

Recontextualizing Cooperative Learning: Indonesian EFL Teachers' Agency in Adapting a Global Pedagogical Model

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ABSTRACT : Cooperative Learning (CL) is widely recognized as an effective student-centered pedagogical approach and has been extensively promoted in educational reforms worldwide. However, existing studies have predominantly focused on measuring its effectiveness, while limited attention has been given to how teachers interpret and enact CL within their specific sociocultural contexts. Addressing this gap, this study investigates how Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers conceptualize, implement, and adapt cooperative learning in their classroom practices. Employing a qualitative multiple case study design, data were collected from four secondary school English teachers through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The study was informed by Sociocultural Activity Theory and the concept of teacher agency to examine how pedagogical practices are shaped by cultural values, institutional conditions, and professional experiences. The findings reveal that cooperative learning is not implemented as a uniform instructional model but is continuously reinterpreted and recontextualized according to local classroom realities. Teachers enacted CL in diverse ways, drawing upon moral, cultural, religious, institutional, and pragmatic considerations. Furthermore, cultural norms emphasizing social harmony influenced interaction patterns, while tensions between policy expectations and classroom realities prompted teachers to adapt cooperative learning practices strategically. The study highlights teacher agency as a critical mediating factor in translating global pedagogical ideas into contextually meaningful classroom practices. These findings contribute to the literature on pedagogical recontextualization and teacher agency by demonstrating that successful implementation of cooperative learning depends not on procedural fidelity but on teachers' capacity to adapt pedagogical principles to their sociocultural environments. The study also offers implications for educational policy and teacher professional development by emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive approaches to pedagogical reform.

Key words: Cooperative Learning, Teacher Agency, Sociocultural Theory, Activity Theory, EFL Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning (CL) has been widely recognized as one of the most influential pedagogical approaches in contemporary education. Rooted in social

interdependence theory, CL emphasizes structured group interaction in which students work collaboratively to achieve shared learning goals. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that cooperative learning can enhance academic achievement, improve social skills, and foster active engagement in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 2014). These findings have contributed to the growing acceptance of CL as an effective instructional approach across various educational contexts.

Due to these advantages, cooperative learning has been widely promoted as a “best practice” in educational reform across different countries. International organizations and national education systems have adopted CL as part of broader efforts to shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning (UNESCO, 2020). In Indonesia, this orientation is reflected in the implementation of Kurikulum 2013, which encourages collaborative learning, active participation, and the development of higher-order thinking skills (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). Within this policy framework, teachers, particularly English teachers, are expected to integrate cooperative learning into their classroom practices.

Despite its strong theoretical foundation and policy support, the implementation of cooperative learning in real classroom contexts is far from uniform. Teachers who operate within the same curriculum and institutional environment often apply CL in significantly different ways. Some teachers adopt structured cooperative models, while others implement more flexible forms of group work, and some reinterpret the approach according to their own teaching beliefs and classroom realities. This variation raises an important question: if a pedagogical approach is implemented differently by different teachers, can it still be understood as a uniform method?

This issue cannot be fully explained by technical factors alone. Teaching is not merely the application of prescribed methods, but a complex social and cultural practice. From a sociocultural perspective, learning and human action are always mediated by cultural tools and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In this sense, cooperative learning is not simply a set of instructional procedures, but a pedagogical concept that is interpreted and enacted within specific sociocultural contexts.

To understand this complexity, it is necessary to move beyond a narrow focus on whether teachers implement cooperative learning “correctly.” Instead, attention should be directed toward how teachers make sense of the approach in their own contexts. This perspective is supported by Sociocultural Activity Theory, which conceptualizes teaching as an activity system shaped by interactions among tools, rules, community, and division of labor (Engeström, 2001). Within this framework,

contradictions between policy expectations and classroom realities are not viewed as failures, but as sources of adaptation and innovation.

In addition, contemporary discussions on teacher agency highlight that teachers are not passive recipients of educational reform. Rather, they actively interpret, negotiate, and transform pedagogical ideas in response to their experiences and contextual conditions. Teacher agency is understood as an emergent phenomenon shaped by the interaction between individual capacity and structural context (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). This implies that differences in teaching practice should not be viewed merely as deviations, but as expressions of professional judgment shaped by local realities.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Indonesia, these dynamics become even more complex. Teachers often face various constraints, including limited student exposure to English, large class sizes, and assessment systems that prioritize linguistic accuracy. Under such conditions, the implementation of cooperative learning becomes a process of negotiation rather than direct application. Teachers adapt, modify, and sometimes redefine cooperative learning in order to make it workable within their classrooms.

