CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Conclusion

This study has attempted to investigate cooperative learning (CL) as a possible teaching approach to address the challenges of teaching a mixed level of English ability students in a large heterogeneous class. The present qualitative study in a typical large EFL class in Bandung, Indonesia adds to the growing data on the effective implementation of CL pedagogy in such conditions. Most scholars claim that CL is the best option for all students because it emphasizes active interaction between students of diverse abilities and backgrounds (Yu, 1995), specifically in large classes which have a high potential for diversity (Johnson et al., 1991). It was found that both high and low-achievers were able to progress at their own pace and, at the same time, contribute to their peers’ learning. The process of CL provides abundant opportunities for the learners to continually exchange information, activate background knowledge, and construct their own new knowledge. In the current study, it was found that learners enjoyed working together in a free and comfortable environment in groups. The high-achievers gained the most, due to their interest and contribution in accomplishing the group task, and the low-achievers enjoyed a supportive and less stressed learning climate.

Thus, CL pedagogy is more learner-centered, as recommended by Curriculum 2013. The teacher’s role however, is crucial in structuring all the steps necessary to have a successful teaching-learning process in the class. In the present study, the participating teacher was able to engage the students in the teaching-learning process to some extent, and the students benefited from working in small groups. However, equal and active participation of all the students was lacking, as classroom
observations, pupil questionnaires, and focus group discussions data delineated. This seemed to be due to a lack of structuring CL into the lesson plan with all its fundamental features i.e. (positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face interaction, small group social skills and group processing). In particular, the participating teacher’s classroom did not incorporate positive interdependence and individual accountability appropriately, in effect, practicing a truncated CL model. Well-structured CL methods and structures would help the teacher monitor the basic elements of CL. Therefore, it is a pressing need to be familiar with all five essentials elements of CL, along with the implementation recommendations, in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

For the purpose of more adequately utilizing CL pedagogy, current teachers and future teachers must be required to master the essential features of CL, and be able to distinguish it from traditional group work. Teachers need to be trained in cooperative learning instruction to ensure that they are skillful enough to implement it in their own classrooms, and to reap all the benefits of CL for their students. The following steps in implementing CL approach in an EFL classroom are recommended.

Firstly, it is suggested that the teachers start with small groups. Recommended groups size is between two to four students. Findings reveal that smaller groups were more cohesive, and engaged in group discussions better than larger groups of five or more. Secondly, in previous research, heterogeneous groups were seen to be better than homogeneous groups (see Baer, 2003; Gagné & Park, 2013; Ghorbani & Nezamoshari’e, 2012; Jacobs & Small, 2003; Karnes et al. 1997; Marr, 1997; Ning & Hornby, 2014; Ransdell, 2005; Sharan, 2015; Shoval & Shulruf, 2011; Singh, 2013; Zheng, 2012). Heterogeneity can be in terms of ability, gender, ethnicity, social economic status, etc. However, considering cultural factors, in the Indonesian context, it is likely enough that small groups are composed heterogeneously based on ability. Moreover, the teacher should be the one to group the students, according to the students’ characteristics, because teacher selected groups perform better than student
selected groups (Gagné & Park, 2013; Ghorbani, & Nezamoshari’e, 2012; Jacobs & Small, 2003; Lee et al., 1997; Lindquist, 1997; Sharan, 2015; Shoval & Shulruf, 2011; Sirias, 2005; Tran, 2013; Zheng, 2012). Thirdly, each group member must be assigned a role to ensure positive interdependence and individual accountability. In the beginning, the teacher should assign roles, but later students may negotiate in choosing roles. The group must report to the teacher regarding individual role responsibility, so that the teacher is able to assess and remind individuals to get involved in the group task accordingly. Fourthly, assigning groups and roles to students is a time consuming activity. Groups should be set up for a month long period so that group members get to know, and appreciate each other’s strengths and weaknesses, in order to get maximum benefits from each individual. Fifthly, simple CL methods/structures e.g. STAD, TGT, numbered heads together can be employed. These CL methods have shown significant results in Indonesia. Finally, teachers must be well aware of five fundamental elements of CL. These five fundamental elements are positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face interaction, small group and interpersonal skills, and group processing. However, major focus on positive interdependence, individual accountability, and group processing which are essential for group cohesion and gradual development in teaching-learning process and individual growth cognitively and affectively. Students are more engaged in learning as is required by Curriculum 2013.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted within the limitations of the researcher himself, the instruments available, and certain time constraints. The researcher has limited knowledge and skills in conducting research. As an international student, he was unable to benefit completely from all previous local research, curriculum, and analyses of government education policies due to limited competence in the Indonesian language. It was a challenge for the researcher to keep linearity and cohesion in writing this dissertation. The researcher had doubts in constructing a
theoretical framework for the gathering of data, and that was why the participating teacher needed to be interviewed three times. The amount of data collected was challenging at the stage of data reduction. In addition the researcher was under time and monetary pressures during the writing of this dissertation.

Other limitations of the study are that it is an in-depth case study, thus, it may be questioned as to whether the findings are representative of classrooms generally in Indonesia. However, the results of this study are in line with other studies in Indonesia. A study conducted by Muamaroh (2013) revealed that two teachers were trained to implement CL. Each of them taught a group employing traditional approach and the other group using CL approach. They found CL improved their teaching skills. Students had fun working in groups. They preferred working in small groups than large groups. They were found more motivated in speaking English in CL group. However, the teachers encountered problems in implementation, as they missed some of the elements, or were not able to employ them appropriately. Therefore, they wanted more training. In the present study students equal involvement was a challenge. Findings are in line with Muamaroh (2013) that all students did not participate actively in groups. This deficiency of the teachers’ knowledge on CL theory was an obstacle in implementing all procedures of CL.

A qualitative descriptive study carried out at a secondary school in Sumatra by Kristiawan (2013) supported this study, as students improved in terms of academic and social competence however, teachers lacked CL competence to implement it properly.

That there was more subjective than objective data to analyze, and so the possibility of bias on the part of teacher (wants her class to look good etc.) or students (they want to give the answer expected etc.) is a limitation. Participants may have performed better than usual due to observer effect.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research
The current study clearly illustrates that a teacher who is enthusiastic about using CL pedagogy in the classroom, who has many years’ experience and is keen to participate in a research study like this, still struggles to implement all aspects of the established CL teaching approach. Research that would clearly identify the factors that hinder an otherwise very capable and positive teacher, let alone the many other instructors who are less positive on CL, is urgently needed. A detailed CL training program for practicing teachers is recommended. This program should include training and implementation simultaneously, so that the challenges can be addressed immediately. It is better if the program is conducted by a research scholar who may has more time and concerns pertaining to data for his or her thesis/dissertation for the insightful understanding of CL approach and its implementation adapting according to Indonesian context nationwide.

More research is also needed to address the real issues teachers face in their working context. No one argues CL is not “potentially” very helpful for the teaching-learning process in large EFL classes, but many Indonesian teachers do not choose to employ a full CL approach in their classrooms. It is important to know why there is this discrepancy. More quantitative research on how CL is currently implemented in a variety of school contexts, and the factors that contribute to, and/or hinder effective implementation is needed. This research must include an evaluation of the teachers’ perspective and understanding of CL, as well as an evaluation of possible strategies to overcome the challenges in implementing CL in the Indonesian context.