STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IN THE ACADEMIC READING CLASS

THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of SarjanaPendidikan

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STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IN THE ACADEMIC READING CLASS

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Abstract

Small group discussion (SGD) is a way to implement cooperative learning, which is more student-centered than teacher-centered, where students interact and cooperate with each other to achieve individual and group goals. Some research studies have shown the benefits of small group discussion based on students’ point of view. This study aimed to know whether the students’ attitudes toward SGD in this context is similar or different to the previous findings and to assess the students’ attitude toward small group discussion in the Academic Reading class of students majoring in English Language Education of the Faculty of Languages and Arts at Universitas Kristen SatyaWacana (UKSW), Salatiga. The method of this research study was quantitative descriptive by using Likert-scale and open-ended questionnaire. The result of this study found that 76 participants had positive attitude toward SGD. Their positive attitude regarding how they learned, how much they learned, and how much they enjoyed learning in the small group. Therefore, small group discussion was suitable to be implemented in this course to enhance the learning process. What needs to keep in mind is that each group member should be willing to do his/her responsibilities in order to achieve the group’s goal.

Keywords: attitude, cooperative learning, and small group discussion

Introduction

In recent times, one of the problems in our educational world is about the weaknesses in the learning process. In the learning process, especially in the language learning process, students are less motivated to develop their critical thinking in several aspects, such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Commonly, the learning process in the classroom makes the students force their brain and energy to memorize the knowledge without developing or relating them
to their life situations. In other words, the teachers dominate the activities in the classroom and the teaching process is merely passing the knowledge from the teacher to the students. The students are passive recipients who take in whatever taught by the teacher. In this case, it makes the students have no strategy to help their own learning process meaningful, whereas students who are taught with a strategy are more highly motivated than those who are not and can be lead to a more effective learning (Nunan, 1999). As a factor to determine students’ successful learning, teaching-learning strategy itself has a broad meaning and variety.

In education, the term “group discussion” is often used as a strategy in a teaching and learning process. Especially in language learning, “small group discussion is widely used in the classroom” (Phillips, 1966, p.1). Small group discussion, also called group work, is a way of implementing cooperative learning. As cited in Mo Xue (2013, p.3), many researchers have claimed that “group work is beneficial to L2 learners by offering many and diverse opportunities of interacting directly with the target language”.

Since group discussion method was a concern for the researchers, it needs to be studied further to enrich information addressing this issue in different contexts. Through this question: “What are the students’ attitudes toward small group discussion in the Academic Reading class?” this study was aimed to assess the students’ attitude toward small group discussion, especially in their Academic Reading class. In other words, this study tried to uncover how they think, feel, and behave when working with other students to learn English.
The significance of this study is giving contribution to help the teachers and the students get more information and understanding about the students’ attitudes toward small group discussion in their English learning process. The information from this study will help teachers and students make small group learning more productive and enjoyable so as to aid the success of the teaching and learning process.

**Literature Review**

In order to discuss students’ attitude toward small group discussion (SGD) that is commonly used as a learning strategy in learning English; this literature review provides the theoretical framework and relevant studies for the current study in the topic area of SGD. This section will mainly discuss attitude, small group discussion, and previous studies on small group discussion.

**Attitude**

Attitude is people’s mindset or tendency to act in a particular way due to both an individual’s experience and temperament (Pickens, 2005). He also stated that attitudes include feelings, thoughts, and actions. Attitudes might simply be an evaluation of a person or object, as in “she has a positive attitude toward group work”, or other emotional reactions to people and to objects (e.g., “I dislike bossy people” or “Small group discussion is wasting time”. Hence, attitudes can help us define how we see situations, as well as define how we behave toward the situation or object (p.44).
Moreover, some definitions of attitude have also been proposed by some other experts. For example, Jowell (2005) believed that attitude is a complex combination of things we tend to call personality, beliefs, values, behaviors, and motivations. He defined an attitude as “a psychological tendency to view a particular object or behavior with a degree of favour or disfavour” (p.1). Therefore, knowing the students’ attitudes toward small group discussion is an important component of the educational process (Kouros & Abrami, 2006). There are two reasons why it is important. First, students’ attitudes are going to reflect the quality of a students’ learning experience. Second, it is also to influence their learning behavior, whether these attitudes enhance or hinder their learning process (p.5).

**Small Group Discussion**

Small group discussion refers to the situation where a particular number of people meet face to face and through free oral interaction, share, and discuss ideas to arrive at a decision or solution to a problem. Ideally, groups should have between two and five members, to allow everyone to contribute (Davidson, n.d. cited in Shrawder, 2009).

