowledge Sharing

Another common finding was the development of *peer-assisted learning*. Students helped one another understand difficult vocabulary and interpret meaning. Teachers stated that SGD promoted mutual support, as stronger students explained concepts to weaker ones. This interaction created a collaborative environment where knowledge was co-constructed rather than transmitted.

3.3 Improved Reading Comprehension and Efficiency

Working collaboratively enabled students to complete comprehension tasks faster and more accurately. Discussion encouraged students to analyze main ideas, infer meanings, and connect ideas across paragraphs. One participant stated:

“They find the answers more easily because they discuss together. They understand the text better than when working alone.”

3.4 The Role of the Teacher as Facilitator

Teachers highlighted a shift in their role from being knowledge transmitters to facilitators. Instead of dominating the lesson, they guided students, monitored progress, and clarified misunderstandings when needed. This approach empowered students to take more responsibility for their learning.

3.5 Challenges in Implementation

Despite its advantages, teachers faced several challenges, including managing large classes, handling uneven participation, and assessing group performance. Some groups were dominated by outspoken students, while others remained quiet. Large class sizes also made it difficult to monitor all discussions effectively.

3.6 Strategies and Solutions

Teachers employed several strategies to overcome these challenges, such as forming heterogeneous groups based on proficiency levels, assigning clear roles, providing structured worksheets, and using peer evaluation to assess contributions. Continuous monitoring and positive reinforcement also helped maintain focus and inclusivity during discussions.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with previous research indicating that SGD enhances reading comprehension and student engagement (Joshi, 2023; Muslim et al., 2022). Teachers' experiences confirm that collaborative learning encourages students to think critically, share perspectives, and internalize meaning through discussion. This supports constructivist theories, which view learning as a social process shaped by interaction and dialogue.

Moreover, the teachers' shift toward facilitation reflects modern pedagogical approaches that emphasize learner autonomy and teacher scaffolding (Harmer, 2001). By guiding rather than lecturing, teachers create opportunities for students to develop independence, cooperation, and confidence.

However, challenges such as large class sizes, uneven participation, and assessment difficulties are consistent with prior studies (Ningsih et al., 2021; Kusnandar and Darizki, 2023). Effective strategies such as heterogeneous grouping, differentiated tasks, and peer assessment were found to mitigate these issues. The findings suggest that successful implementation of SGD requires intentional planning, structured management, and flexibility from the teacher.

Furthermore, SGD contributes to both academic and social development. Students not only improve comprehension but also develop soft skills like communication, leadership, and teamwork competencies essential in 21st-century education. This holistic outcome makes SGD a valuable teaching approach for EFL contexts, especially in settings where active participation is often limited.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that small group discussion, when properly structured and facilitated, is a highly effective strategy for improving students' reading comprehension and engagement in EFL classrooms. Teachers' experiences reveal that SGD fosters collaboration, critical thinking, and student-centered learning. While challenges such as large classes and uneven participation persist, these can be effectively addressed through thoughtful planning, heterogeneous grouping, role distribution, and active facilitation.

The study emphasizes the importance of continuous teacher reflection and adaptation in applying SGD. For future research, expanding the participant pool to include teachers from various educational levels and regions could provide broader insights into how SGD functions across contexts. Additionally, future studies could focus on developing assessment models tailored for collaborative learning environments.

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