

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

Reading is regarded as the primary means of learning new knowledge and obtaining access to different explanations and interpretations in academic settings (Marriane in Siswanti, 2012). It implies that reading is a fundamental tool for students to learn new information. Regardless, numerous research on English language teaching in Indonesia reveal that the goal of learning English has never been adequately accomplished (Gunarwan, 2000).

Nurkamto (2000) argues that there are several reasons that become challenges in the teaching of English in Indonesia, they are: (1) English is a foreign language in Indonesia, and students are only subjected to it in the class; (2) Indonesia is thousands of miles away from English-speaking countries, giving students very little opportunity to use the target language in real-life contexts; (3) Indonesia holds several traditional views that do not motivate students to learn as much as they could; (4) professional and academic qualifications of teachers are unsatisfactory; (5) the number of students in one class is large; (6) the learning aids are incomplete; and (7) the evaluation method is incompatible with communicative language learning.

English teaching experts have developed a variety of strategies to assist teachers in dealing with these issues. Community Language Learning (CLL) method is one of them. Community Language Learning is based on the assumption that a strong community can reduce students' anxiety (Brown,

2007). Small Group Discussion Technique is one of the strategies used in Community Language Learning.

Ahmad (2013) revealed in his research that small group discussion is a successful technique for improving students' reading skill in junior high school. According to Arends (1997), discussion allows students to openly discuss and play with their own ideas, as well as motivation to engage in discourse both inside and outside of the classroom. Wu (2008) backs this up, stating that small group discussions can encourage students to involve in the active process of knowledge construction. Furthermore, whether consciously or unconsciously, students learn from one another during group discussions. Jones (2007) adds that students' confidence will gradually improve as they actively share knowledge and thoughts when working together. As a result, the students are more confident in expressing their opinions their small groups (Brown & Atkins, 1988).

According to Serravallo (2010), the discussion technique can pair up with the small group method to help students develop as readers and thinkers. Small groups will assist students in reading with interest and excitement, reading effectively, engaging in meaningful, invigorating discussions about book, reading fluently and expressively, and reading progressively more challenging literature.

Indah (2018) discovered that small group discussion can increase students' reading comprehension in her study titled "Using Small Group Discussion Technique in Teaching Reading Comprehension". The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is 38,5, which has increased to 75. As a result, it is

determined that there is a substantial difference in pre-test and post-test reading comprehension of students taught using small group discussion.

Mardiyah (2013) discovered that students are enthusiastic about the classroom activity in her study titled “The Implementation of Small Group Discussion Technique in Teaching Reading Analytical Exposition Text”. The most significant benefit of the SGD technique, according to the teacher, is that it can alleviate students’ nervousness. The teacher thought that the material (Analytical Exposition text) might be difficult for the majority of her students. Working in small groups allows students to exchange information with other group members. The students will gain a better understanding of the material this way. The teacher, on the other hand, has certain difficulties in applying this teaching technique. It is more difficult for the teacher to control the classroom and ensure that every student participates in the discussion than usual.

In fact, one of teachers’ hopes is for students to engage in group discussions. Teachers expect that all students will be able to contribute effectively during group discussions. According to Barkley (in Yanse, 2016), engagement is “the regularity with which students participate in activities that represent effective educational practices, and conceive of it as a pattern of involvement in a variety of activities and interactions both in and out of the classroom”. Furthermore, Barkley claims that teachers typically describe student engagement in one of two ways. The first is with phrases such as “Engaged students care about what they have learned; they want to study” or “When students are engaged, they exceed expectations and go above and

beyond what is expected” or “The adjectives that represent student engagement are passion and excitement”. This means that teachers want their students to share their interest for their academic discipline and find their courses so fascinating that they freely, even enthusiastically, devote their hearts and minds to the learning process.

Referring to the previous research and definition, it can be seen that small group discussion is effective in improving students’ reading comprehension. Therefore, the researcher needs to investigate how the small group discussion itself in students’ point of view, so that teacher can evaluate their teaching strategy in the case of enhancing students’ engagement and also this strategy will be increasingly used by other teachers. In this case, the researcher investigates the students’ perceptions on their engagement in small group discussion. Additionally, the researcher analyze students of SMP Al-Wasliyah 8 Medan which the English teacher usually use this strategy in TLP.

B. The Problems of the Study

Based on the background above, the problems of the study are:

1. How do the students perceive their engagement in small group discussions?
2. What are the factors that influence the students’ engagement in small group discussions?

C. The Objectives of the Study

Related to the problems above, the objectives of the study are:

1. To describe how the students perceive their engagement in small group discussions.
2. To explain the factors that influence the students' engagement in small group discussions.

D. The Scope of the Study

The focus of this study is to examine the students' own perceptions of their engagement in small group discussions, as well as the reasons of their engagement.

E. The Significances of the Study

1. Theoretically

This research may support the existing theory or add new information related to students' engagement in Small Group Discussion.

2. Practically

a. Teachers

It will provide students' perceptions (positive and negative perception) in a small group discussion and the reason of their engagement, so teachers can overcome the negative engagement of the students.

b. Students

This study is mostly concerned with students. It is expected that students can reflect on whether or not they have engaged effectively in group discussion. To be engaged implies that they can take part discussions and are an active learner. Furthermore, the researcher expects that in the future, they will be able to undertake a more effective learning process.

c. Other Researchers

As a result, this study can be used as a reference for other studies which are related to this topic, i.e. students' perceptions on their engagement in small group discussion.