As Brewer (2013) proposed, small group discussion is a group work that serves “intellectual, emotional, and social purpose” (p.23). Intellectually, it helps the participants of group become more aware of opinions on an issue. They will try to think critically about all the possibilities in the issue. Emotionally, they will be more sensitive to the issue discussed which helps them to realize their own
opinion or others’ and will later build their self-confidence and sense of belonging. Socially, group discussion will build a sense of working with other people, where all differences are allowed to create good atmosphere in the group. In a similar sense, Oakeshoot (1962, cited in Juan, 2014) mentioned that group discussion or group work might help increase the participants’ motivation to do their responsibility in learning.

According to Phillips (1966), “small-group methods have been extensively used in a number of educational contexts.” (p.52). People use language in small group discussion in order to discuss issues, solve problems, understand materials, communicate, and make decisions. In small group discussion, each group member could elaborate their ideas, information, and knowledge to achieve goals in the learning process. Phillips also added that small group discussion is widely used by teachers in classroom activities. Indirectly, students become more familiar with the method and thus begin to use small group discussion as their learning strategy, even outside the classroom activity, to make their learning process become easier, more fun, more enjoyable, and more effective (p.20).

By learning from the above definitions and the detailed explanations about small group discussion, it can be said that small group discussion is a way to implement cooperative learning. Cooperative learning has been defined as “student-centered, instructor-facilitated instructional strategy in which a small group of students is responsible for its own learning and the learning of all group members” (Li & Lam, 2005, p.1). In other words, in cooperative learning, the students interact with each other in the same group to acquire and practice the
elements of a subject matter in order to solve problems and complete a task or achieve a goal.

Furthermore, Johnson and Johnson (2001, cited in Felder & Brent, 2007) proposed five elements of cooperative learning. The first element is positive interdependence, in which the team members are obliged to rely on one another to achieve the goal. If any team members fail to do their part, everyone suffers consequences. The second element is individual accountability, which requires each member of the group to share their own work and master the materials to be learned. Third, face-to-face interaction, demands all members in the group to be interactive to give feedback, reasons, solutions, and conclusion in the discussion. The fourth element, appropriate use of collaborative skills, encourages and helps group members to develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills. Finally, in the fifth element, group processing, team members set group goals and assess what they are doing well as a team.

Moreover, seen from its practice where the intellectual, emotional, and social aspects of the learners are encouraged (Brewer, 2013), SGD can be regarded as a means to implement Oxford’s learning strategies (1990, cited in Lee, 2010), which include cognitive, emotional, and social aspects, among others, to enhance learners’ language learning proficiency and self-confidence.

Oxford (2003) actually came up with a language learning strategy system that consists of six categories, including “memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social
strategies” (p.17). The first three categories are the direct strategies, and the other three are the indirect ones.

**Previous Research on Small Group Discussion**

A study was conducted by Towns, Kreke, and Fields (2000) about students’ perspectives of small group learning in Chemistry. That study aimed to discover how the activities could be improved, and to learn how the students’ perception of small group learning changed. The participants were undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university in the United States. Through an analysis of field notes and a student questionnaire, two findings emerged which described the students’ perceptions of small group learning activities in an undergraduate chemistry course. The small group learning was beneficial for the students. The first finding was that small group learning activities provided a mechanism for students to develop a feeling of community in the classroom: through interacting, they could rely on and trust each other so that a feeling of community grew. Second, relationships were viewed as a positive force in learning, which promoted achievement through commitment and mutual goals. Students facilitated each other's learning by teaching each other, sharing approaches to problem-solving and asking questions.

Supporting the above findings, Jacques (1991, cited in Gunn, 2007) affirmed that teaching and learning in small groups has a valuable part to play in the all-round education of students. It allows them to negotiate meanings, to express themselves in the language of the subject, and to establish more
intimate contact with academic staff than more formal methods permit. It also develops the more instrumental skills of listening, presenting ideas, and persuading (p.5).

Another study was conducted by Li and Campbell in 2005 in a New Zealand tertiary institution with 22 Asian students as the participants. The aim was to examine their perceptions toward the much-promulgated collaborative learning in the form of group work and group assignments. Through individual semi-structured interviews, they found that Asian students show positive attitudes towards group discussions where they could interact with students from diverse cultural background, improve their English language skills, and promote their cultural understanding (p.82).

