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# Student Teachers' Perception on the Use of Learning Community in EFL Classroom

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#### Abstract

This quantitative and qualitative study focuses on university students' perceptions on the use of learning community through cooperative learning approach in EFL classroom. The purpose of the study is to explore the student teachers' opinion about the use of learning community in the EFL Micro Teaching classroom. The participants of this study were the seventh semester students of the Special English Education Program taking Micro Teaching course. The number of participants was 28 students. The data were collected using questionnaire and interview. The result of this research showed that the seventh semester students of the Special English Education program of Universitas Negeri Makassar had positive responses toward the implementation of learning community through Cooperative Learning. Besides that, it was found that students were happy to attend Micro Teaching classroom which mainly consisted of group activities in learning community. Likewise, learning community helps facilitate student learning and improve their vocabulary.

**Keywords:** Learning community, cooperative learning, EFL classroom, perception.

# INTRODUCTION

Learning community represents an approach in which the learners learn to be able to reason through complex issues and problems, direct one's own learning, communicate and work with people from diverse backgrounds and views, and share what one learns with others. The central ideas in this approach are to increase the collective knowledge of the group members and facilitate individual students learn. This is in line with Bielaczyc & Collins' (1999) who argue that a key idea in the learning-communities approach is to advance the collective knowledge of the community, and in that way to help individual students learn. Under this approach, the students are encouraged to work on tasks, problems or projects together, and discuss and share their knowledge, ideas, and information they have related to the problems they learn in order to reach their collective goals. In more traditional group works, the main emphasis is the pursuit of individual learners. In this case, learning is viewed as an individual pursuit and the goal is

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commonly to transmit the textbook's and teacher's knowledge to students. As a consequence, learning sometimes discourages sharing of knowledge and opportunity to speak and share ideas and information is too often addressed to certain individual students where "smart and fast learners" usually become dominant and at the same time ignore and restrict the right of the "weak and slow learners." The weak students usually sit in isolation as they lose confidence in their ability to speak English. Working in small groups or learning community is believed to help solve this problem. Shy students who do not like to speak in a large class are more confortable speaking out in smaller groups. Groups or learning community members can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in English through cooperative work within their own groups.

Bielaczyc & Collins (1999) further argued that there are four characteristics that a learning community must have: (1) diversity of expertise among its members, who are valued for their contributions and given support to develop, (2) a shared objective of continually advancing the collective knowledge and skills, (3) an emphasis on learning how to learn, and (4) mechanisms for sharing what is learned. If a learning community is presented with a problem, then the learning community can bring its collective knowledge to bear on the problem. It is not necessary that each member assimilate everything that the community knows, but each should know who within the community has relevant expertise to address any problem and they may become the resources of knowledge, skill and information for the whole members of the learning community.

Martha M. Snyder (2009) Learning communities are groups of people that share the common interests of learning and sharing knowledge. The goal of a learning community is to advance collective knowledge by supporting the growth of individual knowledge (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999). For example, Tinto (1997) suggests that learning communities can enhance student learning by enabling students and faculty to interact with each other and par-ticipate in collaborative learning experiences. Online learning communities can help students in distance education programs feel more con-nected to their professors and classmates. Shea, Li, and Pickett (2006) suggest that "good learn-ing environments are learner-centered, knowl-edge-centered, assessment-centered and com-munity-centered" (p. 176).

Some researchers have been made dealing with the use of cooperative learning in classroom contexts. Tang (2000) did a research on several ESL students from India, South Korea, Hong Kong, Croatia, and Taiwan at a secondary school in Canada which used a concept mapping skill to teach ESL Reading in the classroom. The observation towards ESL students' cooperative learning activities during this research indicated that teaching reading by using concept mapping strategy could improve the students' reading comprehension and communication skill. He further stated that this improvement was made possible by the fact that they learned how to negotiate meaning with their partners and among themselves.

Similarly, Meteetham (2001) conducted a research on cooperative learning by using jigsaw technique with English major students at Naresuan University. The results of his research showed that there were 39 language functions and 3 social language functions used in learning sessions. He found that all subjects had higher academic and oral achievement test scores after engaging in this learning. Moreover, the cooperative language learning also generated functional and communicative, frequent and redundant input. Through this research, he concluded that nearly all subjects had positive attitudes towards cooperative learning in terms of oral competence, academic achievement, social skills, personal development, collaborative skills, thinking skills, and learning atmosphere.

Another researcher, Mekki (2016), wrote a research paper on cooperative learning in EFL classroom. He reported that cooperative learning is an effective teaching approach for both teacher

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and students since it gives positive learning atmosphere for the EFL students to practice their English. As a result, less time effort would be exerted by the EFL teachers when using this learning approach.

