

“They Had Peer Preference”: A Portrait of Tensions in Cooperative Learning Implementation in EFL Classrooms

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“They Had Peer Preference”:
A Portrait of Tensions in Cooperative Learning
Implementation in EFL Classrooms

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Despite an increase in research on the effects of cooperative learning (CL) on EFL learning, few studies explore the processes occurring 11 in the use of CL and even fewer depict challenges with CL implementation. To address that gap, this qualitative multi-case study explored the important roles that individual accountability – CL’s key principle – play in enhancing EFL learning and was guided by the following question: How does missing the activities that demonstrate individual accountability in CL affect EFL learning? Data were generated by participant observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to conduct an empirical examination of what teachers and students experience, namely that while CL was part of teacher participants’ instructional practice, the procedures of some selected CL structures were only partially followed by these teachers. When CL was not implemented with fidelity, p 23 rmances of individual accountability in home groups and peer interactions were missed. With a Cultural-Historical Activity Theory lens, this analysis provides a portrait of tensions in the CL implementation, such as one between EFL learners (subjects) and the EFL classroom (community); it was evidenced by the learners having peer preference, i.e., taking the attitude that not all of their peers could be their resource person.

Keywords: cooperative learning, CL structures, individual accountability, peer interaction, peer preference

Introduction

As in other countries, the Indonesian education system stresses learning processes that make students active in developing their potential (see Law 25 p. 20/2003 on the National Education System, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2003). In accordance with this Law, the Ministry of Education and Culture stipulates decrees on the Process Standard of Primary and Secondary Education that stress active learning (see Board of National Education Standards, 2007, 2013, 2016). As such, EFL instruction in Indonesia prescribes that teachers utilize Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Lie, 2007), an approach to language instruction that emphasizes students’ interaction with their peers and aims at developing students’ communicative competence through active learning and use of the target language (see Richards, 2002; Savignon, 1991).

As might also be the case in other parts of the world, in Indonesia there are discrepancies between ministerial mandates and classroom realities. For example, in English classes, Indonesian students largely

learn English through repetition and substitution drills (Alwasilah, 2012; Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011). Teachers' low-level mastery of CLT teaching methodology is found to be one cause of the discrepancy (Alwasilah, 2013; Madya, 2017). In this article, we explore this particular challenge to CLT implementation by depicting the implementation processes of cooperative learning (CL, a teaching method that aligns with CLT) in Indonesian secondary school EFL classrooms. A major theme presented in this article — teachers' lack of fidelity being a challenge in CL implementation—emerged from a subset of our larger qualitative case study's data. The theme revealed tensions in CL implementation in the observed EFL classrooms.

While most educators know from their teaching experience that the implementation of any educational innovation, including CL, might not go in the desired direction, very little research about the implementation of CL in Asian EFL contexts depicts how CL goes wrong. In order to fill that gap, our research examines issues with CL processes empirically and begins the conversation about what leads to breakdowns in CL for language learning. Knowing this, the EFL field can design, implement, and investigate interventions to create the necessary conditions that better facilitate CL's use in EFL contexts.

Literature Review

CL facilitates group learning in which individual students' contribution through presentations and interaction benefit not only themselves but also their peers and the group's goals (Astuti & Lamm, 2017). CL has a firm position in Indonesian education system. The Process Standard that guided the teaching and learning process in the School-based Curriculum implementation (years of 2006-2013) mandated teachers to use CL in their instruction. Though the 2013 Curriculum (year 2013-present) no longer specifically mandates the use of CL, it instructs teachers to build students' character virtues, knowledge, and skills through discovery/inquiry-based and project-based learning. These methods promote active learning and go hand-in-hand with CL (see Jones & Palmer, 2017; Shafaei & Rahim, 2015).

Literature also shows how the aims of CLT go together with CL's tenets such as student-student interaction (see Coelho, 2009). When Indonesian EFL teachers incorporate CL in their instruction, they implement the government mandates for CLT because CL employs active learning (e.g., Richards, 2002; Sharan, 2016). This, however, does not seem to be a practice in most EFL contexts in Indonesia. The leaders of the Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia (TEFLIN, 2011) highlighted the pressing need of Indonesian EFL teachers to improve their pedagogical competence (see also Madya, 2007) to better help EFL learners attain communicative competence in English, the goal of CLT.