From all of the explanations above, small group discussion is a way to implement cooperative learning, which is more student-centered than teacher-centered. Small group discussion is also a learning strategy that is included in Oxford’s taxonomy of social strategies, where students interact and cooperate with each other in a small group to achieve individual and group goals. Some research studies have also shown the benefits of small group discussion based on students’ point of view. Therefore, in this current study the researcher would like to know whether the students’ attitude toward SGD in this context is similar or different to the previous findings.
The Study

Research Design

The method of this research is descriptive. It aims to find out the attitude toward small group discussion of students majoring in the English Language Education Program (ELEP) of the Faculty of Languages and Arts at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW), Salatiga. The study tries to answer the research question:

- What are the students’ attitudes toward small group discussion in the Academic Reading class?

Context of the Study

The setting of this study was in Academic Reading Course, in the English Language Education Program (ELEP) of Faculty of Language and Arts (FLA), in Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, Central Java. Academic Reading course was the course that must be taken by all of the ELEP students in the 10th trimester (1st Trimester / 2015-2016), which was packed in 14 meetings. Academic Reading course was the course that equipped students with skills for reading a variety of academic texts and learning to use those texts in academic assignments. The skills learned included annotating, summarizing, quoting, paraphrasing, and synthesizing. These skills would be practiced on actual academic texts, both in class and through independent reading activities.
The objectives by learning the skills in this course were to enable the students to identify and evaluate arguments, to quote, to paraphrase, to annotate academic texts, and to synthesize several articles on similar topics for academic purpose. Moreover, these skills would be useful for students in the Academic Writing Course and their final thesis.

The teacher often used small group discussion as a student activity in the classroom. It was used to discuss how to apply the aforementioned skills in reading the academic texts. Moreover, there were also assignments, and presentations that should be done in groups. The assignments were related to the implementation of the skills that had been discussed in class. Additionally, students also needed to evaluate the argument from a particular academic text. Those assignments aimed to measure the students’ understanding about the skills that they have learned. In those activities, students could learn both by themselves and from other people as they shared their ideas, additional information, and knowledge about the skills or the texts they read. In other words, this course required the students to work together to understand texts, to do assignments related to the materials given, and to help them apply the skills learned in this course more easily.

The assessment in this class included a test, two group presentations, one individual reflective reading assignment, one individual in-class assignment, three group assignments, and one individual final project. Therefore, this reading course was suitable to help knowing the attitudes of students toward small group discussion.
Participants

The participants for this study were 76 students from batch 2013 who took the Academic Reading course in Trimester 1, 2015/2016. The basic reason of choosing the students from batch 2013 was that according to the curriculum used in ELEP, Academic Reading course was opened for batch 2013 in Trimester 1, 2015/2016 and the ELEP data recorded that 76 students from batch 2013 were registered in the course. In that semester, four classes of Academic Reading were opened and were taught by different teachers. However, the classes followed the same syllabus and rules. Therefore, the participants represented the whole population at that time. During the data collection, all the participants returned the questionnaire. They have answered all closed-ended items, but some of them had no response in one or two numbers in the open-ended questions.

Data Collection Instrument

Addressing the preceded research question, this study used a questionnaire as the instrument to collect the data. The questionnaire had two parts: closed-ended and open-ended. The closed-ended section used a Likert-scale questionnaire that was adapted from a study conducted by Kouros, Abrami, Glasshan, and Wade (2006) from The Centre for the Study of Learning and Performance (CSLP), Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The questionnaire is called SAGE (Student Attitudes towards Group Environments) questionnaire. The SAGE questionnaire originally consists of 54 attitude statements. However, only 15
attitude statements were included in the closed-ended section of the questionnaire in this study. Because the original questionnaire is too broad, the researcher made it simpler by grouping them into several categories. The 15 statements covered the students’ attitude on how they learned (items 1-5) to represent their actions, how much they learned (items 6-10) to represent their thoughts, and how much they enjoyed learning in small group (items 11-15) to represent their feelings. Actions, thoughts, and feelings are the three aspects of attitude proposed by Pickens (2005).

The participants indicated their responses on four Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD). They gave a tick (✓) in each option of the statement. Here the researcher did not use the “neutral or undecided” option like in the original SAGE questionnaire to avoid the middle answers and to make the participants’ answers clearer and easier to analyze.