A classroom run as a learning community operates on the understanding that the growth of knowledge involves individual and social processes. It aims to enhance individual learning that is both a contribution to their own learning and the group's learning, and does this through supporting individual contributions to a communal effort. As has already mentioned before, the learning community members could complement each other's' strengths and weaknesses in English either at the content knowledge level or at the technical procedural level.

As a compulsory course in the English Education Study Program, Micro Teaching aims to develop the EFL student teachers' pedagogical and professional skills. This course covers does not only provide the student teachers with ample opportunity to practice basic teaching skills required for EFL teacher candidates, but also encourage them to learn collaboratively and independently at the same time. Here, the student teachers learn how to design and develop instructional lesson plan, apply teaching diverse approaches, methods, and techniques appropriately in some different contexts of learning. Therefore, the learning activities the student teachers must follow in this course vary from individual reading and resuming, performing group work both during and after the class hours, discussing and sharing knowledge, ideas, and information within their own learning group or community, providing feedback to the groups, presenting their group and individual lesson plans, practicing micro teaching session and exchanging such different roles as micro teachers, observers, students, time keepers, recorders or the like. Within these various types of learning activities, learning community seems appropriate to be applied in order to facilitate all student teachers to reach their intended collective and common knowledge as well as individual goals supported by cooperative learning approach.

The previous research findings inferred that students' perception on teacher's teaching style and method that is used in the classroom is important to be considered. Tudor (In Kourieos & Evripidou, 2013) states that learners' view about effective language learning tends to consciously or automatically direct their action which support their own learning and most importantly influence their positive response or resistance and dissatisfaction to teaching activities. Therefore, the identification of students' perception becomes the most important part to evaluate the methods that teacher used. It is aimed at knowing what students need for their learning activity to reach the learning goals. Thus, the researcher is interested to explore student teachers' perceptions ion the implementation of learning community through cooperative learning in EFL Micro Teaching classroom.

## **METHOD**

This study used quantitative and qualitative research method to explore the issues which related to the student teachers' perception on the implementation of learning community through cooperative learning in EFL classroom. Two instruments were used to collect the research data: questionnaire and interview. Questionnaire consisted of 20 (twenty) questions using Likert Scale (5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Undecided, 2= Disagree, 1= Strongly Disagree). Interview which consisted of 5 questions aimed to get in depth data about the student teachers' perception about the implementation of learning community through cooperative learning in EFL classroom, particularly in Micro Teaching class. The subjects of this research were the seventh semester students of the Special English Education Program taking Micro Teaching course. They consisted of 28 students: 22 female and 6 male.

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#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study analyzed the perception of EFL student teachers' in the application of learning community through cooperative learning approach in EFL Micro Teaching classroom. In this research, the participants were asked to complete 20 (twenty) statements adapted from Wichadee's study which related to learning community. The results of the study were based on the student answers from questionnaire administered to them. The data were explained in paragraph based on the table of each statement.

Table 1

	Student's Response				
Statement	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Undecided	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
I'm familiar with learning community through group work	8	20	0	0	0

Based on the table above, it is understood that 8 (28.6%) students strongly agree that they are familiar with learning community through group work in EFL Micro Teaching classroom activity, 20 (71.4%) students agreed that they are familiar with learning community through group work in EFL Micro Teaching classroom activity, and none of the students undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 2

	14070 =				
	Student's Response				
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
In Micro Teaching class, the lecturer often uses group discussions and activities.	10	18	0	0	0

From the table two, it is known that 10 (35.7%) students strongly agreed that the lecturer often used group discussions and activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom, 18 (64.3%) students agreed that the lecturer often used group discussions and activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom. Meanwhile, none of the students' undecided, disagreed, and strongly disagreed with the statement that the lecturer often used group discussions and activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom.

Table 3

	Student's Response				
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
We have no much classroom Activities in Micro Teaching class.	1	4	8	9	6

Based on the table three, 1 (3.6%) student strongly agreed that they have no much classroom activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom, 4 (14.3%) students agreed that they have no much classroom activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom, 8 (28.6%) undecided that they have no

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much classroom activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom, 9 (32.1%) students disagreed that they have no much classroom activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom and 6 (21.4%) strongly disagree that they have no much classroom activities in EFL Micro Teaching classroom.

Table 4

	Student's Response				
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
I like working with learning community groups	5	17	4	1	1

Based on the table four above, it is understood that 5 (17.9%) students strongly agreed that they liked working with learning community groups, 17 (60.7%) students agreed that they liked working with learning community groups, 4 (14.3%) students undecided that they liked working with learning community groups, 1 (3.6%) student disagreed that they liked working with learning community groups, and 1 (3.6%) student strongly disagreed that they liked working with learning community group.