With a CLT-CL connection in mind, we frame our inquiry into CL implementation in the Indonesian classrooms we studied by drawing on the growing body of knowledge about CL's use in EFL contexts. Several studies emphasize that using CL increased EFL learners' achievement in the four language skills and promoted EFL learners' mastery of language components (e.g., Alghamdi, 2014; Almuslimi, 2016; Sachs, Candlin, & Rose, 2003; Wei & Tang, 2015). By requiring individual students' presentations and structured peer interaction (activities that display individual accountability), CL maximizes opportunities for learners to produce spoken English (Astuti & Lammers, 2017a) and to interact with their peers (Astuti & Barratt, 2018), which improves communicative competence. Research focusing on the use of CL in EFL classrooms has also shown how this teaching method is supportive of EFL learning by raising learners' consciousness of the target language's rules and patterns and increasing learners' level of ambiguity tolerance (Chiang, 2016) while also facilitating peer feedback (Peng, 2010). In addition, studies have demonstrated that the use of CL in EFL classrooms nurtures learners' motivation (e.g., Baleghzadeh & Farhesh, 2014) and social skills (Ning, 2013).

Research also reports on the potential limitations of CL, including individual students who present challenges in teams (Vermette, cited in Cohen, Brody, & Sapon-Shevin, 2004) and interpersonal

problems between group members (Smith, 1987). Our work zooms in on the implications of not implementing CL with fidelity by describing peer preference, i.e., students taking the attitude that not all peers could serve as resources, and we explain factors that contributed to this situation. Students having peer preference does not support CL implementation because CL relies on students feeling comfortable sharing what they learn with *all* peers. CL requires students to present in front of a single student, their home group members, other groups' members, and/or to the whole class and interact with their peers between initial and subsequent performances (see Astuti, 2016; Astuti & Lammers, 2017a, 2017b; Astuti & Barratt, 2018). These CL activities that demonstrate individual accountability necessitate that students see all peers as collaborators or resources in their learning. In the present study, our exploration of individual accountability in CL highlights that an initial performance (e.g., in home group) prepares students for their subsequent performances (e.g., in other group) (see Storch, 2001, 2002).

As a core CL principle, individual accountability also defines CL in contrast to collaborative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Kagan, 1989; Kato, Bolstad, & Watari, 2015; Slavin, 1995). Other CL principles include positive interdependence, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction (see Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Researchers argue that when enacted, these principles facilitate cooperation among students leading to more effective CL implementation (e.g., Chen, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1999). However, how CL principles manifest and play roles in learning, including in ESL/EFL fields, remains understudied. Hence, we sought to better understand the implications of CL structures not being followed with fidelity as we answered the following question: How does missing the activities that demonstrate individual accountability in CL affect EFL learning? Our exploration of the existing literature on CL, our thinking of how to implement it effectively, and our probing into our data led to the following realization. When teachers miss one or more individual accountability activities in CL, not only are the CL characteristics lost, but this might also result in some students having peer preference, a condition that limits the effectiveness of CL.

There are also calls for studies on how CL is implemented with attention to classrooms' sociocultural and historical contexts, especially with the position of CL as a Western pedagogical method and a manifestation of educational neocolonialism (see Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009). Additionally, research that portrays the affordances of students' culture for inducing learning is scant (e.g., Loh & Teo, 2017; McKay, 2004; Phan, 2010). These areas of inquiry are needed to understand how to implement CL in a way that suits the world views, values, norms, and cultures of both teachers and students. In this article, we address these calls by offering a portrait of CL implementation in a collectivist society—Indonesia—examining how an issue of interpersonal relationship arose in the process and articulating its contextual aspects. While this article mainly focuses on one factor coming from the teacher as contributive to the unfavorable situation, we also discuss other potential factors noted in existing studies.

Method

To contribute to the field's nascent understanding of individual accountability in CL, we need specific illustrations of its enactment. Hence, we carried out a qualitative research study with the purpose of exploring a focal CL principle. We conducted a qualitative case study involving two Indonesian secondary schools: one middle school and one high school both located in the same school district in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The schools implemented different curricula, the 2013 and the 2006 curriculum respectively. As indicated earlier, both curricula have mandates aligned with the use of CL. We were thus engaged in a multi-case study with individual accountability in CL as our unit of analysis. We obtained consent forms from the teachers and student participants. All names are pseudonyms.

Our teacher participants, Andini (middle school) and Putri (high school), shared many similarities, including: each had 10 years teaching experience, were certified EFL teachers, and had implemented CL for more than two years. They regarded CL as part of their practice and considered themselves different

from their colleagues, viewing others as teaching in traditional ways and attributing their own non-traditional classrooms to their CL implementation.

Students in Andini's and Putri's observed classes served as research participants, shedding light on learning in CL groups and doing activities that promoted individual accountability. Through convenience sampling, we recruited these students whom we considered focal, or "telling" (Wallestad, 2010, p. xxii) for our in-depth interviews: Midya (female) and Budi (male) from the middle school, and Joko (male) and Natya (female) from the high school. With constructivism framing our epistemological beliefs, we shared experiences and built relationships with our research participants to understand their meaning making, and position them as reality co-constructors (Creswell, 2012, p. 38). We employed constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) – discussed in the next section – to guide our data collection and analysis processes.