Despite the growing body of research on cooperative learning, many studies still focus primarily on measuring its effectiveness, often overlooking how the approach is actually understood and practiced by teachers. There remains a need for research that explores cooperative learning from the perspective of teachers as active agents, particularly in non-Western educational contexts.

This study aims to address this gap by examining how Indonesian English teachers interpret and implement cooperative learning within a shared institutional setting. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions: (1) how do teachers conceptualize cooperative learning, (2) how is it enacted in classroom practice, and (3) what factors shape its variation across teachers. By adopting a sociocultural perspective, this study argues that cooperative learning is not a fixed and universally applicable method, but a dynamic pedagogical practice that is continuously reinterpreted and reshaped within specific contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cooperative learning (CL) has long been established as a central pedagogical approach in contemporary education, particularly within the broader shift toward student-centered learning. At its theoretical core, cooperative learning is grounded in social interdependence theory, which emphasizes that learning outcomes are shaped by the structure of interaction among learners (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). In this framework, learning is optimized when students work collaboratively in small groups

to achieve shared goals, supported by key principles such as positive interdependence and individual accountability.

Empirical research on cooperative learning has been extensive and consistently supportive. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have demonstrated that cooperative learning produces significant positive effects on academic achievement, student attitudes, and social relationships (Kyndt et al., 2013; Slavin, 2014). For instance, Kyndt et al. (2013) found that cooperative learning not only improves achievement outcomes but also enhances students' attitudes toward learning and peer interaction, with contextual factors such as subject domain and cultural setting influencing the magnitude of these effects. Similarly, Slavin (2014) confirms that cooperative learning contributes positively to intergroup relations and social cohesion, indicating its broader socio-educational impact beyond cognitive outcomes.

Beyond achievement, cooperative learning is widely recognized as a pedagogical approach that fosters active engagement and deeper learning processes. It encourages students to articulate ideas, negotiate meaning, and co-construct knowledge through interaction (Gillies, 2016). As noted in contemporary research, cooperative structures promote not only cognitive gains but also critical thinking, motivation, and collaborative problem-solving skills. These advantages explain why cooperative learning has been widely promoted in global education policies and reform initiatives.

However, despite this strong empirical foundation, a growing body of literature challenges the assumption that cooperative learning can be universally applied across different sociocultural contexts. One key critique concerns the cultural assumptions embedded in cooperative learning practices. The approach presupposes that students are willing to participate actively, express opinions openly, and engage in peer negotiation—behaviors that may not align with educational cultures characterized by hierarchical relationships and respect for authority (Hofstede, 2001). As such, the effectiveness of cooperative learning is not only a matter of instructional design but also of cultural compatibility.

This issue becomes more evident when examined through the lens of comparative education and policy transfer. Educational models such as cooperative learning are often disseminated globally through policy borrowing, where practices developed in one context are adopted in another. However, as argued by Crossley and Watson (2003) and Phillips and Ochs (2004), such transfer processes rarely result in direct replication. Instead, pedagogical models undergo processes of reinterpretation, adaptation, and transformation within local contexts. This process, often referred to

as recontextualization, suggests that variation in implementation is an inherent feature of pedagogical transfer rather than a deviation from it.

Empirical evidence from Asian educational contexts further supports this argument. A substantial body of research shows that teachers frequently adapt collaborative and communicative learning practices to align with local cultural norms and institutional constraints. For example, studies have documented how pedagogical innovations are often reinterpreted or selectively implemented in ways that maintain classroom harmony and align with culturally embedded expectations of authority and participation (Hu, 2002; Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006; Schweisfurth, 2011). These patterns suggest that cooperative learning is rarely enacted as a fixed instructional model; rather, it is continuously reshaped as a flexible and context-sensitive set of practices grounded in local realities.

In Indonesia, similar patterns have been documented. Although student-centered and collaborative learning approaches are formally embedded within the national curriculum, their implementation varies considerably across classrooms. Policy documents emphasize active, student-centered learning, yet classroom enactment is often shaped by contextual constraints such as large class sizes, students' proficiency levels, limited resources, and assessment pressures (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). Moreover, research has shown that, despite broad recognition of their pedagogical value, the implementation of such approaches remains uneven in practice, pointing to a persistent gap between policy expectations and classroom realities (Schweisfurth, 2011).