In addition to that, three open-ended questions were added to elicit the participants’ opinions about the best and the worst part of small group discussion, and how to improve the practice of small group discussion. There were also follow-up questions given to 6 participants to give further explanation on a specific point of their answers. These 6 participants had filled in the consent form in the questionnaire that made the researcher easier to meet the participants.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The data was collected through several steps. The first step was piloting the questionnaire. For the piloting, the questionnaire was given to ¼ of the total
participants (McKay, 2006). In total, there were 76 students of batch 2013 as the participants of this study. Hence, for the pilot study, the questionnaire was distributed to 19 students from batch 2012 as the participants, considering that students of this batch had previously taken the Academic Reading course. The second step was revising the questionnaire items that were regarded to be confusing for the participants based on the pilot study result. The 15 items of closed-ended were put in numbers randomly. After the piloting was done, the questionnaire were rearranged and revised. Each item in the closed-ended were categorized into three regarding how they learned, how much they learned, or how much they enjoyed learning in small group discussion.

The last step, the final questionnaire was distributed in 2016 (2nd Trimester / 2015-2016) to the 76 participants from Batch 2013 that had passed the course. The follow up questions were given to the 6 participants one day after they filled in the questionnaire.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

As stated earlier, the Likert-scale questionnaire was used to measure participants' attitudes regarding how they learned (items 1-5), how much they learned (items 6-10), and how much they enjoyed learning in small group (items 11-15). In analyzing the data, Microsoft office excel for Windows was used to calculate the percentages of the participants’ responses to each statement and to create the charts that show the summary of the responses in each category above. Afterwards, the summarized data were interpreted. For the open-ended part, there
were three parts concerning the best part, the worst part, and the ways to improve the practice of small group discussion. For each question above, the participants’ responses were coded into several categories, and the frequency of occurrence was counted. The data were then summarized into tables.

**Discussion**

The aim of this section is to report the data analysis and interpretation in order to answer the research question: “What are the students’ attitudes toward small group discussion in the Academic Reading class?”

This section presents the data from the closed-ended questionnaire in the form of charts, followed by the analysis and interpretation. The data findings are arranged and discussed from the most supported item to the least. For the open-ended part, the percentage of the data is presented in a table from the highest to the lowest percentage, added with further explanation on a few parts from the results of the follow-up interview.

**Closed-Ended Questionnaire Analysis**

**How Students Learned in Small Group Discussion**

Figure 1 provides the data from items 1-5. The data is about the students’ attitude regarding how they learned in small group. This is going to reflect the quality of students’ learning experience and to influence their learning behavior whether it enhances or hinders the learning process (Kouros&Abrami, 2006).
From the data above, Item 1 has the highest percentage. In total, 96.1% participants (40.8% agreed and 55.3% strongly agreed) stated that when they worked in a group they were able to share their own ideas. The second highest percentage item is Item 4. A total of 94.7% participants strongly agreed (42.1%) and agreed (52.6%) that when they worked in-group, the group members helped them explain things that they did not understand. Interestingly, 93.4% participants stated that they also learned some things when they taught the materials to their group members (Item 5, 23.7% agreed, 69.7% strongly agreed). This finding echoes Towns, Kreke, and Fields (2000) explanation that students helped each other’s learning by sharing ideas to solve the problem before them, asking and answering questions, and teaching each other.

In conclusion, according to the data in Figure 1, the result shows that the participants have positive attitude toward small group, in that it helps the learning process through sharing ideas and helping each other to understand the material.
**How Much Students Learned in Small Group Discussion**

Figure 2 provides the data from Items 6-10. Interestingly, Figure 2 shows the positive result based on how much they learned in small group. According to Hornby (2009 cited in Al-Yaseen, 2014), cooperative learning or group work is effective in promoting academic achievement of students of all ages. The chart below presents the positive attitude toward how much they learned in small group.

![Chart showing data from Items 6-10](chart.png)

*Figure 2. How much students learned in Small Group Discussion (Questionnaire Items 6-10)*

From the data in Figure 2 above, two items receive the highest percentages of positive response. The highest percentage is in item 7; 97.4% participants strongly agreed (32.9%) and agreed (64.5%) that when they worked in group, they are learning more information. Positively, the second highest percentage is 93.5%. The participants strongly agreed (22.4%) and agreed (71.1%) that when they worked in group, it could make the materials easier to understand (item 10). These may be related to the findings in the previous discussion about how they learned in small group discussion, i.e. the participants shared their ideas and
helped each other to understand the material. It can be interpreted that by sharing ideas and helping each other to understand the material, they can learn more information and understand the material more easily. As written in a book by Phillips (1966), in small group discussion each group member could elaborate their ideas, information, and knowledge in order to achieve goals in the learning process such as discuss issues, solve problems, understand materials, communicate, and make decisions.

