CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of The Study

As the means of communication, languages are generally used to transfer information, deliver ideas, and also help people performing transformational interaction among each other. English, in fact, has been the language used at the most part of the world which runs its functions as the international mean of communication generating worldwide interaction. In accordance to its global function, English now becomes the most foreign language taught and learnt in regions whose native languages are not English, such as in Eastern European and Asian countries. This most spoken language now is taught in each educational level across different continents.

In Indonesia itself, English starts being taught to the students of only 6 year-old and even to the students of kindergartens and pre-schools. This language teaching activity is further continued to the higher educational level such as primary and secondary schools with a large number of learners. Most Indonesian teachers, in fact, have to deal with big classes that each may consists of 35 to 40 students, meaning that these teachers must make all learners do the work and engage in the learning activities. This condition led the researcher to a thought about their successive in language learning; whether or not these students really succeed in learning English as a foreign language.

Based on her pre-cycle study, the researcher had figured out that students did not do so well on their individual tasks. This fact is strongly proven by the
students’ average score which was only 54.65 from the scale of 100 (appendix 1) on their individual tasks. The students shared slight distinction in percentage that 51% of them was below average, and 49% of them was above the average; showing that the language learning was not successful enough. In regards to this problem, the writer is interested to generate new learning strategy to improve the students’ scores. Davis (1993) states that students learn best when they are actively involved in the process, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Thus, the researcher assumes that working groups potentially make all of the students be involved in the classroom learning process, which also may foster their English achievement in the form of scores.

Nevertheless, there are two distinct ideas about working group. The idea stated by Ormrod (2000) clarifies that teachers are better to choose group membership based on which students are likely to work effectively with one another. Students feel like they have known each individual that leads them to a communicative atmosphere, which hopefully fosters their scores and achievements in group tasks. Otherwise, Richards and Lockhart (1994) claim what happened when the teacher gave the authority to the students in choosing their group partners themselves: a few groups would finish early and would just sit quietly doing nothing until the other groups had finished and the teacher gave directions for the next activity. While in contrast, this activity took some other groups longer to move on the next activity. Teachers, in this case, have the
authority to arrange the working group’s format in order to improve the students’ achievement in learning a foreign language.

This phenomenon becomes the reason why the researcher is interested in doing this research; she wanted to find the best way in teaching interactive English through working groups that suit classroom learning atmosphere. The researcher wants to create conducive learning atmosphere which enables teacher to control the class, and students feel free to explore the usage of the learned language. The importance of this research relies on the results that show different English achievements gained by students who work in different working groups. Based on the background above, the researcher would like to investigate the effect of two distinct working group activities in a thesis entitled “The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning by Using Working Groups Strategy to Improve Students’ English Achievement in SMPN 15 Malang”. This research discusses the way of improving students’ English achievement through a classroom-action research limited into two cycles.

1.2. Statements of the Problems

Based on the background above, the identified problems are:

1. Do working groups show students’ better cooperation in doing English tasks to the eight graders of SMPN 15 Malang?

2. Do working groups help students to get higher English achievement to the eight graders of SMPN 15 Malang?
1.3. Purposes of the Study

Based on the problem above, the purposes of this study are:

1. To know whether working groups show students’ better cooperation in doing English tasks to the eight graders of SMPN 15 Malang.
2. To know whether working groups help students to get higher English achievement to the eight graders of SMPN 15 Malang.

1.4. Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this classroom-action research are:

1. Cooperative Learning through working groups show students’ better cooperation in doing English tasks to the eight graders of SMPN 15 Malang.
2. Cooperative Learning through working groups help students to get higher English achievement to the eight graders of SMPN 15 Malang.

1.5. Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research is investigating the Cooperative Learning technique to teach English in a junior high school. It becomes an independent variable which controls the students’ English achievement.

Meanwhile, the limitation of this research is the students of grade VIII SMPN 15 Malang, academic year 2009/2010, whose teaching and learning activities are generated through small working groups – as one of the types of Cooperative Learning. This research measures students’ achievement in the form of scores.
1.6. Significances of The Study

1. Practical Significance

a. Teachers

This classroom-action research is expected to provide visions and considerations to the English teachers about English language teaching. Its conclusions hopefully present fruitful results that potentially help teachers in generating suitable cooperative learning. Thus, warm learning atmosphere that fits Indonesian junior high school models possibly be gained and increasing both students’ motivation and achievement in learning a foreign language.

b. Students and Learners

This classroom-action research is expected to be an additional knowledge for English learners about the relationship among their social interaction, learning community, and language learning achievement in the form of scores. English learners, hopefully, will be able to use English as their mean of communication – at least in a small learning community – by identifying strengths and flaws themselves.

c. Education Practicioners

Education practitioners, in this case, are education experts, government staff, and their educational policies. These elements will picture the advantages of language learning and apply its results in the real life; they are expected to support language
education in Indonesia. Therefore, the learned language can be optimally employed by the learners if they are given both place and chance.

d. Next Researchers

It is suggested that the next researches will be willing to conduct researches related to the students’ social behavior (related to working group) and the impacts toward their learning achievement. Both language and social life, in this case, is reciprocal since language is employed in students’ learning environment; and their learning environment potentially impacts their language learning achievement as well.

2. Theoretical Significance

The findings and discussions of this research will theoretically contribute to the classroom working group principles. This classroom-scale theory explains about suitable language teaching for junior high school students based on the research had been done, whether or not the working group members formation affects students’ English achievement.

1.7. Definition of Key Terms

Related to this research, some terms employed need to be specified to avoid misconceptions; they are as follows:

1. Classroom-Action Research (CAR)

CAR is a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real condition and a close examination of the effects of such intervention.
2. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups, so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning. It produces higher achievement, more positive students’ relationships, and healthier psychological adjustment compared to competitive or individualistic experiences.

3. English Achievement

English achievement is defined as a scoring based on the performance-based assessment in the forms of conversation, writing, open responses, combination of listening and speaking skills, group performance, and other interaction forms.

4. Working Group

Working groups are temporary clusterings of students within a single class session. It can be initiated by asking students to turn to a neighbor and discussing a question the teacher has posed; forming groups of three to five to solve a problem or pose a question; or organizing informal groups at any time in a class of any size to check on students’ understanding of the material, to give students an opportunity to apply what they are learning, or to provide a change of pace.