Comprehending the Learning Process of Peer-Feedback Activities of EFL Learners with Autism in Different Settings in Indonesia

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Abstract

This classroom observation study attempts to comprehend, reveal and find the learning possibilities from the social learning perspective, in the process of peer-feedback activities of EFL Learners with autism learning with different peers in different settings. This study aimed at discovering the viability of the practice of EFL learners with autism peering with other autistic students, normal students, and special needs students. The research took place in inclusive (IC) classroom, mainstreaming and Special Educational Needs (SEN) classroom.8 autistic students, 7 males and 1 female, were observed during their discussion with their peers in the teaching and learning process in English Foreign Language class. Throughout the classroom observation and discourse analysis during the students' discussion there are four pattern of interaction took place: unique collaborative, expert-novice, and passive-passive. Wherein the unique collaborative is divided into active unique collaborative and passive unique collaborative and these are new findings and may add to the theory of peer-feedback interaction in EFL context.

Keywords

peer-feedback activities, EFL students with autism, different settings

1. Introduction

Autistic students have more opportunities to study in different settings since Salamanca agreement initiated by UNESCO in 1994. The agreement assembles the foundation of worldwide students with autism to study not only in special needs setting but also in inclusive setting. Responding to this, Government of Republic of Indonesia initiated Bandung Declaration on 2004 in Bandung. Since then, inclusive setting in Indonesia becomes alternative for autistic student to study.

Inclusion provides autistic students with the necessary services and supports within the general education classroom to enable them learn with normal students. UNESCO (1994) define inclusion as a developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. According to Iams, Johnson and Sukhodolsky (2005), inclusive classrooms are an ideal location for implementation of social interaction intervention and behavioral interventions because of the availability of peers to interact within natural location.

In Indonesia, inclusive setting provides two classroom options for autistic students, mainstreaming classroom and inclusive classroom. Mainstreaming classroom is a normal classroom consisting around 30 to 40 students learning with maximum three autistic students. Mainstreaming classroom provides specialized field teacher in the classroom, e.g., English teacher.

An inclusive classroom is a specialized classroom for autistic students and other special needs students who have more severe symptoms aside from their autism. It has capacity up to 8 special students. Therefore, they blend with normal students only in vocational subjects. Teachers assisting them to learn in inclusive classroom are shadow provided by the board of education. They have a background in psychology.

Autistic students who want to go to inclusive setting should meet certain criteria such as: 1) they should be in the category of High Functioning Autism (HFA) and asperger syndrome but not in the category of Low Functioning Autism (LFA). HFA is a category of autism with IQ level around 70 to 110, while students with asperger syndrome have IQ more than 110. LFA students are mute and categorized as severe autism and are not encouraged to join inclusive setting because they needs individualized therapy program. Therefore, students in the category of LFA usually study in special needs setting.

In the teaching and learning of EFL learners with autism in various settings, peer-feedback learning between autistic students in inclusive classroom, autistic students with normal students in mainstreaming classroom, and autistic students with other special needs students in SEN (Special Educational Needs classroom) may become a major help for the teacher in teaching English.

  For instance the large number of students in the mainstreaming classroom added with autistic students learning together with the normal students is something teacher feels pressure about. Another example in inclusive classroom which is the place for autistic students learn and help each other in one class within a "normal" school, challenge the teacher to deal with the English material as well as autistic students learning together within one class with their various symptoms other than their autism such as tantrum, psychopath, and so on. In the SEN classroom, teacher is facing another atmosphere of teaching EFL to autistic students who learn with other disable students.

With the help of peer-feedback teacher might get some help in dealing with this issues. In such contexts, many teachers promote using peer-feedback activities. But what concern us the most is whether peer-feedback may facilitate the students to give a better learning experiences to the students and what are the pattern of interaction that occurs in the peer-feedback activities when autistic students doing the

discussion. Will be it the same with what Storch (2002) has classify about the five patterns of interaction: collaborative, expert-novice, dominant-dominant, dominant-passive and passive-passive.