In conclusion, according to the data in Figure 2, the result shows the participants’ positive attitude toward small group discussion regarding how much they learned in small group discussion. Most of the participants concerned more about getting more information and understanding the material more easily through small group discussion than the other raised aspects: improving the organization, the quality of their work, and improving their work habit.

**How Much Students Enjoyed Learning in Small Group Discussion**

Figure 3 provides the data from Items 11-15 regarding how much they enjoyed learning in small group.

**Figure 3:**
How Much They Enjoyed Learning in Small Group (item 11-15)
According to the result in Figure 3, the highest percentage is in Item 14, where 100% participants strongly agreed (18.4%) and agreed (81.6%) about their feeling that when they worked in-group they were part of what was going on in the group. Then, the second highest percentage is in Item 12. There were 92.2% participants strongly agreed (21.1%) and agreed (71.1%) that the group members could also respect their opinions. Besides that, there were 92.1% participants who got to know their group members well (item 13, 22.4% strongly agreed and 69.7% agreed).

These findings are in line with the results of Towns et al. (2000)’s study that small group discussion is one way to help students interact with other friends in order to build the sense of community in the classroom during the learning process. As the participants in this study could build the sense of community in their group, they could feel they were part of what was going on in the group and they could respect each other’s opinions and get to know their group members well.
In conclusion, according to the data in Figure 3, the result shows the participants’ positive attitude toward small group discussion regarding how much they enjoyed learning in small group discussion. Here, all of the participants felt that they were part of what was going on in the group and they got to know each other well. In addition, they could respect each other’s opinions.

In general, the results of closed-ended questionnaire in Figure 1 up to Figure 3 illustrate the participants’ positive attitudes toward small group discussion, regarding how they learned, how much they learned, and how much they enjoyed learning in small group. Through small group discussion in the Academic Reading class, with regard to how they learned that represented their actions in the small group discussion, the participants were able to share their own ideas and to teach or to help explaining the materials that other members did not understand, by doing so, they could learn more. In terms of how much they learned that represent their thoughts, small group discussions helped them learn more information and understand the materials more easily. Moreover, how much they enjoyed learning in small group discussion represent their feelings. As the participants could feel as a part of the group, respect each other’s opinions, and know each other well, it can be inferred that they enjoyed the learning process in small group discussions.

Open-Ended Questionnaire Analysis

This section will show the data from the second part of the questionnaire. The participants were asked to respond to the questions about the best part, the
worst part, and how to improve the practice of small group discussion. The tables in this section will show the frequency and percentage of the participants’ responses to the open-ended questions. It will be discussed from the highest to the lowest percentage.

**The Best Part of Small Group Discussion**

The table below shows the percentage of the best part of SGD and will be followed by its discussion from the highest to the lowest percentage.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>The Best Part of SGD</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Share ideas to get more information</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learn together to understand the materials</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Help each other to do the group assignments</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Respect each other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Work with active individual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Joking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chatting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Eating together</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Discussion be more focused</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Well-organized</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Achieve high comprehension</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Learn to communicate well</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>No Response</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants’ responses that appear were various. However, Table 1 shows that there were 5 statements based on the participants’ responses that are similar to the Likert-scale questionnaire items. For the statements number 1 up to
3 are regarding how they learned in small group. Then, statements 4 up to 5 are regarding how they enjoyed learning in small group. For number 6 up to 12 are the new opinions that are different from the Likert-scale questionnaire items.

Table 1 shows the highest frequency of occurrences in the statement about the best part of SGD was sharing ideas to get more information (35.5%). In the open-ended section, student A wrote this explanation:

“To explore and to enrich knowledge for all of the group members is really helpful, so that we also could deal with the materials or assignments being discussed.”

By doing so, it means that sharing ideas to get information in the Academic Reading course will help them to demonstrate their opinion, ideas, information to get more knowledge concerning to the academic texts being discussed.

Then, 19.7% mentioned about learning together to understand the materials. When asked for further detail about this, one of the participants (Student B) explained:

“I could learn from the other members how to apply the skills, or learn other important points of the academic text from the others. I think, it is similar to help and share ideas with each other. As the example we learned about the skills for reading (annotating, summarizing, quoting, paraphrasing, and synthesizing) variety of academic texts, and learning to use those texts for academic assignments.”

Similar to the finding in Towns et al. (2000)’s study which emphasized that while working in-group, students facilitated the learning process by teaching, sharing approaches to problem-solving and asking questions to each other.