We collected data via three methods: 1) participant observations, 2) in-depth interviews, and 3) document analysis. For participant observations, we paid attention to activities that exhibit individual accountability in CL. To maintain this focus, Author1 sat and stayed with only one or two groups during each observation as she took notes. She also documented the teacher participants' activities implementing CL in their classrooms. She observed 10 lessons during our one-month fieldwork, five in the middle school and five in the high school, generating 10 sets of field notes, totaling approximately 70 pages.

We conducted 19 interviews over seven months, including eight teacher participant interviews, five high school student interviews, and six middle school student interviews. Each semi-structured interview ranged from 30 minutes to one hour, resulting in approximately 110 pages of transcripts. Lastly, throughout the study we examined curriculum and instructional documents (e.g., ministerial decrees on education standards, syllabi, lesson plans, etc.). Our memos and journal entries for each data source documented our reflections throughout the research process.

Theoretical Framework

To explore how CL works, particularly how its principle of individual accountability manifests in EFL classrooms, we used Cultural-Historical Activity Theory or CHAT (Engeström, 2000; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999; Leont'ev, 1978; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003, 2007, 2010). This theory provided us a unique perspective for understanding how individual accountability as a CL activity interacts with its contextual aspects and how this interaction affords or hampers the attainment of CL's benefits. With this framework, we positioned the implementation of CL in EFL classrooms as activity systems under study. Next, with the components of activity systems as conceptual organizers (i.e., subjects, tools, object/outcome, rules, community, and division of labor) (see Engeström, 1993; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999), we paid attention to how the selected CL structures actually worked in our teacher participants' classrooms. For example, with reference to the developer(s)' procedures of the structures (the rules component), we looked at whether there were any missed steps in the use of these structures. We also examined how teachers' skipping certain steps affected the realization of the lesson objectives (the object component).

During data analysis, we kept in mind the interrelatedness of the activity systems' components and paid particular attention to any tensions observed in these dynamic systems. Tensions among components cause inner contradictions; activity systems are not stable nor harmonious (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 1993). The manifestations of tensions in the relationships among components resulted in the themes discussed here. Tensions in an activity system may result from conditions that one component creates for other components, which may cause subjects to face contradictory situations that hamper attainment of the object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003, p. 103). In EFL contexts, when learners do not share the importance of using English in classroom interaction—a situation in the community—other components in the activity system (i.e., EFL instruction) may be affected. For example, an individual student's action of speaking English in response to his/her peer's learning task-related questions might not be accepted

(rules). When this situation persists, learners might not attain improved communicative competence in English (object/outcome).

Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) guided our data analysis. We employed sensitizing concepts, drawn from our theoretical framework, that gave us “ideas to pursue and questions to raise” about our topic (pp. 30-31). With these concepts from CHAT as starting points to access and analyze our research participants’ meaning making, we relied on them as tentative tools because our findings came from the data themselves (Charmaz, 2014). Bringing in mind our sensitizing concepts and unit of analysis, we completed three levels of data coding: line-by-line (including in-vivo coding), focused, and axial coding. Through the process of coding and analytic memo writing, themes emerged from our data. For example, through initial coding of the 10 participant observations, we began to see how the use of CL structures in these classrooms did or did not display individual accountability. From focused coding we noted that peer interaction between initial and subsequent performances of individual accountability occur in most CL structures, but also noted the times when CL structures were not implemented with fidelity. Next, through our axial coding and analytic memo writing, we developed an understanding of how the absence of one or two activities that exhibit individual accountability had consequences for EFL learning. In this article, we illuminate these consequences through instances of CL activities when steps in the chosen CL structures were missed.

Limitations

This study predictably suffers from limitations. The short period of our investigation was one, especially with regard to the participant observations (i.e., one month). However, in generating multiple data sources, we were able to triangulate claims. The second limitation relates to the position of Author1 as “the researcher as translator” (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 168) as she translated from Indonesian to English—especially those quotes concerning our focus—from the interviews, all of which were done in Indonesian, and from relevant documents. The coding and analytic memo writing occurred in English, and Author1 conducted member checking in Indonesian. Despite these limitations, we believe our findings make significant contributions for EFL instruction.

Findings

Our analysis shows there was a situation in the rules component of the activity systems: the teachers’ lack of fidelity to following procedures of selected CL structures. Teachers missed some steps in their chosen structures: performance of individual accountability in students’ home groups and peer interaction. Missing these two activities created systemic tensions in their CL implementation. We begin our presentation of findings by describing these missed steps in one of the activity systems (the CL implementation in the middle school classrooms) as an exemplar of what we observed across the cases. We continue by sharing key themes that elucidate the resulting systemic tensions: 1) not presenting share of work, 2) performing without preparation, and 3) having peer preference. These themes also suggest factors that hamper the effectiveness of CL implementation and the loss of CL characteristics in its implementation, all of which appear unsupportive of EFL learning.