To understand these variations, it is necessary to adopt a theoretical perspective that accounts for teaching as a socially situated and culturally mediated activity. Sociocultural theory, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), provides a foundational framework by emphasizing that learning is mediated through interaction, language, and cultural tools. From this perspective, teaching practices are not simply applied techniques but are shaped by the meanings constructed within specific social contexts.

Building on this foundation, Sociocultural Activity Theory (SCAT) offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for examining teaching practices. According to Engeström (2001), human activity is organized within systems that consist of interconnected components, including subject, object, tools, rules, community, and division of labor. Teaching, therefore, is understood as a dynamic and systemic activity shaped by interactions among these elements.

A central concept within activity theory is contradiction, which refers to tensions or misalignments within or between elements of an activity system. These

contradictions often emerge when new pedagogical approaches, such as cooperative learning, are introduced into existing educational structures. Importantly, contradictions are not merely obstacles but are considered sources of development and transformation. They prompt teachers to adapt, modify, and innovate their practices in response to contextual challenges (Engeström, 2001). This perspective provides a powerful lens for understanding why cooperative learning is enacted differently across classrooms.

In addition to activity theory, the concept of teacher agency offers further insight into how pedagogical practices are shaped in context. Contemporary research conceptualizes teacher agency as an emergent and context-dependent phenomenon rather than a fixed individual attribute. According to Biesta et al. (2015) and Priestley et al. (2015), teacher agency is achieved through the interaction between past experiences, present conditions, and future aspirations. This ecological perspective highlights that teachers' actions are influenced not only by their beliefs but also by the structural and cultural environments in which they operate.

Within this framework, variation in the implementation of cooperative learning can be understood as an expression of teacher agency. Teachers do not simply apply prescribed methods; they interpret, negotiate, and reshape pedagogical models to align with their local contexts. As such, differences in classroom practice should not be viewed as failures of implementation but as forms of situated professional judgment.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that cooperative learning should not be understood as a universal and fixed instructional model. Instead, it is a dynamic pedagogical practice that is continuously reinterpreted and transformed through interaction between teachers, students, and their sociocultural environments. Understanding this process requires a shift from evaluating effectiveness to examining practice, specifically on how teachers conceptualize and enact cooperative learning within their own contexts. This study adopts such an approach by drawing on Sociocultural Activity Theory to analyze how cooperative learning is recontextualized in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate how Indonesian English teachers conceptualize and implement cooperative learning within their classroom practices. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand meanings, interpretations, and practices from the perspective of participants within their natural settings. As argued by Creswell and Poth (2018),

qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena where context plays a crucial role.

The use of a case study design is justified by the study's focus on examining a bounded system in depth. Case study research allows for a detailed exploration of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). By employing a multiple case study design, this research enables cross-case comparison, providing a more nuanced understanding of both individual variation and shared patterns among teachers.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in a public senior secondary school in West Sulawesi, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively as it represents a typical Indonesian school implementing Kurikulum 2013, which promotes student-centered learning approaches, including cooperative learning. The school serves students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, with varying levels of English proficiency.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is appropriate in qualitative research for identifying information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The criteria for participant selection were as follows:

- a. English teachers who self-identified as using cooperative learning strategies;
- b. Teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience; and
- c. Willingness to participate in classroom observations and in-depth interviews.

Based on these criteria, four English teachers were selected. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used: Joko, Sandi, Ratna, and Bowo. The participants varied in terms of age, teaching experience, and educational background, allowing the study to capture diverse professional trajectories and pedagogical orientations.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a three-month period using three primary methods: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The use of multiple data sources allows for triangulation, which enhances the credibility and validity of qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

a. Semi-Structured Interviews

Each participant was interviewed two to three times, with each session lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility to explore participants' perspectives while maintaining a consistent focus on key research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The interviews explored teachers' professional histories, beliefs about teaching and learning, understanding of cooperative learning, and reflections on classroom practices. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for analysis.

b. Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted to examine how cooperative learning was enacted in practice. Each teacher was observed in three to four lessons where cooperative learning activities were implemented. A non-participant observation approach was adopted to minimize researcher interference (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Observations focused on key aspects such as task design, group interaction, teacher facilitation, and the presence of cooperative learning elements (e.g., interaction patterns, participation, and accountability). Field notes were taken during observations and expanded immediately after each session.

c. Document Analysis

Instructional documents were collected to complement interview and observation data. These included lesson plans, teaching materials, student worksheets, and assessment rubrics. Document analysis helps provide insight into how teachers plan and conceptualize cooperative learning in relation to curriculum requirements (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis informed by Sociocultural Activity Theory. The process followed an iterative and inductive approach, allowing patterns and themes to emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was carried out in three stages:

First, within-case analysis was conducted for each teacher. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed to construct detailed case narratives. Coding focused on:

- a. Teachers' professional backgrounds (ontogenetic dimension),
- b. Conceptualizations of cooperative learning,
- c. Classroom practices, and
- d. Perceived challenges or tensions.