There were 10.5% participants mentioned about helping each other to do the assignments. Since in the course required the students to learn about academic
texts and skills for reading, it means helping each other could make the assignments easier and finish it more quickly because they work together with other members.

The next was 6.6% participants feel more comfortable if each member in the group could respect each other. It might be able to build a positive atmosphere in the learning process in small groups.

Interestingly, there were 2.5% participants who stated that working with active individual is the best part of SGD. One of two participants that gave the statements (Student C) wrote that:

“This active student is similar with one dominant student. Usually the dominant student is active and smart.”

The rest of the participants (9.2%) mentioned different opinions. There are 7 new opinions about the best part of SGD. The three participants mentioned three different answers from one and another such as joking, chatting, and eating together with the group members. These statements could be included in the feelings element of attitude (Pickens, 2005) or how much they enjoyed learning in the small group. Another four participants also have different answers. Each participant mentioned while learning in small group, the discussion was more focused, the group became well organized, they achieved high comprehension, and they learned to communicate well. These responses from the participants about the best part of SGD were indicated to how much they learned in small group. However, twelve participants (15.8%) did not answer about the best part of small group discussion. They did not give their responses to this question.
The Worst Part of Small Group Discussion

The table below shows the percentage of the best worst of SGD and will be followed by discussing them from the highest to the least supporters. There were new opinions based on the participants’ responses regarding the worst part of small group discussion that will be discussed in this section.

Table 2

The worst part of small group discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>The worst part</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Uncooperative members</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disagreement due to various ideas</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unequal participation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Disrespecting others' opinion</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Time constraint</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Too much joking</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Out of topic discussion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Limited ideas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Limited use of vernacular language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 above shows the responses from the participants about the worst parts of SGD. From the table, five responses have the highest percentages. The first highest percentage was 30.3% participants stated that uncooperative group members as the worst part of SGD. In the open-ended section, one of the participants (student D) mentioned that uncooperative group member was someone who was passive in the discussion and was lazy to do the task. She argued that:

“When a group has passive members, it will affect the mood of the other members. The passive member will be annoyed because they are lazy to
cooperate. They did not participate actively in the group discussion even difficult to connect with both the task and other member.”

The second highest percentage was 14.5%, where the participants mentioned about disagreement due to various ideas. Since we know the result of the best part of SGD is about sharing ideas to get more information, it means that this problem might potentially appear in the group discussion. When the students have different ideas, they could agree or disagree with other friends’ ideas and opinions. The participants wrote that it was hard to choose the best decision on whose ideas or opinions would be added and made the group members debate on different ideas. Sometimes it could make misunderstanding with the other members.

The third, 11.8% participants mentioned regarding unequal participation. As the example are the task divided unequally or unwell-organized task, and one dominant student. When asked for detail about one dominant student, student E explained that:

“One dominant student was the one who is smart and sometimes dominates in everything that going on in the group.”

Another participant wrote that sometimes only one student who dominates in the group discussion.

The fourth, the participants (10.5%) mentioned about disrespecting others’ opinion as the worst part of SGD. In the previous discussion, which is about the best part of SGD, the fourth highest percentage was also about respecting each other. However, only 6.6% of participants who stated that respecting each other as the best part of SGD. It means that some of them still cannot feel that their group
members respect each other. Therefore, the percentage of disrespecting others is highest than respecting others.

The fifth, 9.2% mentioned time constraint as the worst part of SGD. As the example are it is hard to find time to work together, the time management during the process of doing the group assignments, and the absence of the group members in group’s meeting. As Student F wrote that busy schedule of each individual made the group could not find the day or time for the discussion.

Interestingly, the 7.9% participants stated about joking too much with the group members as the worst part of group discussion. However, one participant (1.3%) stated that joking as the best part of small group discussion. In other words, joking was good to make the situation in the discussion more fun, but too much joke was not good either. Therefore, they should know the portion when they joke during the discussion. However, from all the response given, 4 out of 76 participants (5.3%) did not respond to the question.

Suggestions to Improve the Practice of Small Group Discussion

The participants already gave their responses to the best and the worst parts of small group discussion. In order to make their small group discussion work better, they have to know how to improve the practice of small group discussion. The participants’ suggestions to improve SGD were diverse. There were several general answers about how to improve the practice of SGD based on their learning experiences in small group discussion, and there were also new opinions from some of the participants.
Table 3

*The suggestion to improve the practice of SGD*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Suggestions to improve the practice of SGD</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Initiative to be active</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Divide the group task equally</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work together seriously</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Respect each other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Build good communication</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Be open-minded</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Choose the group member by ourselves</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Understand the tasks well</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Do the discussion outside the class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Focus on one idea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Create rules and work checklist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL PARTICIPANTS** 76  100%

First, the highest percentage was 17.1%. The participants suggested that the group members should have initiative to be more active. One of the participants (student F) said that:

“We should have initiative for starting the work and be more active by asking questions to the things that unclear or maybe by sharing ideas and opinion.”