A review of the literature suggests that peer-feedback is becoming more and more popular nowadays as it operates a more informal level than teacher response, giving a learning experience from the one-way interaction among teacher and students. Such as what Rollinson (2002), Mangelsdorf (1992), Storch (1998), and Cheng (2012) says, all these studies reveal that peer-feedback is a beneficial learning process in learning English as their second language and foreign language. But all these research were conducted in the context of normal students learning English as their second language or foreign language. Therefore, the research question in this study addressed as how are EFL learners with autism peer-learning patterns demonstrated in different settings?

2. Method

This study conducted in three different classrooms within two settings (inclusive setting and special needs setting): mainstreaming classroom, inclusive classroom, and SEN classroom. Mainstreaming classroom provide a learning environment in which autistic students learning together with normal students in the composition of 30 to 40 students. There are 2 autistic students in two different mainstreaming classrooms observed.

Inclusive classroom is within inclusive setting and they learn together with other autistic students in a classroom, there are about 4 autistic students learning together within the same inclusive classroom. The students in inclusive class does not enter the mainstreaming class due to their autism and other symptoms such as tantrum, psychopath, and depressed. Those symptoms are considered to be too much for the mainstreaming environment so that they may not be able to enter the mainstreaming class.

SEN classroom is a setting specially provides education for special students, the autistic students learn together with other students with disability in the same classroom. There were two autistic students observed during teaching and learning together with 4 slow learner students.

8 autistic students studying in different settings are observed. 8 of them are 7 males and 1 female, with ages ranging from 17 to 20. They study in the same level of senior high school in Indonesia. They study English as their foreign language, mentioning that Javanese is their first language, Indonesia their second language and English is their foreign language.

Data analysis consisted of 2 stages. The first stage is to understand the data by reading the observation notes, listened to the recorded videos to mark on certain conversation or activities that may support the findings. Next, is the implication. We analyzed the student's discussion to draw out the interpretation, opinions, attitude, behavior on the peer-feedback activities. If there are a certain thing needs to clarify to the students or the teachers, an interview done to deepen our understanding.

3. Findings

At this stage, we watch again to the video and unfolded the peer-feedback activities happening the classrooms. The conversation between the students: autistic students to autistic students, autistic students to normal students, and autistic students to other special students happen in a friendly and cooperative atmosphere, indicating that their autism and symptoms are "accepted" and may not become huge problems in their relationship while studying together and giving feedback. For a closer study of the discourse of the interaction that may point to the learning activity during the peer-feedback activities, we transcribed the kind of interactions that occur in the discussions.

The characteristic of the discourse of the group interaction is convergent. Through the convergent discourse, a member of the group may identify a trouble and the others are engaged to resolve it. Classroom observation and further discourse analysis has witnessed five cooperation patterns, represented by five patterns of interaction, among which four patterns of interaction are similar to those by Storch (2002): collaborative, expert-novice, dominant-passive, dominant-dominant, and passive-passive. However, in the pattern of interaction of autistic students to other students whether it is autistic students to normal students, autistic students to autistic students, and autistic students to other special students, only four type of pattern are the same with Storch (2002) they are expert-novice, dominant-passive, and passive-passive. Furthermore this research add one more finding about the type of interaction, namely unique collaborative.

Unique collaborative pattern divided into active and passive unique collaboration pattern. Active and passive are referring to how they may actively contribute to the peer learning activity or not. If the peer can deal with the symptoms of the autistic student, the autism student will give a good and constructive opinion to the discussion or so I called it active unique collaboration patter. However, if the peer cannot accommodate the symptoms of the autistic student, then he will remove himself from the discussion and may not be able to actively contribute his opinion or so called passive unique collaborative. Members of the groups work together on problems discuss optional revisions and keep up with the discussion progress inside the group as in the following case:

Excerpt 1:

St	*An and Oy (mumbling, not focus).*
Oy	*Indian movies very important (try to make St focus).*
St	*Yes.*
Oy	*Why do you think it is so important?*
St	*because is very (mumbling, not focus).*
Oy	*St, stay focus please.*
Oy	*What does Mahabharata film about?*
St	*Tells about 5 pandawa and 100 kurawa.*
Oy	*Yes, true (writing the discussion result).*
Oy	*What is the name of the kingdom?*