Table 5

	Student's Response					
Statement	5	4	3	2	1	
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly	
	Agree				Disagree	
Learning community helps me learn English easier.	8	12	5	2	1	

From the table five above, it is understood that 8 (28.6%) students strongly agreed that learning community helped them learn English easier, 12 (42.6%) students agreed that learning community helped them learn English easier, 5 (18.2%) students undecided that learning community helped them learn English easier, 2 (7.1%) students disagreed that learning community helped them learn English easier, and one (3.6%) student strongly disagreed that learning community helped them learn English easier.

Table 6

	Student's Response					
Statement	5	4	3	2	1	
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly	
	Agree				Disagree	
Learning community helps me acquire knowledge through working in a team.	8	12	6	1	1	

Based on the table six, 8 (28.6%) students strongly agreed that learning community helped them acquire knowledge through working in a team, 12 (42.6%) students agreed that learning community helped them acquire knowledge through working in a team, 6 (21.4%) students

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undecided that learning community helped them acquire knowledge through working in a team 1 (3.6%) student disagreed that learning community helped them acquire knowledge through working in a team, and also 1 (3.6%) student disagreed that learning community helped them acquire knowledge through working in a team.

Table 7

	Student's Response					
Statement	5	4	3	2	1	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Learning community helps me understand the working process.	6	16	4	2	2	

From the table seven above, it is understood that 6 (21.4%) students strongly agreed that learning community helped them understand the working process, 16 (57.1%) students agreed that learning community helped them understand the working process, 4 (14.3%) students undecided that learning community helped them understand the working process, 2 (7.1%) students disagreed that group learning community helped them understand the working process, and also 2 (7.1%) students disagreed that group learning community helped them understand the working process.

Table 8

	Studer	nt's Respo	onse		
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
This approach enables me to participate in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems.	5	22	0	1	0

Based on the table eight, 5 (17.9%) students strongly agreed that learning community enabled them to participate in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems. 22 (78.6%) students agreed that learning community enabled them to participate in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems. 1 (3.6%) student disagreed that learning community enabled them to participate in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems, whereas none of the students who undecided and strongly disagreed that learning community enabled them to participate in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems.

Table 9

	Student's Response					
Statement	5	4	3	2	1	
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly	
	Agree				Disagree	

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I prefer the class to have more group activities rather than individual study	14	5	3	0
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Based on the table nine, 16 (57.1%) students strongly agreed that they preferred the class to have more group activities rather than individual study, 14 (50%) students agreed that they preferred the class to have more group activities rather than individual study, 5 (17.9%) students undecided they preferred the class to have more group activities rather than individual study, 3 (10.7%) students disagreed that they preferred the class to have more group activities rather than individual study, whereas none of the students strongly disagreed that they preferred the class to have more group activities rather than individual study.

Table 10

	Student	's Respon	se		
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
I fell happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through learning community or group activities.	6	20	1	1	0

Based on the table ten, 6 (21.4%) students strongly agreed that they felt happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through learning community or group activities, 20 (71.4%) students agreed that they felt happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through or group activities, 1 (3.6%) undecided that they felt happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through learning community or group activities, 1 (3.6%) also disagreed that they felt happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through learning community or group activities, and none of the students strongly disagreed that they felt happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through learning community or group activities.

Table 11

	Student's Response					
Statement	5	4	3	2	1	
	Strongly	Agree	Undecid	Disagree	Strongly	
	Agree		ed		Disagree	
Learning community can improve my attitude towards work.	6	12	6	2	2	

Based on the table eleven above, 6(21.4%) students strongly agreed that learning community could improve their attitude towards work, 12(42.6%) agreed that learning community could improve their attitude towards work, 6(21.6%) students undecided that learning community could improve their attitude towards work, 2(7.1%) students disagreed that learning community could improve their attitude towards work, and 2(7.1%) students strongly disagreed that learning community could improve their attitude towards work.

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	Student's Response				
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagr	Strongly
	Agree			ee	Disagree
I don't like teachers' intervention when we do group work	4	5	2	13	4

Based on the table twelve above, 4 (14.3%) students strongly agreed that they did not like teachers' intervention when they do group work, 5 (17.9%) students agreed that they did not like teachers' intervention when they do group work, 2 (7.1%) students undecided that they did not like teachers' intervention when they do group work, 13 (46.4%) students disagreed that they did not like teachers' intervention when they do group work, and 4 (14.3%) students strongly disagreed that they did not like teachers' intervention when they do group work.