Individual Accountability in Home Groups

One example of individual accountability in home groups being missed occurred in the use of Numbered Heads Together (NHT). NHT, as described by its developers Kagan and Kagan (2009, p. 6.30),

proceeds as follows: 1) students sit in their [home] groups; 2) each student in the group is assigned one number (e.g., one, two, three, or four); 3) teacher poses a problem and gives think time; 4) students privately write their answers; 5) students stand up and “put their heads together,” showing answers, discussing, and teaching each other; 6) students sit down when everyone knows the answer or has something to share; 7) teacher calls a number; and 8) students with that number answer. The procedure then repeats with each subsequent question or problem. Recall that individual accountability in CL comprises individual students’ performance in front of a single student, their home group members, other groups’ members, and/or to the whole class and students’ interaction with their group members after a performance or between two performances. Hence, in NHT, activities that demonstrate individual accountability include: step #5 (individual accountability in home groups and peer interaction) and step #8 (individual accountability to the whole class).

Andini used NHT to check her students’ comprehension of a fable they read by giving them questions, which she gave all at once after her students sat in their home groups (step #1). She followed all the aforementioned steps except step #5, in which individual accountability performances in home groups and peer interaction should have taken place, and step #6, in which students should have had their group’s answer ready (Field Notes, 20150413). Thus, students performed individual accountability only directly to the whole class; they gave answers to Andini’s comprehension questions directly to the whole class.

Recalling how NHT went for her tenth graders, Andini said:

The time was limited. [It was] incidental. Well, last time, the problem was, it was not a perfect NHT. Uhm, if the time allowed, the time suited what I planned, I would also, implement NHT that was, correct, you know. So, last time it was rather, rather, a short cut NHT. (Third Interview, 20150404)

Andini’s account indicates that her use of NHT on that day did not run as she planned. She even labeled it as a “short cut” NHT and attributed this to the limited time she had. Andini’s explanation also suggested her awareness of her imprecision with NHT and she knew how to use it the “correct” way. The following excerpt from an earlier interview also suggests the same:

We give questions to our students, right? I give the questions. For example, there are five questions, and there are five students. Hence, then you have to, student one, two, three, four, five. Each student, first of all, thinks of the answer, whether or not it is acceptable. Then, they discuss whether or not the answer is correct. If they get difficulties, they can ask their peers; that’s how it works. Then I will say: “Uhm, this question number one is for student number three.” So, he/she has to master all, the answers to all of the five questions. (Second Interview, 20150408)

The excerpt emphasizes Andini’s points that in NHT, there are activities of think time (“Each student, first of all, thinks of the answer, ...”), individual accountability in home groups and peer interaction (“... they discuss whether or not the answer is correct”), and individual accountability to the whole class (“... this question number one is for student number three”). These activities are set by Kagan and Kagan (2009) as parts of NHT procedure. Andini’s actual use of the structure, however, did not appear to show that the activities took place (Field Notes, 20150413).

At least two levels of discrepancies indicated Andini’s lack of fidelity with implementing this CL structure. The first level is between Andini’s understanding of how NHT works and the procedure of the CL structure as stated by its developers. Following her version of NHT, Andini gave all of the questions she had in the beginning. This practice prevented her students from having multiple opportunities to perform their individual accountability in their groups and to interact with their group members in preparation for their performance of individual accountability to the whole class (Field Notes, 20150413). Kagan and Kagan (2009) designed the NHT procedure to provide multiple opportunities for peer interaction in line with the number of the questions that the teacher will ask (step #5).

The second level of discrepancy is between Andini's understanding of how NHT works and her actual use of this CL structure in her classroom. While Andini knew that NHT had the following activities: individual accountability in home groups, peer interaction, and individual accountability to the whole class, the first two activities did not take place during her use of the structure (Field Notes, 20150413).

From a CHAT perspective, the procedures of CL structures can be considered part of the rules component in the activity systems, providing guidance for the teachers on how to use the structures. The aforementioned discrepancies between CL structures' preset procedures and actual classroom practice set up a challenging situation in the rules component. We now turn to the next individual accountability activity missed in the use of CL structures across sites—which further complicates the situation in the rules component—peer interaction.

Peer Interaction

In the above example of NHT, Andini's students did not share answers to the comprehension questions to their group members first. They did not interact with their home group members to discuss the answers, reach a consensus, and teach each other for their mastery of the group's answer. Students whose number corresponded to the number Andini called gave their own answer directly to the whole class. Hence, individual students were not held accountable for discussing answers with their group members, thus peer interaction did not take place (Field Notes, 20150413).