626

St	*Hastinapura Kingdom, Pandawa is five Man and Kurawa is 100*
Oy	*Is M-A-N the right way to spell it?*
St	*Yes yes M-A-N true.*

In this segment, St, the autistic student in the mainstreaming classroom makes discussion with the normal student in his group. At first, St was mumbling and not focuses on the discussion. But his peer Oy guide St to be able to focus on the discussion by reminding St to be focus and cut St's mumbling by saying something about the topic. Soon St is able to concentrate and he contributes to the discussion actively, and even he contributed some good ideas to their work.

Next, they were discussing about the most satisfying answer about Mahabharata movie. The teacher tells them to share opinion about the movie. Oy the female normal student ask St about what should they tell about it. St suggest about the character in the movie and Oy responded by agreeing St. She then continue asking about the name of the kingdom and St answers Hastinapura kingdom and added that Pandawa is five man and Kurawa is 100. Oy seem not sure on how to spell M-A-N and check it with St, so St answering by agreeing Oy that M-A-N should be spelled that way.

In this pattern of interaction, the distribution of the discourse is symmetrical, with the two students directly learns together within the discussion. This pattern has great mutuality and equality. Another active unique collaborative can be found in excerpt 2 the discussion were carried out by autistic student namely D (initial name since the parents do not want her daughter name to be published) and her special need' peer namely Yn in a discussion.

Excerpt 2:

Teacher	*: what is menyelam (diving) in English?*
D	*: My mother will give me rice (mumbling and not focus).*
Yn	*: This one D (directing).*
D	*: Yes, diving is the answer.*
D	*: May I borrow your eraser. Ok. Done.*
Yn	*: It should be like this. (correcting her writing).*

In excerpt 2, Yn acted as D peer in the classroom, and she try to direct D when her autism symptoms took place, as result they do a fruitful discussion and were able to answer the teacher's question. Unlike in the passive unique collaborative, there appear to be good equality but less mutuality as illustrated in the following case:

Excerpt 3:

Teacher	*Okay now please work together to make a dialogue.*
Il	*Okay write down, hello may I help you, or can I help you.*
Pt	*Yes, you are the guide ok.*
Iq	*Okay.*
Kv	*(in silence, sometimes mumbling).*
Teacher	*(visiting Kv group) please make Kv join thediscussion.*

627

Students	*(continue discuss without Kv).*
Teacher	*Come on boys, ask Kv to join the conversation so that hemay learn just like you do.*
Iq	*(try to generate conversation) what is "mengarahkan" in English?*
Kv	*I do not know, look at the dictionary yourself.*

In this segment, Kv is the autistic students, while the other students Il, Pt and Iq are the normal students. They have to work to make a conversation to be presented in front of the classroom. However, since they do not know how to work with Kv and his symptoms, they ignore Kv. Therefore when the teacher asked them to include Kv in the discussion and they try to generate conversation with them, Kv removes himself from the discussion. There are two cases spotted here, the peer normal students were not aware on how to include the autistic students into the discussion, and the second one the teacher did not provide instruction how to deal with autistic students in a discussion. This what is so called a passive unique collaboration, in which when the peer do not know how to deal with the autistic students symptoms, the autistic students will not actively participate himself from the discussion.

In the expert-novice pattern, some participants administer the task, making more authoritative role, while the others assume a passive or a peripheral role. The expert involves the novice in the interaction and provides assistance to help the novice learn from the interaction, as in the following case.