Table 13

	Student's Response				
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
I think interaction through learning community can improve English more than just learning from lecturers	6	17	3	2	0

From the table thirteen above, it is understood that six (21.4%) students strongly agreed that interaction through learning community could improve English more than just learning from lecturers, 17 (60.7%) students agreed that interaction through learning community could improve English more than just learning from lecturers, 3 (10.7%) students undecided that interaction through learning community could improve English more than just learning from lecturers, 2 (7.1%) students disagreed that interaction through learning community could improve English more than just learning from lecturers, whereas none of the students strongly agreed that interaction through learning community could improve English more than just learning from lecturers.

Table 14

	Table 1-	•			
	Student	's Respon	se		
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
This approach helps everyone	4	15	4	3	2
reach the goal equally					

Based on the table fourteen, 4 (14.3%) students strongly agreed that learning community helped everyone reach the goal equally, 15 (53.6%) students agreed that learning community helped everyone reach the goal equally, 4 (14.3%) students undecided that learning community helped everyone reach the goal equally, 3 (10.7%) students disagreed that learning community

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helped everyone reach the goal equally, and 2 (7.1%) students strongly disagreed that learning community helped everyone reach the goal equally.

Table 15

	Student's Response				
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
This approach creates a good relationship among group members	5	15	4	2	2

From the table fifteen above, it could be seen that 5 (17.9%) students strongly agreed that learning community created a good relationship among group members, 15 (53.6%) students agreed that learning community created a good relationship among group members, 4 (14.3%) students undecided that learning community created a good relationship among group members, 2 (7.1%) students disagreed that learning community created a good relationship among group members, and 2 (7.1%) students also strongly disagreed that learning community created a good relationship among group members.

Table 16

	Student's Response					
Statement	5	4	3	2	1	
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly	
	Agree				Disagree	
This approach trains me how to be a good leader and a good follower	8	14	4	2	0	

From the table fifteen above, it could be seen that 8 (28.6%) students strongly agreed that learning community trained them how to be a good leader and a good follower, 14 (50%) students agreed that learning community trained them how to be a good leader and a good follower, 4 (14.3%) students undecided that learning community trained them how to be a good leader and a good follower, 2 (7.1%) students disagreed that learning community trained them how to be a good leader and a good follower, whereas none of the students also strongly disagreed that learning community trained them how to be a good leader and a good follower.

Table 17

	Student's Response						
Statement	5	4	3	2	1		
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly		
	Agree				Disagree		

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The lessons become more interesting	3	23	1	1	0
with this approach.					

Based on the table seventeen, 3 (10.7%) students strongly agreed that the lesson became more interesting with learning community through cooperative learning approach, 23 (82.1%) students' agreed that the lesson became more interesting with learning community through cooperative learning approach, 1 (3.6%) student undecided that the lesson became more interesting with learning community through cooperative learning approach, 1 (3.6%) students disagreed that the lesson became more interesting with learning community through cooperative learning approach, whereas none of the student strongly disagreed that the lesson became more interesting with learning community through cooperative learning approach.

Table 18

	Student	Student's Response				
Statement	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Undecided	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree	
I feel actively involved in all activities through this approach.	3	18	3	3	1	

Based on the table eighteen, it could be seen that 3 (10.7%) students strongly agreed that they felt actively involved in all activities through learning community, 18 (64,3%) students agreed felt actively involved in all activities through learning community, 3 (10,7%) undecided felt actively involved in all activities through learning community, 3 (10,7%) students disagreed that felt actively involved in all activities through learning community and 1 (3,6%) students strongly disagreed that they felt actively involved in all activities through learning community.

Table 19

	Student's Response					
Statement	5	4	3	2	1	
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly	
	Agree				Disagree	
I feel intellectually challenged through this approach	3	18	4	2	1	

From the table nineteen above, it could be understood that 3 (10.7%) students strongly agreed that they felt intellectually challenged through cooperative learning community, 18 (64.3%) students agreed f that they felt intellectually challenged through cooperative learning community, 4 (14.3%) students undecided that they felt intellectually challenged through cooperative learning community, 2 (7.1%) students disagreed that they felt intellectually challenged through cooperative learning community, and 1 (3.6%) students strongly disagreed that they felt intellectually challenged through cooperative learning community.

