



Promoting Autonomous Language Learners through Lesson Study Program: Vigotsky's Social Constructivism Perspective

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to analyze how Lesson Study promotes autonomous language learners viewed from social constructivism perspectives. This research applied qualitative method for data collection and analysis. The qualitative data were collected by transcribing the video recorded files of Lesson Study program. Data from video recorded files were analyzed by transcribing, classifying, coding, and categorizing to find out how Lesson Study promotes autonomous language learners viewed from Vigotsky's social constructivism perspective. The result of the research indicates that the learners' activities in Lesson Study cover all the three themes in Vigotsky's social constructivism perspective, they are Social Interaction (SI), More Knowledgeable Others (MKO), Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Keywords: *Autonomous, Lesson Study, Social Constructivism Perspective, Learners*

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1. Introduction

Learner autonomy in English language learning has been debated among teachers as the ways of promoting learner autonomy and increasing learner independence. Henri Holec, the father of learner autonomy, believes that the autonomous language learner takes responsibility for the totality of his learning situation. Holec (1981) was the first person defines the learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning". It means that learner autonomy results from an individual learner's taking responsibility for his or her own learning. In line with Holec's, Dickinson (1987) believes that learning autonomy is a "situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his or her learning and the implementation of those decisions.

However, along with the many experts who research about learner autonomy, it is found that learner autonomy can not only be achieved by learning alone, but the surroundings can be very helpful. According to Esch (1996), learner autonomy is developed if supportive circumstances and contexts

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are provided to learners. For example, Breen (1984) states that this support can only be given with the process syllabus and learner centred approach. Another expert also proposed that teachers are responsible for promoting the learners' autonomous ability and make them become autonomous learners. Likewise, Dam (2011) mentions ways that have been useful for her in fostering autonomy in her classrooms. In addition, Little (1995) reminds that learners need help in analyzing what they have written, spotting different learning habits and estimating how effective these learning habits are. The same sound is also proposed by Candy (1991). She states that autonomy is an essential way of effective learning. It is not the total detachment of the teacher, but the teacher and learner collaboration to meet learners' needs. This again emphasizes the social side of autonomous language learning, as learners are not simply left alone with their writing or analyzing, but rather are helped along and fostered into becoming more aware.

That is why this present research relates autonomy in language learning with the social constructivism. Social constructivism was developed by post-revolutionary Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky was a cognitivist, but rejected the assumption made by cognitivists such as Piaget and Perry that it was possible to separate learning from its social context. He argued that all cognitive functions originate in, and must therefore be explained as products of social interactions and that learning was not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners; it was the process by which learners were integrated into a knowledge community. Furthermore, social constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of much learning.

One of model which can collaboratively promote autonomy in language learning is Lesson Study (LS). LS is a staff development program which is introduced by Yoshida (1999) to develop *kenkyujugyo* in Japan, which is called the Study of Teaching. As the implementation leaves a significant impact on the quality of teachers and teaching, this concept has been adopted by other countries and has become a model to improve the quality of education and teaching. Yoshida states that LS involves a comprehensive process of planning, observation, analysis and identifying the best teaching approaches in a class. LS also covers collaborative learning methods which require learners to develop teamwork skills and to see individual learning as essentially related to the success of group learning. English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Cokroaminoto University Palopo has implemented LS in last four years. So, this research aims to explore how the Lesson Study program promote the learners to be autonomous learners viewed from Vigotsky's social constructivism perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Autonomous Language Learners

According to Holec (1979), the autonomous learner enables to determine goals, selects appropriate tools and methods and follow and evaluate his/her own progress and that these skills are learnt gradually. Moreover, Holec (1979) specified his definition by emphasizing that autonomy is indeed ability, not

behaviour. Little (2009) describes that an autonomous classroom should be based on three principles: learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use. Little (2009), who himself promotes the use of the European language portfolio as a tool for promoting autonomy in language learning, sees logbook and diaries as an essential tool for autonomous classrooms. However, Little (1995) reminds that learners need help in analyzing what they have written, spotting different learning habits and estimating how effective these learning habits are. Nunan (1997) has provided us with a five stage model for implementing autonomy in classrooms. Nunan's (1997) model consists of five levels that can overlap and develop in non-linear manner. These levels are awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence. Even though the model offers clear stages, Nunan notes that implementing learner autonomy is a gradual change that does not have to require big alterations to the current classroom practices, and ultimately is depended on the situation. How far one goes, or wants to go, in encouraging learner autonomy will be dictated by the context and environments in which the teaching and learning takes place (Nunan, 1997).