Second, cross-case analysis was performed to identify similarities and differences across cases. This stage aimed to uncover patterns of variation in how cooperative learning was interpreted and enacted.

Third, the findings were interpreted through the lens of Sociocultural Activity Theory, focusing on how teaching practices were mediated by tools, rules, community, and institutional conditions. Particular attention was given to identifying contradictions within activity systems and how these contradictions shaped pedagogical adaptation.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation across multiple sources and methods. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of findings with participants to verify accuracy.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability and confirmability were ensured through maintaining an audit trail of data collection and analysis, as well as reflective notes documenting the researcher's positionality and decision-making throughout the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional authority. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality.

All names and identifying information have been anonymized to protect participants' privacy.

Limitations

As a qualitative multiple case study, the findings of this research are not intended to be statistically generalizable. Instead, the study aims to provide analytical insights into how cooperative learning is interpreted and enacted within a specific context (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the presence of the researcher during classroom observations may have influenced participants' behavior, although efforts were made to minimize this effect by building rapport over time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study by examining how four Indonesian English teachers conceptualize and enact cooperative learning (CL) within their classroom practices. The analysis integrates empirical data with Sociocultural Activity Theory and the concept of teacher agency, highlighting how pedagogical

practices are shaped through interaction between individual beliefs, sociocultural contexts, and institutional conditions.

Cooperative Learning as a Reinterpreted Practice

A central finding of this study is that cooperative learning is not implemented as a uniform pedagogical model, but rather as a reinterpreted and contextually adapted practice. Although all participants claimed to use cooperative learning, their understandings and classroom enactments varied significantly. This variation suggests that what is labeled as “cooperative learning” in policy and theory does not necessarily correspond to a singular, stable practice in classrooms, but instead emerges as multiple situated versions shaped by teachers’ interpretations.

This pattern can be understood through the concept of recontextualization, which refers to the process by which educational knowledge and pedagogical models are transformed as they move from official discourse into practice (Bernstein, 2000; Crossley & Watson, 2003). Within this process, teachers do not simply implement externally defined methods; they selectively interpret, reshape, and reassemble pedagogical ideas in ways that make sense within their local contexts. As such, cooperative learning becomes less of a transferable “method” and more of a socially mediated practice that is continuously reconstructed in use.

Empirical studies in comparative education further support this perspective, showing that pedagogical approaches introduced through reform agendas are rarely adopted in their original form. Instead, they are adapted to align with local cultural norms, institutional expectations, and classroom realities (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011). In this sense, variation in implementation should not be viewed as a deviation from the model, but as an inherent feature of how pedagogical ideas travel and settle in new contexts.

The cases in this study illustrate this process clearly. Joko conceptualized cooperative learning as a moral responsibility to ensure that no student was left behind, framing collaboration primarily in terms of care and inclusivity. His classroom practices emphasized peer support and collective responsibility, even when formal structures of cooperative learning were not fully implemented. In contrast, Sandi interpreted cooperative learning through a religious lens, embedding it within values such as mutual responsibility and social harmony. His enactment prioritized respectful interaction and moral conduct, reflecting the integration of pedagogical practice with cultural and religious meaning systems.

Meanwhile, Ratna approached cooperative learning as a curriculum-driven requirement, focusing on aligning her teaching with prescribed guidelines and procedural expectations. Her implementation reflected a form of compliance shaped

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by institutional accountability, where cooperative learning was operationalized through structured activities but often constrained by practical challenges. Bowo, on the other hand, treated cooperative learning pragmatically as a strategy for managing classroom efficiency. His version minimized interactional complexity and emphasized task completion, illustrating how pedagogical models can be simplified to meet immediate classroom demands.