Table 20

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	Student's Response				
Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
I expect the lecturer to continue using more learning community groups and activities in EFL Micro Teaching class.	7	14	4	3	0

From the table twenty above, 7 (25%) students strongly agreed that they expected the lecturer to continue using more learning community groups and activities in EFL Micro Teaching class, 14 (50%) students agreed that they expected the lecturer to continue using more learning community groups and activities in EFL Micro Teaching class, 4 (14.3%) students undecided that they expected the lecturer to continue using more learning community groups and activities in EFL Micro Teaching class 3 (10.7%) students disagreed that they expected the lecturer to continue using more learning community groups and activities in EFL Micro Teaching class, whereas none of the students strongly disagreed that they expected the lecturer to continue using more learning community groups and activities in EFL Micro Teaching class.

Based on the student teachers' perceptions on the implementation of learning community through cooperative learning in EFL classroom above, some importance findings are of necessary to address. First, all subjects (100%) responded strongly agree and agree on two items of the questionnaire; they are statement no. 1 and 2. It is evident here that all of the student teachers participating in this course feel familiar with learning community group activities in the classroom. They also completely agree with the statement that their lecturer often uses learning community as the basis of EFL Micro Teaching activities in their classroom. Second, more than 92% of the participating student teachers agree with the statement no. 8, 10, and 17. In this case, 27 subjects believe that learning community enables them to participate in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems. Similarly, 26 subjects fell happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through learning community or group activities. Likewise, they also find the lessons in EFL Micro Teaching class become more interesting with this approach. Third, most participants agree with 13 items of the questionnaire: statements no. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 19, and 20. Within this category, the student teachers like working with learning community groups. They also believe that learning community helps they learn English easier. Acquire knowledge through working in a team, understand the working process, reach the goal equally, create a good relationship among group members, and train them how to be a good leader and a good follower. Similarly, they prefer working within small groups to working individually. Likewise, they feel that learning community can improve their attitude towards work. They even think interaction through learning community can improve English more than just learning from lecturers. They also feel actively involved in all activities and intellectually challenged through this approach. Furthermore, the student teachers expect the lecturer to continue using more learning community groups and activities in the EFL Microteaching class.

The result of this study indicated that the implementation of learning community in EFL Micro Teaching class contribute to build student teachers' positive attitudes (Meteetham, 2001). The student teachers fell happy to participate in EFL Micro Teaching class through learning community or group activities, and therefore find the lessons become more interesting. Since the implementation of learning community creates positive learning atmosphere (Mekki, 2016), the

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student teachers believe learning community helps them learn English easier. Acquire knowledge (Tang, 2000), understand the working process, reach the goal equally, create a good relationship among group members, and train them how to be a good leader and a good follower Meteetham (2001).

The result of the study also indicated that learning community is an effective teaching approach for both lecturer and students since it gives positive learning atmosphere for the EFL students to learn pedagogical instructional skills and practice their English. On the part of the lecturer, this approach makes possible the teaching and learning process in the EFL Micro Teaching class run smoothly and succeeds to reach the target curriculum and develop the student teachers' social and individual skills. On the part of student teachers, learning community helps them increase their academic achievement and build their willingness and self-confidence to develop individual and social skills among the learning community members as a whole.

From the results of interview, most students argued that the use of learning community in EFL Microteaching classroom increased their vocabulary in terms of verbs, nouns, and adjectives. The increase of these types of vocabulary took place particularly words and phrases commonly used for teaching and learning. In other words, they increased in instructional English. Besides, they also said that they also improved in pronunciation and presentation skill.

#### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The result of this study indicates that the EFL student teachers had positive perception on the implementation of learning community through cooperative learning approach in EFL Micro Teaching classroom. Besides, they also felt happy to attend the Micro Teaching course and willingly participate and learn together with the members of their learning community as to reach their communal collective goals as well as individual learning. The data show that cooperative learning helps the EFL student teachers in learning English language and pedagogical content knowledge of the curriculum. Most of the students agreed that this approach helps them to acquire the knowledge through working in a team easily and make the learning process more interesting. Moreover, students believe that through learning community, they can learn language not only from the teacher but also from the interaction with the others. Based on the students' perception, learning community through cooperative learning produces good impact for the students to reach the collective goals and the individual pursuit of learning language and pedagogical content knowledge in Micro Teaching class. The implementation of learning community in the EFL Micro Teaching classroom does not only facilitate the student teachers to acquire the knowledge and skill in designing instructional lesson plan, but also contribute to improve their basic teaching skills as well as their English skills particularly the language for teaching and learning. This means that learning community through cooperative learning is an effective approach to apply in EFL courses, especially Micro Teaching course. However, the implementation of this approach was less optimum during the Covid-19 pandemic since it lacked of face-to-face meeting between the lecturer and the student teachers. This suggests that the implementation of learning community especially during the pandemic requires blended learning.

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