2.2 Lesson Study

Originated in Japan, Murata (2007) states that lesson study is a collaboration-based teacher professional development approach. Furthermore, Baba (2007) explain more that it is a process in which teachers progressively strive to improve their teaching methods by working with other teachers to examine and critique one another's teaching techniques. This is in line with Cerbin and Kopp (2006) who mention that lesson study is a teaching improvement and knowledge building process. Moreover, Dubin (2009) asserts that the main objective of lesson study is not being able to come up with the best lesson. Instead, it is to engage teachers in a research process that will help them improve their teaching as lesson study provides a framework for teachers to think deeply about content and learner learning as well as give them an opportunity to learn from each other. Fernandez and Yoshida (2004) also note the same idea that through lesson study not only do teachers plan lessons together, but they also go on to observe these lessons unfold in actual classrooms and to discuss their observations. The lesson study which is implemented in English Education Study Program of Cokroaminoto Palopo University adopts Hendayana's (2011) steps of LS. Hendayana (2011) simplified the steps of LS into three steps namely Plan, Do and See. In Plan phase the teachers collaboratively plan a learner centered learning on the basis of problems in the classroom. In Do phase, a teacher does the learners centered learning, meanwhile other teachers observe the learners learning activities. In See phase, the teachers do reflection on the learning effectiveness and mutual learning by the principal of collegiality.

2.3 Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Perspective

Social constructivism was developed by post-revolutionary Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky was a cognitivist, but rejected the assumption made by cognitivists such as Piaget and Perry that it was possible to separate learning from its social context. Social constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of much

learning (Vygotsky, 1978). He argued that all cognitive functions originate in (and must therefore be explained as products of) social interactions and that learning did not simply comprise the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners; it was the process by which learners were integrated into a knowledge community. According to Vygotsky (1978), every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals.

According to Vygotsky, child is completely dependent on other people during the early stages as the sociocultural environment keeps on presenting the child with a variety of tasks and demands, engaging the child in his world. This stage is referred as interpsychological plane where child knowledge through contacts and interactions with people. When applying to teaching it means that both the teacher and a learner are seen as active agents in children's learning. The teacher's intervention in children's learning is necessary, but it is the quality of the teacher-learner interaction, which is seen as crucial in that learning Vygotsky's theory assumes that learning arises not through interaction, but in interaction. Learners first succeed in performing a new task with the help of another person and then internalize this task so that they can perform it on their own. In this way, social interaction is advocated to mediate learning.

2.4 Social Interaction

Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. In contrast to Jean Piaget's understanding of child development (in which development necessarily precedes learning), Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development. He states: "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)".

2.5 The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)

The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher, coach, or older adult, but the MKO could also be peers, a younger person, or even computers.

2.6 The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The ZPD is the distance between a learner's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the learner's ability solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, learning occurred in this zone. Vygotsky focuses on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences. According to Vygotsky, humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. Initially children develop these tools to serve solely as social functions, ways to communicate

needs. Vygotsky believes that the internalization of these tools led to higher thinking skills. ZPD theories help us to understand how people learn in social contexts (learn from each other) and informs us on how we, as teachers, construct active learning communities. Vygotsky (1978) also examines how our social environments influence the learning process. He suggested that learning takes place through the interactions students have with their peers, teachers, and other experts. Consequently, teachers can create a learning environment that maximizes the learner's ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration, and feedback. Moreover, Vygotsky (1978) argues that culture is the primary determining factor for knowledge construction. We learn through this cultural lens by interacting with others and following the rules, skills, and abilities shaped by our culture.

Vygotsky (1978) argued that language is the main tool that promotes thinking, develops reasoning, and supports cultural activities like reading and writing. As a result, instructional strategies that promote literacy across the curriculum play a significant role in knowledge construction as well as the combination of whole class leadership, individual and group coaching, and independent learning. Moreover, teachers need to provide the opportunity to students for a managed discussion about their learning. Discussion that has a purpose with substantive comments that build off each other and there is a meaningful exchange between students that results in questions that promote deeper understanding.

3. Methodology

The research overviews the process of teaching and learning in Lesson Study program, specifically how the program promotes the learners to be autonomous in learning viewed from social constructivism perspective.. So, the design of the research adopts a survey in educational research to overview the setting intensively through quantitative and qualitative data. Four cycles of translation class are chosen as the research sample.

4. Finding and Discussion

Vygotsky (1978) creates a model of human development now called the sociocultural model. He believed that all cultural development in children is visible in two stages. First, the child observes the interaction between other people and then the behavior develops inside the child. This means that the child first observes the adults around him communicating amongst themselves and then later develops the ability himself to communicate. Second, Vygotsky also theorizes that a child learns best when interacting with those around him to solve a problem. At first, the adult interacting with the child is responsible for leading the child, and eventually, the child becomes more capable of problem solving on his own. This is true with language, as the adult first talks at the child and eventually the child learns to respond in turn. The child moves from gurgling to baby talk to more complete and correct sentences.