These variations highlight that teachers draw on different interpretive resources such as moral, cultural, institutional, and practical in shaping their understanding of cooperative learning. From a sociocultural perspective, this can be seen as a process of mediated action, where teachers' practices are shaped by the interaction between cultural tools, prior experiences, and contextual constraints (Vygotsky, 1978). Cooperative learning, therefore, is not enacted as a fixed set of procedures, but as a flexible repertoire of practices that are adapted and reconfigured through everyday teaching activity.

Cultural Mediation in Classroom Interaction

The study also reveals that cultural values play a significant role in shaping how cooperative learning is enacted in practice. While cooperative learning is often associated with active discussion, open exchange of ideas, and critical engagement among students, such interactional patterns were not always fully realized in the observed classrooms. Instead, classroom interaction reflected culturally embedded norms that influenced how students participated in collaborative activities.

In Sandi's classroom, for example, student interaction was characterized by politeness, restraint, and a strong emphasis on maintaining social harmony. Although students actively participated in group discussions, they rarely challenged each other's ideas or engaged in critical debate. This pattern can be understood in relation to broader cultural orientations that value respect, harmony, and avoidance of conflict, which are commonly associated with collectivist societies (Hofstede, 2001). Within such cultural frameworks, disagreement may be perceived not as an intellectual exercise but as a potential disruption of social relationships, thereby shaping the nature of classroom discourse.

A similar pattern was observed in Joko's classroom, where cooperation was framed primarily as mutual assistance rather than critical dialogue. Students were encouraged to help one another understand the material, but the interaction often remained at the level of support and clarification rather than deeper cognitive engagement. This suggests that cooperative learning, when mediated by local cultural values, may emphasize relational aspects of learning such as care, solidarity, and inclusivity over argumentative or analytical processes.

These findings align with a growing body of research demonstrating that classroom interaction is deeply shaped by culturally embedded norms of communication and participation. In many Asian educational contexts, students tend to avoid openly challenging peers or expressing disagreement, even within collaborative learning environments, due to strong cultural emphases on respect, harmony, and sensitivity to hierarchical relationships (Butler, 2011; Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006). Such tendencies influence not only the form of participation but also the depth of engagement in group work. Consequently, cooperative learning practices in these contexts often diverge from their original conceptualizations, particularly in terms of the extent to which they promote critical dialogue and cognitively demanding peer interaction.

From a sociocultural perspective, these interactional patterns can be understood as forms of mediated action, where teaching and learning are shaped by culturally constructed tools, norms, and meanings (Vygotsky, 1978). Language, interaction styles, and classroom expectations function as mediational means that influence how students engage with each other and with the learning task. In this sense, cooperative learning is not implemented in a cultural vacuum; rather, it is reconfigured through locally shared understandings of appropriate behavior and communication.

Contradictions and Pedagogical Adaptation

Another important finding concerns the role of contradictions in shaping teachers' practices. Across all cases, teachers encountered tensions between the ideals of cooperative learning as promoted in policy and theory, and the realities of their classroom contexts. These tensions were not incidental but appeared as recurring structural features of teaching practice, indicating that the implementation of cooperative learning is inherently negotiated rather than straightforward. For example, Ratna experienced difficulty balancing curriculum requirements with students' limited English proficiency. While cooperative learning activities were formally included in her lesson plans in alignment with curriculum expectations, their enactment often required direct teacher intervention when students struggled to participate meaningfully. Similarly, Bowo faced a persistent tension between the goal of fostering student interaction and the practical need to maintain classroom order and complete the prescribed syllabus within limited time. In his case, cooperative learning was selectively simplified to ensure efficiency, even if this reduced opportunities for interaction.

Within the framework of Sociocultural Activity Theory, such tensions can be understood as contradictions within the activity system (Engeström, 2001). These

contradictions emerge when there is a misalignment between different components of the system such as rules (curriculum demands), tools (cooperative learning structures), and object (student learning outcomes). Importantly, contradictions are not merely surface-level difficulties, but deeper structural tensions that reflect competing priorities within educational practice (Engeström, 1987).

A closer analysis of the cases suggests that multiple layers of contradiction were at play. First, there were contradictions between pedagogical ideals and student readiness, particularly in contexts where students lacked the linguistic or cognitive resources to engage fully in cooperative activities. Second, contradictions emerged between institutional expectations and classroom realities, such as the pressure to implement student-centered learning while simultaneously meeting assessment targets and time constraints. Third, there were contradictions between interactional goals and cultural norms, where expectations for active participation were mediated by values of respect and harmony.