As pointed out earlier, discrepancies between the procedure of NHT and Andini's understanding of this CL structure included the frequency of peer interaction in it. Nonetheless, Andini knew that peer interaction was one activity in NHT: "...they discuss whether or not the answer is correct. If they get difficulties, they ask their peers; that's how it works" (Second Interview, 20150408). Andini's account signposts a gap between her understanding of CL and her actual implementation of this teaching method.

We found across sites that when individual accountability in home groups did not take place, neither would peer interaction. Additionally, we discovered that when these two activities of individual accountability were missed, the student participants were put in situations that may not have gone to the direction of attaining the lesson objectives. In the fifth observed lesson where Andini used NHT, for example, her lesson centers on speaking skills and a part of her lesson objectives read: ... communicate it [narrative text] skillfully (Lesson Plan, 20150413). Yet, as described in this section, Andini's CL implementation did not seem to lead her students to achieve this particular lesson objective, especially because not all students got to share an answer. We dedicate the following section to detailing the situation in the rules component that created the systemic tensions among the activity systems' components.

The Systemic Tensions

The student participants across sites faced unfavorable situations that may have hampered the object attainment (the lesson objectives) and the goal of enhancing their EFL learning (improved communicative competence). These included: 1) not presenting their share of work, 2) performing without preparation, and 3) having peer preference. Again, we share an example from Andini's middle school classroom to illustrate what occurred.

Not presenting share of work

Inner tensions in the rules component affected the relation between the subjects and the division of labor. Due to missed individual accountability in their NHT home groups, Andini's students did not tell their group members their answer to each comprehension question; they did not complete their share of the work. As a result, there could be students who did not have any answer ready. The few appointed

students who shared answers did so based on their own thinking since home groups' interaction did not take place (Field Notes, 20150413). In short, home group members did not share their work to each other.

One of the focal students in Andini's class, Midya, recounted how she was learning through NHT:

My number was not called. No discussion. My group members whose number was called gave their own answers, not answers resulted from group discussion. (Second Interview, 20150608)

When the activity missed individual accountability and peer interaction, Midya and her peers did not share their work to their group members and, consequently, their group did not have any work ready to share to the whole class.

If Andini had followed the preset procedure of NHT, a favorable division of labor-object/outcome relation in Midya's classroom would have looked as follows: 1) individual students have a responsibility to do their share of work (coming up with their answer to the question being asked), 2) they display their share of work or the answer with their home group members, 3) they discuss with their peers to reach consensus (the group's best answer), and 4) teach their peers so everyone can represent the group to tell the group's answer. These activities could have promoted the student participants' comprehension of the text they read, which was also one of the day's learning objectives (Lesson Plan, 20150413).

Performing without preparation

Not only affecting the relationship between subjects and the division of labor, conditions in the rules component also created tension in the subjects-tools relationship. Because activities of individual accountability in home groups and peer interaction were missed, the EFL learners did not utilize each other as learning tools or sources, which then resulted in performances of individual accountability to the whole class without preparation. For example, when the middle schoolers learned through a CL structure named RoundRobin, some could not come up with any fable titles when they got their turn to mention one to the whole class (Field Notes, 20150406). If individual accountability in home groups and peer interaction took place, the EFL learners might have collected from everyone's share of work and interaction with their peers, and then been able to share to the whole class one or more fable title with sureness.

We also observed a similar tension in the relationship between the subjects and the tools in Andini's use of NHT in her EFL classroom. As described earlier, because Andini missed the two activities of individual accountability, her EFL learners had to face a situation in which they had to give their answers to the questions directly to the whole class without preparation. Put differently, individual EFL learners neither shared their own answers nor had a discussion with their home group members to achieve consensus (Field Notes, 20150413).

Activities in home groups including individual students' presentation, sharing, and their discussion with each other could actually help the EFL learners for their subsequent performance of individual accountability, such as practicing their spoken language production and receiving feedback on their share of the work. These processes could have given Andini's students preparation to exhibit their individual accountability to the whole class.

In short, tension within the rules component caused EFL learners to face a situation where they could not utilize their peers as one of their learning tools while they learned through CL, a teaching method that highlights cooperation between students. This shows how conditions in the rules component could not mediate the subjects-tools relation and how conditions in one component could produce systemic tensions in the whole activity system. We argue that situations previously illustrated, i.e., not presenting share of work and performing without preparation, to some degree yielded the subsequent unfavorable situation—the learning did not go to the attainment of lesson objectives because students had preference, which we describe in the following section.

Having peer preference

Conditions in the rules component also affect ²⁸ the relationship between subjects and the community. As defined by Yamagata-Lynch (2003, p. 102), community is the social group that the subject identifies being a member of while participating in the activity. The middle school's EFL classrooms were the communities in which students were members and they shared some understandings, such as that working in groups was one of their learning activities.

Despite the fact that the two teacher participants considered CL as part of their instructional practice, our data analysis showed that when it came to working in groups, their students had peer preference. This means that the EFL learners regarded that not all of their peers could be their resource person. We depict this situation by first describing how the teacher participant usually formed CL groups in her classes and then discussing her students' voices regarding this grouping.