Excerpt 4:

Pt	*What about this St?*
St	*Okay, now you look at this.*
Pt	*So which one is the auxiliary?*
St	*Okay this one is the main clause, this is the active clause while this one is the passive. I give example Eka is blab la bla changed into blab la bla is by Eka.*
Pt	*What about this question?*
St	*It means that if you are get help by someone.*
Pt	*Ok.*
Pt	*So B is helped by A is passive, while A is helped by B is active.*

In this segment St is the autistic student take role as the expert while Pt the normal students is the novice learner. Pt was puzzled about passive and active sentences and asked St to help her understood the task. So, the following discourse St helped her to understand which the passive is and which the active one is. Here, St discourse was authoritative, serving as the instructor, while Pt try to access what St knows about the topic. Through this access, the novice learner gets an opportunity to develop her language knowledge—identifying the passive and active voice. While St, the expert learners, through the instruction develop other knowledge by teaching the novice one. In Wenger's (1998) term, newcomers learn the practice in concrete terms and the core member gain new insights from contact with less-engaged participants. In this pattern of interaction, the distribution of the discourse is not symmetrical, with the expert contributes more than the novice. So that the novice may directly learn

628

from the expert contribution in the way of direct instruction.

In the passive-passive pattern, participants display their frustration or inability of reaching a solution to a problem, as follows:

Excerpt 5

Ed	*SStt Gam, may I borrow your dictionary I could not understand this part.*
Ed	*(smiling/showing symptoms).*
Ag	*(Singing/showing symptoms).*
Ed	*(giving back the dictionary).*
Ed	*Do you know what is held in Indonesia?*
Ag	*H-E-L-D (searching in dictionary).*
Ed	*Uuuu (mumbling/showing symptoms).*

In this segment, Ed and Aga both are autistic students studying in inclusive classroom. They work together peering to discuss about teacher's task in the worksheet. Ed seems did not understand what is the meaning of HELD, so he searched in the dictionary. However, he could not find the meaning in the dictionary and attempted to seek help from Ag, his partner, by raising question on the unknown vocabulary HELD. Unfortunately Ag could not find the answer in the dictionary so that there was no consensus reached. Passive-passive pattern of interaction above showed us about the participants distribute their contribution in symmetrical mode, but since none have adequate specialized knowledge, the space from them to learn from each other is limited. That is to say, there was high equality but low mutuality.

The understanding gained from the study is local and situational. Whether it is of significance in other instructional context remains to be observed. However we may draw some conclusions. The first the autistic students placement are the most appropriate setting given for the autistic students to study. In special setting for instance, the symptoms of autistic students happen more intense. Therefore the autistic students paired up other special students are the best peer choosing for them because the other special students understand their needs and how to cooperate with them. The reason behind this understanding is because they have learned together for years from primary level.

In inclusive setting, the autistic students are placed within one setting and they are demanded to help each other while doing peer-feedback activities. These students are able to control their symptoms better than the autistic students in the special setting. However, their symptoms are more serious when they peer up with the normal students in the school. They will respond seriously to bullying, jokes, and noisy situations. And since the English teachers in the mainstreaming class are not accustomed to the autistic students who have serious symptoms, the teachers may not be able to teach the mainstreaming class properly. Therefore they are put in the inclusive class. Unlike their friend in the mainstreaming class, who are able to maintain their symptoms better in the "normal" classroom.

The second conclusion is that peer-feedback is less complicated in mainstreaming and special classroom and more complicated in inclusive setting. Peer-feedback activities in the mainstreaming and

629

special classroom is less complicated since they have a normal peer or special peer which enable them to have a more capacity in "nursing" the autistic students. However in the inclusive setting, since their peer is also autistic it is not recommended for the teacher to peer up the students. It should be better using teacher feedback rather than the students' feedback in this setting.

4. Discussions

Due to common deficiencies in the social relationships of children with autism, peer-mediated interventions have been advocated as potentially useful approaches for facilitating the participation of children with autism in mainstreaming classroom. Utilizing typical peers to support the academic functioning of students with autism has proven in this research to reduce the needs for continuous one-on-one adult attention, thus allowing students with autism to function with increased autonomy in a manner that more closely matches their typical classmates.

Peer learning happened in this research usually consist of pairing two students together or a small group to work to any instructional strategy, with one student providing assistance, instruction and feedback to the other. From the finding above we may see that autistic student peering with normal student (mainstreaming), peering with autistic student (inclusive classroom) and peering with slow learner student (SEN classroom) has been shown to be effective way in producing increases in on-task behavior, math performance, and social interactions for the autistic students. This is just like Locke and Fuchs (1995) has mentioned in his research that all the students (autism and normal) are paired and work simultaneously. This is resulted in increasing the amount of instructional time that all students engage in academics and to provide pacing, feedback, immediate error correction, high mastery levels and content coverage.