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develop these tools to serve solely as social functions, ways to communicate needs. Vygotsky believed that the internalization of these tools led to higher thinking skills.

4.1 Social Interaction (SI)

Social interaction is the process by which students act and react to those around them. It includes those acts of students perform toward each other and the responses they give in return. In LS, social interaction happens between peers and groups. As can be seen in Data (19) which shows how the teacher checks students' understanding of the material to be discussed. It also appears that teacher tries to direct students if there is a wrong understanding. Based on the result of classroom observation, it can be seen that LS provides condition for the learners to have social interaction (SI) in learning process. It may happen naturally between learners, or it happens when teachers ask them to socially interact each other in the learning process. Data shows some SI activities did by the learners. Here is the example in data (1).

Data (1)

- Lec : "Okay thank you. Guys, who want to help me to translate the definition? *Sekalian diterjemahkan*, or you have already understood the definition? *Sudah dipahami?*" ("Okay thank you. Guys, who want to help me to translate the definition? As well as to translate it, or you have already understood the definition? Haven't you?")
- Studs : [nod their head]
- Lec : "Okay, the point is that we use language as a medium. *Jadi karya sastra itu karya yang menggunakan bahasa sebagai medium. Apa-apa itu yang masuk karya sastra?*" ("Okay, the point is that we use language as a medium. Well, literary works are those texts that make use of language as a medium. Can you mention any kinds of literary works?")
- Studs : "*Puisi, sajak, pantun, novel*" ("poems, poetry, verses, novel")
- Studs : Yes, Mam

(Do in Cycle 1)

In data (1), the social interaction happened between teacher and students. The the process of transferring knowledge happened between them. Social interaction also happened between student to student when they do discussion in learning process.

4.2 More Knowledgeable Others (MKO)

Vygotsky (1978) points to the role of a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in demonstrating ideas, values, strategies, speech patterns and so on that a child internalises and learns from. In early stages of development, this is likely to be a parent, but it can also be a teacher, peers, or a technology. In LS, the MKO could be the teacher, peers (students), technology, and books such as dictionary.

In MKO, learners learn from a more knowledgeable, informed and experienced person. Usually, learners learn from their teachers or peers/friends. Additionally, in digital era MKO does not have to be a human, it could be a computer. In fact, the learners used search engine to find more information about their subjects. Well, a MKO demonstrates ideas, so that the learner can

understand and learn from it. It refers to appropriate assistance to learners dealing with learning and helping them focus on the learning purposes. This is the activity where the teacher assists the learners in learning. Instead, getting help from someone would allow learners to learn and understand better. The example data of MKO can be seen in the data (2).

Data (2)

[Lec walks around to each group to check students' work and give help if any of groups find problems in doing the translation]

Lec : "*Buka kamus.* You may utilize your digital dictionary, online dictionary, *silakan.*" ("Please do open your dictionary. You may utilize your digital dictionary, online dictionary, please.")

[Students use smartphone and dictionary]

(Do in Cycle 2)

Here, the learners got help from the more knowledgeable others, that is the teacher, and also got help from the dictionary and smartphone to solve their problems in doing the translation task.

The teacher, or local topic expert, plays the important role of facilitator, creating the environment where directed and guided interactions can occur. Many other educational theorists adopted Vygotsky's social process ideas and proposed strategies that foster deeper knowledge construction, facilitate the student discussions, and build active learning communities through small group based instruction.

4.3 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

According to Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD is the level at which learning takes place. It comprises cognitive structures that are still in the process of maturing, but which can only mature under the guidance of or in collaboration with others. So, ZPD is the core of social constructivism perspective. It is the result of students engage in social interaction and the guidance of MKO.

ZPD was developed by Vygotsky. He rejected the assumption made by Piaget that it was possible to separate learning from its social context. According to Vygotsky (1978), every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)."

ZPD theories help us to understand how people learn in social contexts (learn from each other) and informs us on how we, as teachers, construct active learning communities. Vygotsky (1978) also examines how our social environments influence the learning process. He suggested that learning takes place through the interactions students have with their peers, teachers, and other experts. Consequently, teachers can create a learning environment that maximizes the learner's ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration, and feedback. Moreover, Vygotsky (1978) argues that culture is the primary determining factor for knowledge construction. We learn through

this cultural lens by interacting with others and following the rules, skills, and abilities shaped by our culture.