Andini paired up her middle school students when she used Think-Pair-Share (Field Notes, 20150331, 20150404) and grouped them when they learned through the Whispering Game (Field Notes, 20150401). Although students did not object to her about this pairing and grouping, two focal students expressed their concerns in interviews:

If getting members for group work is, what's that, left up to us, usually it has fewer weaknesses. But if it is determined by, Miss Andini, for example, we are not rivaling with each other, but we are not very close to each other, either. So, maybe, if we get those whom we are not close with for working together in groups, there is a possibility that we will communicate less. (Budi, Second Interview, 20150530)

This extract suggests Budi's preference for working with classmates with whom he was familiar and close to ("If getting members for group work is... what's that, left up to us, usually it has fewer weaknesses"). By explaining the opposite situation ("...there is a possibility that we will communicate less"), Budi also put forward that when working with "close" classmates, he would communicate more. His peer preference signposted an unfavorable situation in his classroom community because he did not see all classmates as tools or resources to maximize his learning, but only saw benefit to working with close peers.

Midya had a similar view, saying:

If our group members are chosen by Miss Andini, it is not suitable, less sociable. That is the problem. When choosing group members, I like to choose classmates I am close with. I prefer choosing them by myself. I choose classmates I am close with, more familiar. (Midya, Second Interview, 20150608)

Midya, like Budi, stressed her preference for working with her close classmates. Using "not suitable, less sociable," Midya suggested that working in the same group with classmates she was not close with resulted in less interaction between group members.

Midya's peers also had peer preference. When Andini put Midya and her classmates in groups in one observed lesson, another girl complained about being grouped with the students Andini chose. She claimed to have a religious reason that did not allow her to work with them (Field Notes, 20150406). When asked about this, Andini explained that what the girl said (Midya's peer) was an excuse for not working with a few boys that she did not like. She also stressed that their school did not segregate boys from girls. Earlier in the first interview, Andini said that Midya's classmates (8 G) had peer preferences; they did not want to mingle with classmates that they were not close with. Therefore, Andini forced them to work with the other students by choosing CL group members for them. She said:

Students in 8 G, they had peer preferences. That's why I have to, have to push them to, to mingle with the other students. (First Interview, 20150405)

The notion of individual accountability in CL advocates that each student in their group has their share of the work or their contribution for completion of any given task. The EFL learners' peer preferences indicated that as members of their classroom community, these students did not see each other as equal resources in their learning. Such situation is unfavorable especially because CL underscores the ideas of students having discussions with their peers on materials, helping one another to understand it (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 68), and increasing their peers' learning (Olsen & Kagan, 1992, p. 8). The absence of individual accountability in home groups and peer interaction—inherent in CL structures—in Andini's use of CL might have contributed to the situation, i.e., her students having peer preference. These students had limited opportunities to see how peers' share of work and feedback could help complete their learning tasks.

The EFL learners' peer preference also indicated that the teachers' CL practice and their lack of fidelity in implementing CL caused the tensions in the community component. Missing the steps of activities that exhibit individual accountability seem to have contributed to EFL learners having peer preference and not seeing that their peers could all become resources when learning in CL groups. These EFL learners did not have many opportunities to see other community members presenting their share of work or for giving feedback on peers' individual accountability performances. Here we underscore the phrase "not many" because the EFL learners did experience such opportunities. Our larger study showed us that when our teacher participants faithfully followed the procedures of the selected CL structures, EFL learners benefitted (see Astuti & Lammers, 2017a; Astuti & Barratt, 2018). However, we noted that only a few of the observed lessons used CL structures with fidelity.

When students work in conventional or non-CL groups, opportunities exist for some peers to dominate or to be helpful than the others, increasing the possibility of them having peer preference as they react to others' ways of participating. However, when students learn through CL structures implemented with fidelity, everyone's individual accountability is required. Doing activities that reinforce individual accountability manifests equal participation among students (Astuti, 2020). Through such participation, students are likely to see that their peers contribute to everybody's individual and the group's collective learning, which sets up conditions for valuing all peers' contributions. In addition, although language learners are likely to sense their differences in abilities during activities of presenting share of work and feedback giving/receiving, literature suggests that language learners benefit from their peers' various proficiency levels because they try to produce input comprehensible for their peers (see Astuti & Lammers, 2017a; Long & Porter, 1985; McGroarty, 1989).

Discussion

In providing this portrait, our study's contributions about peer preference extend Webb's (1982) variables of student interaction and learning in small groups that she identified as positively related to achievement: giving and receiving help. Since EFL learners in our study missed opportunities for having peer interaction, they also missed opportunities for giving help to and receiving help from their peers, which could have promoted their achievement. Hence, although our data did not allow us to argue that the absence of peer interaction affected the EFL learners' achievement, it is safe to say that the absence of peer interaction in the studied CL implementation not only created peer preference but also may have led to ineffective use of CL and in turn affected students' achievement.