Peer mediated instruction also beneficial during the reading process of the students. This research shows that the students more attracted in reading activity because the interaction with the normal peers helped them to socialize. This finding is supported by a study from Kamps, Barbetta, Leonard and Delquadri (1994) examining the effects of Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) in reading instruction among three students with autism participating in regular education classroom, results of reading assessments revealed gains in reading fluency and correct responses to reading comprehension questions.

Furthermore, in unstructured free-time activities, increases in the duration of social interactions between the students with autism and their non-disable peers were observed after the implementation of peer activity (Kamps et al., 1994). However, there is some evidence that increasing the rate of social interaction among children activities in SEN classroom and mainstreaming classroom but not in IC classroom is because the normal student and slow learner students can mediate their autism symptoms, however in IC classroom, it is not suggested to use the peer mediated instruction because autistic student failed to accommodate other autistic student peer. Moreover, this strategy appears ideal for use in mainstreaming and SEN classroom, and contributes effectively on social and academic achievements

630

to the EFL learners with autism.

However, these research findings are different with Odom and Strain (1984) suggested that when typical children initiated contact with their peers with autism, social responses by students with autism increased, and that when teachers prompted the social interactions, both social responses and initiations to learning increased. In Inclusive Classroom (IC) where autistic students learn together with other autistic students, their social contact is increased but their learning performance is not.

In addition involvement of slow learner peers in weekly discussions with a teacher integration facilitator increase opportunities for social interaction both peers. Autistic student even becoming the source student for the group or peers during the discussion, the slow learner peers participated back in the implementation of social skills interventions and used self-monitoring strategies to record the quantity and quality of interactions with classmate with autism.

During the role play activity in the classroom, this study revealed increased reading and speaking gains, academic engagement, and peer interaction among students with autism and their peer participating in mainstreaming classroom. The activity of writing a sociodrama, doing the practice and role-play activity in the classroom, suggested that it plays a double learning benefits for the improvement to their English and the symptoms. Goldstein and Cisar (1992) in his research added that the routines of using various role-play activities between students with autism and their typical peers were increased the theme-related social behaviors, even when new scripts were introduced and the play groups were rearranged.

The findings on the peer-feedback activities is considered a productive teaching and learning activities (in mainstreaming and SEN classroom) in this research in line with the existing peer review studies (e.g., Schultz, 2000; Zhu, 1994; Nystrand & Brandt, 1989; Spear, 1988; Nystrand, 1986). In this case, the normal peers and other peers in mainstreaming and SEN classroom which provide a reading and writing activity at the same time are the best peer but not on the IC classroom in which autistic student helping the other autistic student.

5. Conclusions

The four learning patterns peer-feedback activities entailed in the active unique collaborative and expert-novice patterns are apparent, where the students develop themselves by mutual scaffolding and perfection during the discussion. These two patterns of learning are viable and the most appropriate way of learning through the peer-feedback activities. These two patterns may occur in the discussion if the correct peer is matched up with the autistic students, as in the active unique collaborative. However, matching up autistic students with inappropriate peer lead to passive unique collaborative pattern and passive-passive pattern, in which the autistic students may remove participation from a peer activity.

In the expert-novice interaction, the finding might be against a common sense that impossible for an autistic students acting as an expert in the peer learning activity. However, the evidence proofed that it is possible for an autistic students leading a group discussion and may act as the source of information

631

within group.

During the feedback it seems that peer-feedback between autistic students in the same group (inclusive classroom) might not generate a good learning environment for both students in passive-passive interactions. The passive-passive patterns' suggesting that the teacher's direct guidance, explanation, and illustration is needed. To facilitate this problem, teacher should act as their peer and also teaching at the same time. Using peer activity in the inclusive classroom should be under a tight teacher control.

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