Vygotsky's notion of ZPD is a major idea to the social constructivist learning theory. The ZPD describes the difference between what a person can learn on his or her own and what that person can learn when learning is supported by a more knowledgeable other. Vygotsky considers that social interaction is a fundamental aspect of successful cognitive and intellectual growth. Vygotsky places great emphasis on dialogue and other interaction between the learner and another.

In essence, Vygotsky recognizes that learning always occurs and cannot be separated from a social context. Consequently, instructional strategies that promote the distribution of expert knowledge where students collaboratively work together to conduct research, share their results, and perform or produce a final project, help to create a collaborative community of learners.

In data presented in this writing, it can be seen that the teachers always make a situation where students can engage in collaborative work to share their ideas and give comments to each other so the students can improve their knowledge in the learning process. One example can be seen in data (3).

Data (3)

- Lec : ("What about the translation number 5? [Lec lets other groups to give response] 'Orang tidak bisa menemukan fikirannya ketika suasana hatinya tidak baik' [Lec repeats the translation from stud1] You should know that the translation was not accurate.")
- Stud2 : "Menurut saya artinya itu ee 'Dia tidak bisa berpikir secara rasional saat dia dalam keadaan hati yang tidak baik' "
("In my opinion it should be that 'Dia tidak bisa berpikir secara rasional saat dia dalam keadaan hati yang tidak baik' ")
- Lec : "Okay. What about that? [Lecturer asks other groups' opinion] Just be mindful of the form of the sentence. What about the meaning? Did you get the same idea?"
- Stud3 : "Kalau saya menurutku Ma'am, ee 'Susah mengajaknya berubah pikiran ketika dia dalam suasana yang tidak baik'. Seperti itu."
("In my opinion, Mam, 'Susah mengajaknya berubah pikiran ketika dia dalam suasana yang tidak baik' ")
- Lec : "Okay, could you please repeat what you just said, Asriadi"? [Lec asks the stud2 to re-read his translation]
- Stud2 : "Ee 'Dia tidak berfikir secara normal ee rasional ketika dia dalam suasana yang tidak baik', karena di sini ada kata 'listening' dan menurut saya biasanya itu ee kalau dalam listening English, 'listening' itu biasa digunakan dalam pikiran. Itu artinya 'masuk akal', seperti itu."
(" 'Dia tidak berfikir secara normal ee rasional ketika dia dalam suasana yang tidak baik' ". It is because the word 'listening' which, I think, is usually used to refer to what is in mind in English. That means 'masuk akal'.)
- Stud4 : "Saya Mam. 'Orang tidak bisa bertukar pikiran dengan dia saat dia dalam suasana yang tidak baik' "
("I, mam. " 'Orang tidak bisa bertukar pikiran dengan dia saat dia dalam suasana yang tidak baik' ")
- Lec : [Repeat stud4's answer] " 'Orang tidak bisa bertukar pikiran dengan

dia saat dia dalam suasana yang tidak baik. Then, you share the same answer. Okay good. So that's the right translation. Okay the next is what about your group?" [Lec points at the other group]
(Do in Cycle 1)

The data (3) shows that teacher leads the students to be engaged in a discussion by giving comments on their friend's result of translation. The students were free to give their comments.

The principles of lesson study coincide with the idea that learning is a social and situated process; and for teachers, their own classroom is the best venue for them to learn and improve their teaching practices. It follows a cyclical step which involves: 1) collaborative goal setting and planning the study lesson (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004) or research lesson (Lewis, 2002); 2) implementing and observing the research lesson; 3) debriefing and reflecting on the observed lesson; 4) revising the research lesson (optional or whenever necessary); 5) teaching the revised research lesson (optional or whenever necessary); and 6) sharing of thoughts about the outcomes of the research lesson or post-lesson reflection and discussion (PRD).

5. Conclusion

The learners' activities in LS cover all the three themes in Vigotsky's social constructivism perspective. LS provides condition for the learners to have social interaction in learning process. It may happen naturally between learners, or it happens when teachers ask them to socially interact each other in learning process. Besides learning from each other, LS also provides learners to learn from a more knowledgeable others such as teachers, dictionary, and search engine. In term of ZPD, it is the level at which learning takes place. It comprises cognitive structures under the guidance of or in collaboration with others. Learners collaboratively work together to conduct task, share their results, perform or produce a final project, and help to create a collaborative community of learners. LS should be implemented continuously to maintain the spirit of the learners and to make them accustomed to be autonomous language learning. Thus, based on the results where the teachers are the main actor who handle the lesson, the next study hopes to provide a benchmark of information on how teachers are learning as they become engaged in collaborative inquiry wherein their own classrooms become an object of their learning.

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