Our findings on peer preference provide considerable insight into the nature of relationships in second language learners' groups (i.e., whether these learners are collaborative or not (Storch, 2001, 2002)). EFL teachers not implementing CL with fidelity seemed to be a factor that contributed to their students learning in groups in which individual accountability activities did not happen. These groups hardly

displayed the participation and cooperation essential for both individual and collective learning. As students were not encouraged to see how their peers contributed to their learning, peer preference gradually formed. Hence, we argue that group learning opportunities requiring individual accountability (i.e., structured individual students' performances and peer interaction) work against peer preference. Also, when learners see their peers as equally resourceful for their learning, students will have a better appreciation for learning opportunities within their groups and of their classroom community. We thus corroborate Storch's (2002, p. 307) proposition that relationships between learners are important factors in the creation of learning opportunities through interaction.

Our data did not reveal whether the two teacher participants allowed students to stay with the same classmates in CL groups for a long period. Nevertheless, we believe that the peer preference revealed by our analysis lends support to Vermette's (1995, p. 281) suggestions for novice users of CL. He recommends that students work in the same groups for a considerable amount of time in order to "develop an understanding of other people's strengths" and "allow members to feel acceptance". The studied classroom community seemed not to be focused on developing understandings of others' strengths, rather they saw that not all members could provide "mutual assistance," a key character of collectivist societies like Indonesia (Van Der Kroef, 1953).

Beside individual accountability, some researchers propose another CL principle of social skills (see Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Olsen & Kagan, 1992). They theorize this principle as ways or methods to interact, communicate, and work in groups. Olsen and Kagan (1992) organize social skills as group-related (e.g., asking others to contribute) and task-related (e.g., elaborating ideas of others). Other researchers categorize social skills as interpersonal skills (e.g., active listening) and collaborative skills (e.g., take turns) (Ashman & Gillies, 1997; Gillies & Ashman, 1996, 1998). Regardless of categorization, social skills remain important for effective learning through quality cooperation to happen in groups (e.g., Webb, 1982) and teachers need to provide explicit instruction in social skills prior to CL implementation (Alghamdi & Gillies, 2013; Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Coston, 2003; Buchs & Butera, 2015; Gillies & Haynes, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Students need to learn to cooperate in order to cooperate (Slavin, Sharan, Kagan, Hertz-Lazarowitz, Webb, & Schmuk, 1985).

Indirectly, our study's finding on peer preference strengthens the aforementioned studies' findings that underscore the importance of building students' social skills. Again, our data did not allow us to say that the peer preference that the EFL learners had was due to the lack of social skills trainings. More research is needed to determine whether this reasonable investment (Buchs & Butera, 2015) would alleviate the tensions revealed in our analysis.

Drawing on existing studies, we encourage the following ways to teach students social skills as we set the cooperative learning stage: a) giving concrete examples on how to express the targeted skills both in words and in behaviours, b) guiding students with practice and observation after the introduction of a specific skill, c) addressing each cooperative skill during different sessions, d) introducing a new skill only after the previously learned skills become integrated in students' routines (Buchs & Butera, 2015, pp. 9-10), and e) guiding groups in the process of reflection on how they work together to achieve their goal and how they can improve the way they work together (Sharan, 2014, p. 806). We also list here some examples of CL structures that explicitly promote social skills (Kagan & Kagan, 2009, p. 11.4): Talking Chips (turn taking), Numbered Heads Together (helping, teaching, tutoring), Pairs Check (praising), Spend-A-Buck (fairness), and Paraphrase Passport (listening and understanding).

The EFL learners' peer preference, which we have shown throughout the article as connected to their teachers' lack of fidelity in implementing CL structures, also offers a description of one of the challenges of CLT implementation in Indonesian EFL classrooms, i.e., teachers' low mastery of teaching methods under this approach (see Alwasilah, 2013; Madya, 2007). We have indicated that, for the two teacher participants, CL was part of their instructional practice. Yet, their students' peer preference suggests the need for them to recognize the importance of implementing CL with fidelity so that all of the principles may be achieved. This understanding is essential so that teachers' instruction facilitates EFL learners' "communication and interaction in and about the target language"—tenets of CLT (Astuti & Lammers,

2017b, pp. 254-255), and thus promote their communicative competence. Thus, our findings reiterate previous researchers' recommendation for teachers to "use a variety of activities that CLT features" (Jin & Yoo, 2019, p. 1342) and to be well-informed about methods they use in their instruction (e.g., Chiang, 2016).