Rather than resolving these contradictions by abandoning cooperative learning, teachers engaged in processes of pedagogical adaptation. This adaptation can be understood as a form of situated problem-solving, in which teachers reconfigured pedagogical practices to make them workable within their specific contexts. For instance, Joko addressed unequal participation not through formal accountability mechanisms, but by appealing to students' sense of moral responsibility. Sandi reframed participation as a religious obligation, thereby legitimizing engagement within a culturally meaningful framework. Ratna modified tasks and provided more structured guidance to support student participation, while Bowo streamlined cooperative activities to maintain efficiency and control.

These adaptations illustrate that teachers do not simply respond to constraints passively; rather, they actively mediate contradictions through contextually grounded strategies. In this sense, pedagogical adaptation can be seen as a manifestation of what Engeström (2001) refers to as expansive learning, where practitioners respond to systemic tensions by developing new forms of activity. Although the adaptations observed in this study were often incremental rather than radical, they nonetheless reflect ongoing processes of transformation within classroom practice.

Furthermore, these findings align with research on teacher agency, which emphasizes that teachers' actions are shaped by their capacity to navigate and negotiate structural conditions (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). The ways in which teachers responded to contradictions in this study were not uniform, but reflected their individual experiences, beliefs, and priorities. This suggests that

contradictions do not lead to a single predictable outcome; rather, they open up a space for multiple forms of pedagogical response.

Teacher Agency as Contextual Practice

The findings further highlight the central role of teacher agency in shaping how cooperative learning is enacted in classroom practice. Across all cases, teachers did not simply apply cooperative learning as a prescribed method, but actively interpreted and adapted it in response to their professional experiences and contextual conditions. This suggests that pedagogical practice is not determined solely by policy directives or formal training, but is continuously constructed through teachers' situated decision-making (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015).

This interpretation aligns with the ecological perspective of teacher agency proposed by Biesta et al. (2015) and Priestley et al. (2015), which conceptualizes agency as an emergent phenomenon arising from the interaction between past experiences (iterational dimension), present structural and cultural conditions (practical-evaluative dimension), and future-oriented goals (projective dimension). From this perspective, agency is not a fixed individual capacity but is achieved through teachers' engagement with the temporal and contextual dimensions of their work. Similar arguments have been advanced in research on policy enactment, which emphasizes that teachers actively interpret and translate policy into practice rather than implementing it mechanically (Ball et al., 2012).

The cases in this study illustrate how these dimensions of agency operate in practice. Joko's approach to cooperative learning was strongly influenced by his past experiences as a struggling learner, which shaped his commitment to inclusivity and peer support. His pedagogical decisions reflect an iterational dimension of agency, where personal history informs present action. Sandi's enactment of cooperative learning, on the other hand, was mediated by his religious beliefs, which provided a moral and cultural framework for structuring classroom interaction. In this case, agency is not only personal but also culturally embedded, reflecting how pedagogical practices are shaped by socially shared values (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Ratna's practice demonstrates how teacher agency is shaped by institutional structures. Her emphasis on curriculum alignment and procedural implementation reflects the influence of accountability systems and policy expectations. However, her adjustments during classroom interaction, such as modifying tasks and providing scaffolding, indicate that agency remains operative even within constrained conditions. This aligns with research suggesting that teacher agency is often enacted through micro-level decisions in response to immediate classroom demands (Priestley

et al., 2015). Similarly, Bowo's pragmatic orientation reflects a practical-evaluative dimension of agency, where decisions are guided by considerations of efficiency, classroom control, and instructional feasibility.

These variations indicate that teacher agency is not reducible to autonomy or independence from constraint. Rather, it involves the capacity to navigate, negotiate, and respond to the complex interplay of structural demands, cultural norms, and pedagogical goals. In this sense, agency is inherently relational and context-dependent, emerging through the interaction between teachers and the environments in which they work (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). This perspective challenges simplistic dichotomies between compliance and resistance, suggesting instead that teachers operate within a continuum of strategic responses to reform (Kelchtermans, 2017).

Importantly, the findings also suggest that teacher agency plays a mediating role in the recontextualization of pedagogical models. As discussed in previous sections, cooperative learning is not implemented as a fixed method but is continuously reshaped through teachers' interpretations and adaptations. Teacher agency, therefore, functions as a bridge between global pedagogical ideas and local classroom realities. Through their everyday practices, teachers act as interpreters and translators of policy, transforming abstract pedagogical concepts into contextually meaningful forms (Ball et al., 2012; Pantić, 2015).