As related to one elements of cooperative learning by Johnson and Johnson (2001, cited in Felder & Brent, 2007) about face-to-face interaction which demands all the members in the small group discussion create an interactive discussion by giving feedback, solutions, opinions, ideas.

Second, 13.2% participants suggested that the group task should be divided equally. It means the students in the group have their own part to do. Dividing the task equally for each member was included to the Likert-scale items regarding how the students learned in the group discussion. This was also related
to one of cooperative learning by Johnson and Johnson which is about positive interdependence in which the team members are obliged to do each other part, but everyone has responsible for helping each other parts. The reason is because if one of them fail to do their part, everyone suffers the consequences.

Third, the other 13.2% participants suggested that the group members should work together seriously. One of the worst parts of SGD is too much joking with the group members have mentioned earlier by the participants. However, some of participants also mentioned joking as the best part of SGD. Therefore, they need to work together seriously; but they could add some jokes to create a good situation during the discussion.

Fourth, 11.8% participants suggested that the group members should respect each other. The participants already mentioned it earlier; one of the best parts of small group discussion is about respecting each other. The supporting reason according to that statement is because healthy relationships with other classmates allow for personal growth and responsibility (Zhang, 2010 in Alyaseen, 2014).

Fifth, the participants (9.2%) suggested that the group members should build a good communication one and another. As mentioned earlier in the worst part of group discussion, some of participants stated about lack of communication in the group. It means that some of participants need to have a good communication to know what is going on in the group. Every group member needs to know how well the group work is progressing, what have to be changed, if there
exist difficulties or misunderstandings among group members, etc (Johnson & Johnson, 2007 in Zhang 2015, p.20).

Interestingly, there were also participants (6.6%) who suggested that the students should choose the group members by themselves. Another explanation by Student C:

“Personally, I like to choose the group member by myself because sometimes we are more comfortable working with friends that we have already known.”

On the other hand, student A argued that:

“I think the lecturer need to know the students’ profile (background knowledge). So, the lecture able to divide students in appropriate way. The meaning of appropriate itself is the groups not consist of all students who are active or smart, but the combination between passive and active students. This kind of combination to motivate and increase the knowledge of the passive student.”

In a line with the opinion given by student A, Cooper (n.d., Cited in Shrawder, 2009) stated that for the occasional informal small group, avoid allowing students to form their own groups. When groups are self-selected, students are more likely to stray from the objective and form cliques (p.7).

Moreover, there were also 3 different opinions given by 3 participants (in total, 3.9%). First, the participant suggested that the group members should do the discussion outside the class, so that they can get new inspiration. The second, the group discussion itself need to choose and focus on one idea and reduce the unsuitable one. The last one, the group should create rules or work checklist to consider time management. As one of cooperative learningsuggestion, which is about group processing, it is important for the group to set group goals and assess what they are doing well as a team. It could help them know the work progress of
their group. However, there were also 13.2% participants who did not answer regarding to this question.

Learning from all the responses and the explanations above there were several suggestions to improve the practice of small group discussion. According to the participants’ responses the suggestion to make the group work better, it could be coming from the individual’s self-awareness and from the cooperation in the group itself, for example having initiative to be active, being open-minded, and respecting and understanding the task well. Concerning to the cooperation in the group itself for example dividing the task equally, working together seriously, and building a good communication.

**CONCLUSION**

Since the term of “group discussion” is often used in a teaching and learning process, especially in language learning, the aims of this study was to assess the students’ attitude toward small group discussion in the Academic Reading Class by discovering how they think, feel, and behave when working with other students in that course. The participants were majoring in English Language Education of the Faculty of Language and Arts at Universitas Kristen SatyaWacana, Salatiga in the 2015/2016 academic year.