Our findings also suggest that teachers would benefit from refreshing themselves on the procedures in chosen CL structures, especially during lesson planning. Such effort will ensure that teachers do not miss important individual accountability activities, which we believe will lead to more effective CL implementation. Additionally, it is important for teachers to explain CL structures to students before they learn through the structures and to remind students of the benefits each step has for their learning. When teachers do so, students see that their peers play significant roles in their learning, including serving as active listeners and feedback providers.

For effective pre-service courses or professional development programs on CL, we recommend teacher educators pay attention to developing teachers' CL knowledge, their understanding of CL principles and constructs, how to enact them, and their roles in enhancing learning (see Astuti & Barratt, 2018; Astuti & Lammers, 2017a, 2017b). Additionally, as noted by previous studies, teachers need to experience CL themselves so that their efficacy grows (Dellicarpini, 2009; Farrell & Jacobs, 2016). We recommend that teachers learning about CL have a systematic experience as learners that starts with just one CL structure (Caicedo Triviño, 2016). Teacher educators give these teachers experience learning through this structure and then facilitate their examination of how CL principles manifest in the use of the focused structure and how it enhances learning. Next, they should practice using the newly-learned CL structure in peer teaching and their own classrooms. Once teachers gain knowledge and skills for implementing the structure, they can move to the next CL structure. Teachers should receive planned and repeated exposure to CL (Dellicarpini, 2009; Mahbib, Esa, Mohamad, & Mohd Salleh, 2017). We also recommend that workshop providers use CL structures that help serve the goals of curriculum being implemented. For example, if the focused EFL curriculum includes interpersonal conversations as a goal, then workshops could include CL structures for building learners' speaking skills. This way, teachers find the programs relevant and they are likely to implement CL (Ghaith, 2018).

We are aware of other factors that might contribute to students' peer preference ³⁴ when it comes to working in CL groups. Since the scope of our study did not allow us to identify and explain these other factors, we turned to the literature and found the following potentially relevant factors: fear of losing face, avoiding disagreement, being shy, having low self-esteem, low self-confidence (Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005), and foreign language anxiety (Trang, Moni, & Baldauf, 2013). The EFL learners' preference for working in the same groups with their close peers might have been driven by the aforementioned factors; they might have thought that when working with their close classmates, they would not have to deal with such fear, shyness, and anxiety. Group identity (Chen, Chen, & Meindl, 1998), or group membership on the basis of certain identities such as hobby, extracurricular activity, academic standing, geographical origin, and socioeconomic background, might also be a cause. These authors underscore that due to mutual identification—social identities—group identity carries stronger psychological attachment and fosters emerging cooperation, especially in collectivist societies. With Indonesia being one (see Van der Kroef, 1953), group identity could have been a factor that led to the EFL learners in our study having peer preference. Fauzan's (2007) study lends support to our findings. Although it was carried out in a different classroom context (mathematics education), his study signifies Indonesian students' fondness for friendship-based learning environment. Comparison studies with classrooms in other societies may reveal more nuance to this understanding about peer preference.

Conclusion

EFL teachers' practice of implementing CL without fidelity caused a condition within the rules component. This condition created systemic tensions in the activity systems, involving the other

components: subjects, tools, division of labor, community, and objects/outcome. Specifically, the teachers missed some steps in their use of selected CL structures, which then resulted in the absence of individual accountability performance in home groups and peer interaction. These activities should have taken place before subsequent performance of individual accountability. The absence of two activities of individual accountability in CL put EFL learners in unfavorable situations: 1) not presenting their share of work, 2) performing without preparation, and 3) having peer preference. These situations also demonstrate how missing activities affect EFL learning. Specifically, the EFL learning appears not to go in the direction of attaining lesson objectives and improving communicative competence (expected outcome).

Our article suggests the importance of teachers' CL implementation, requiring social skills training for students and teachers mastering and following the preset procedure of any CL structure selected as part of their instructional strategies. We believe that such fidelity with these structures mediates the relationships between components in the activity systems (i.e., their CL implementation) in ways that help students attain their learning objectives. Teachers not following procedures of chosen CL structures can present obstacles in the enactment of individual accountability in CL for enhancing learning, therefore limiting CL's effectiveness.

Lastly, our study contributed initial understandings about the importance of individual accountability in CL and peer preference as a consequence that teachers and students might have to bear when this principle does not fully manifest in CL implementation. Further research might address the question of how other CL principles would contribute to EFL learning and examine the extent to which inclusion and/or absence of these principles impacts the effectiveness of CL in EFL instruction, including the dynamism and efficiency of student-student interaction. We also recommend that future researchers examine the extent to which CL groups' learning contributes to individual students' performances. Such studies can lead to a fuller understanding of how CL promotes second language acquisition and development. Finally, our study offered a depiction of Indonesian students' resistance for working with not-close class members; a phenomenon worth exploring further given their identities as learners in a collectivist society.

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