This perspective is supported by broader research on teacher professionalism, which emphasizes the importance of teachers' interpretive work in educational reform processes (Kelchtermans, 2017; Pantić, 2015). Rather than viewing variation in practice as a lack of fidelity, this body of literature highlights the value of professional judgment and contextual responsiveness. In line with this view, the differences observed in this study should not be interpreted as inconsistencies or deficiencies, but as legitimate expressions of teachers' efforts to align pedagogical approaches with their specific contexts.

At the same time, the findings also point to the limits of teacher agency within structured educational systems. While teachers demonstrated the capacity to adapt cooperative learning, their practices were still shaped by institutional constraints such as curriculum requirements, assessment systems, and classroom conditions. This suggests that agency is always exercised within boundaries, and that meaningful pedagogical change requires not only individual adaptation but also supportive structural conditions (Biesta et al., 2015). Taken together, these findings reinforce the argument that teacher agency is central to understanding how pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning are enacted in practice. It is through

teachers' situated actions that pedagogical models are interpreted, negotiated, and transformed. Recognizing this role is essential for developing more realistic and context-sensitive approaches to educational reform, where teachers are viewed not as implementers of policy, but as active constructors of pedagogical meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how Indonesian English teachers conceptualize and implement cooperative learning within a shared institutional context. Drawing on a sociocultural perspective and Sociocultural Activity Theory, the study reveals that cooperative learning is not enacted as a uniform pedagogical model, but rather as a dynamic and contextually mediated practice.

The findings demonstrate that although cooperative learning is widely promoted in policy and supported by a strong body of research, its implementation varies significantly across teachers. These variations are not random, but are shaped by teachers' professional histories, beliefs, cultural values, and the structural conditions of their classrooms. Cooperative learning, therefore, does not exist as a fixed method in practice; it is continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed through teachers' everyday pedagogical decisions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that challenges the assumption of pedagogical universality. By applying Sociocultural Activity Theory, the study shows that teaching practices are shaped by complex interactions within activity systems, where tools, rules, and community relations influence how pedagogical models are enacted. The identification of contradictions within these systems further highlights that tensions between policy expectations and classroom realities are not merely constraints, but important drivers of adaptation and innovation.

In addition, the study advances current discussions on teacher agency by demonstrating that teachers act as active mediators of educational reform. Rather than simply implementing prescribed methods, they interpret, negotiate, and reshape cooperative learning in ways that align with their local contexts. This finding supports the view that teacher agency is not an individual trait, but an emergent and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by both personal and structural factors (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2015).

The study also has important implications for educational policy. Current reform efforts often emphasize the adoption of "best practices" such as cooperative learning, with an implicit expectation of uniform implementation. However, the findings suggest that such expectations are unrealistic and may overlook the

complexity of classroom practice. Instead of focusing on procedural fidelity, policy frameworks should recognize the importance of contextual adaptation and provide space for teachers to exercise professional judgment. Supporting teacher agency and encouraging flexible interpretation of pedagogical models may lead to more meaningful and sustainable educational change.

In terms of practice, the findings highlight the need for professional development programs that go beyond technical training. Teachers should be supported not only in learning specific instructional strategies, but also in developing the capacity to adapt these strategies to their own contexts. Collaborative professional learning communities can play a crucial role in facilitating reflection, dialogue, and the sharing of contextually relevant practices.

For future research, this study suggests several directions. First, further studies could explore how students experience and respond to different forms of cooperative learning, as student participation is central to the success of collaborative pedagogy. Second, longitudinal research could provide deeper insight into how teachers' practices evolve over time as they continue to engage with educational reforms. Finally, comparative studies across different regions or educational systems could enrich understanding of how pedagogical models are reinterpreted in diverse sociocultural contexts.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The findings are based on a small number of cases within a single institutional setting, which limits their generalizability. However, the goal of this research is not statistical generalization, but analytical insight into how pedagogical practices are shaped in context. Future research involving a broader range of participants and settings would help to extend and refine these findings.

In conclusion, this study argues that cooperative learning should not be understood as a universally applicable instructional method, but as a pedagogical approach that is continuously shaped through interaction between teachers, students, and their sociocultural environments. Recognizing this complexity is essential for developing more context-sensitive approaches to teaching and learning, as well as for designing educational reforms that are responsive to the realities of classroom practice.

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