The results of the study shows the positive attitude of students toward small group discussion regarding how they leaned, how much they learned, and how much they enjoyed learning in small group discussion. In terms of actions, the participants are more concerned about sharing their own ideas and
helping to explain the things that the other members do not understand. Therefore, by doing so, most of the participants also learn something when they could teach the materials to the other members. In terms of thoughts, the participants learned more information from sharing the ideas and help each other to explain the things they do not understand. It could make the materials easier to understand. In terms of feelings, on how much they enjoyed learning in small group discussion help the students feel they were part of what is going on in the group, help them get to know their group well and learn how to respect each other’s opinion.

With regard to the open-ended questionnaire, the two best parts of small group discussion involve sharing ideas to get more information, and learning together with the group to understand the materials. As the worst parts, the two highest percentages were about working with uncooperative members and disagreement due to various ideas from the group members. Therefore, the participants suggested that each group members should have initiative to be active in the discussion and the group’s work. However, they also suggested that the task for each member should be divided equally, but it still becomes the group’s responsibility. Then, each member needs to work seriously and does not joke too much.

Based on the findings on this study, small group discussion was suitable to be implemented in this course. Teacher could use small group discussion to enhance the students’ learning quality by learning with other students in order to discuss on academic text and assignments. Since in the Academic Reading course they discussed the academic texts a lot, it will be helpful if they could share the
ideas from each other, so that they also could get more information about the text itself. Each member in the group could demonstrate their opinion, ideas, information to get more knowledge of the texts. It makes the works easier to be done. However, to ensure that the SGD enhances the learning process, each group member should be committed to their responsibilities in order to achieve the group’s goal.

This research study has reached its aim, but it still has the limitation. This study may represent other students’ attitude toward SGD, but it cannot be generalized to the other study programs. The reason is that the other studies have different context, background, and participants. The course could also affect the way the students learn on different materials. Therefore, the result might be different. Another limitation, this research study has small range. It focuses only on one small course. Therefore, further study is needed to investigate broader aspects concerning other elements such as the gender, teacher’s preference for their teaching method, campus environments, etc, in order to find out whether those elements could affect the students’ attitude toward small group discussion or not.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, my greatest gratitude is dedicated to my Lord, Jesus Christ who gives me strength in every condition and situation, because without his blessing I would not be able to finish my thesis. The second, I am so thankful to my supervisor Gita Hastuti, S.Pd., M.A., for always being patient and willing to spend her time and energy to guide me during the process of making this thesis. As for the examiner, Vica Ananta Kusuma, S.Pd., M.A., I really thank with a grateful heart for her willingness to read, give feedback, and examine my thesis.

I also want to express my thankfulness to my family (my father, my mother, my grand mom, and my two brothers) who always pray and support me. Moreover, I will not forget to thank my sisters in Salatiga (Hesti Datemoli, Vita Sisilia, Mey Gomies, Windi Ismitasari and Bernike Fourina) who were always there to be the best listeners and supporters. Then, I also thank to all my friends that I may not be able to mention one by one.

The last but not least, this gratitude I give to all my participants from batch 2013 who were able to help me spend their time to answer the questionnaire for the data collection. God bless all of you who participated during the hard process to finish this thesis.
REFERENCE


Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear friends,

I am Laura Mezbah Cahayana Silaban from batch year 2012, in order to complete my thesis and to find out your attitudes on small group discussion; I need your help to fill in this questionnaire. There are two parts you need to fill in. This questionnaire is going to answer the research question: “What are the students’ attitudes toward small group discussion in the Academic Reading Class?” Your responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential. Please answer honestly, as this will not affect your grade in any way.

- Demographic Information

NIM :

Part I

For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement by ticking (√) the appropriate box. Where, SA= strongly agree, A= agree, D= disagree, SD= strongly disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements about Students’ Attitude toward Small Group Discussion in Academic Reading Course</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I work in a group, I am able to share my ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When I work with other students the work is divided equally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. One student usually makes the decisions in the group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My group members help explain things that I don’t understand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I also learn when I teach the material to my group members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When I work in group, I do better quality work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When I work in group, I learn more information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part II

Please kindly answer these questions as clearly as possible.

1. In your opinion, what is the best part of small group discussion?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. When I work in group, my work habits improve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When I work in group, my work is better organized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. When I work in group, the material is easier to understand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I enjoy the materials more, when I work with other students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. My group members respect my opinions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I get to know my group member well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I feel I am part of what is going on in the group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I like to help my group members learn the material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In your opinion, what is the worst part of small group discussion?

3. How to improve the practice of small group discussion?
• Consent form

If I need more information on your questionnaire, can I contact you for an interview?

Yes / No (Please circle one)

If you say yes, complete the following information.

Name +No. HP :

Email :

Thank you. God bless 😊