THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY AT INTERNATIONAL PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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Abstract: *Cooperative learning (CL) is an instructional approach that facilitates students' knowledge construction through collaborative interaction in small groups. This qualitative case study explores how CL has been applied in an international primary classroom setting where located in Gresik East Java Indonesia. Two English teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interview and their classes were observed to collect the data. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that CL enhances active engagement, collaboration, and cognitive learning. However, teachers faced several barriers in implementing CL, including time constraints, differences in student's skill levels, and classroom management. To address these challenges, teachers employed diagnostic assessments, flexible grouping, and structured reflections. These findings suggest that while CL is beneficial, its success depends on sufficient teacher training, especially in culturally diverse classrooms. The study underscores the importance of sustained professional training and adaptive strategies to maximize the effectiveness of CL in multicultural setting.*

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INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning (CL) is a well-established pedagogical approach that promotes student collaboration and active learning. Over the past decades, CL has been applied across diverse educational contexts, including language education, to cultivate crucial 21st century skills such as communication, critical thinking, and teamwork (Dörnyei, 2014; Johnson, D.

W., & Johnson, 2009). In Indonesia, several studies have demonstrated that CL enhances social skills, academic achievement, and motivation to learn (Karmina et al., 2021, 2024). Group work involving diverse students encourages empathy, enhances communication, and support effective problem-solving (Dakhi, 2022; Mahill Abdallah Hassan, 2022). Long-term implementation of CL has also been associated with increased student responsibility, leadership skills, and appreciation for diverse perspectives. Although its long-term effects can be challenging to measure, CL shows promise in fostering curiosity and a sense of community, benefiting all students from all backgrounds.

Despite these benefits, implementing CL in Internasional Class Program (ICP) classrooms presents specific challenges. Students often come from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds, making group dynamics and classroom management more complex. Teachers may also face time constraints and lack of adequate training (Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha, 2023). Most research in Indonesia focuses on regular primary schools, leaving a gap in our understanding of how CL works in international and multicultural environments.

Addressing this gap is crucial because international classrooms are becoming more common in Indonesia. Educators require effective and adaptable teaching strategies to assist diverse students. This study investigates the implementation of CL in a multicultural primary classroom within the ICP of a private school in East Java. This study aims to: (1) examine the benefits of CL in ICP primary classrooms, (2) identify the challenges faced by teachers, and (3) propose strategies to optimize CL in multicultural settings. The findings are expected to contribute to current literature and provide practical recommendations for educators and policymakers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cooperative learning (CL) is grounded in social constructivist theory, which argues that individuals construct knowledge most effectively through interaction and collaboration, it goes beyond a more classroom strategy, functioning as a framework for meaningful social interactionin learning (Gillies, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). In classroom practice, this theory is realized through student-centered activities that promote peer engagement. Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, (2009) emphasized that successful CL involves positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills development, and group processing. These components are believed to foster not only academic growth but also the development of interpersonal competencies, including empathy and leadership. However, achieving these elements consistently in real classroom settings requires careful design and facilitation, particularly in diverse educational contexts.

Social constructivism provides a strong philosophical foundation for CL because it assumes that learning is not merely the transfer of information from teacher to student, but

a collaborative process of meaning-making. In practice, this means that students are encouraged to negotiate meaning, challenge each other's ideas, and co-construct knowledge. Such a process inevitably requires active participation, willingness to listen, and openness to different perspectives. When students engage in CL, they not only acquire subject knowledge but also internalize dispositions such as patience, empathy, and respect for diversity. For example, when a group of students collaboratively solves a problem in mathematics, the process of discussing strategies and justifying reasoning allows them to deepen their understanding far more than working in isolation. Moreover, when tasks are structured in a way that demands positive interdependence, students learn that their success is linked to the success of their peers. This sense of shared responsibility develops social accountability and reduces tendencies toward individualistic or competitive behavior that may undermine group cohesion.

Numerous studies highlight the academic and social benefits of CL, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and primary school contexts. CL promotes critical thinking, encourages open communication, and supports students in building interpersonal connections (Mateus, 2014; Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2022; Rodphotong, 2018). These findings indicate that CL enhances not only cognitive achievement but also emotional and social development, key skills for 21st-century learners.

In EFL classrooms, where learners often face anxiety about using a new language, the collaborative setting of CL provides a low-stakes environment to practice. Speaking in smaller groups reduces the fear of making mistakes in front of the whole class. Students often report that they feel more comfortable experimenting with vocabulary and grammar when they are among supportive peers. This aligns with the broader educational goal of preparing students for the demands of the 21st century, which include communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Furthermore, CL supports the holistic development of learners. On the cognitive side, students refine their problem-solving abilities and learn to articulate their ideas clearly. On the affective side, they develop resilience, confidence, and the capacity to handle disagreement constructively. In primary school contexts, these gains are even more pronounced because children are at a developmental stage where peer interaction strongly influences motivation and self-esteem. Thus, CL not only serves as a method for academic instruction but also functions as a vehicle for character formation and emotional maturity.

In Indonesia, CL has also proven effective in enhancing students' motivation, interpersonal intelligence, and academic outcomes. For instance, research has shown that CL fosters collaboration, enhances student motivation, and improves academic performance (Amrullah & Suwarjo, 2018; Muawanah, 2023; Salamah et al., 2024).

Structured group work has been found to increase empathy, communication, and problem-solving abilities among students (Amrullah & Suwarjo, 2018), clear group roles and responsibilities contribute to better learning mastery and student engagement (Muawanah, 2023). Classroom action research indicates that integrating CL with local wisdom and real-life contexts makes learning more meaningful and relatable (Salamah et al., 2024). However, most of these studies have focused on conventional classrooms with relatively homogenous student populations.

The Indonesian classroom context offers unique insights because learning is often intertwined with cultural and communal values. Many schools emphasize *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) as a social ideal, and CL resonates strongly with this cultural heritage. When CL is aligned with local wisdom, it becomes more than a pedagogical technique; it embodies a lived cultural practice that students recognize in their daily lives. For example, when teachers integrate group projects with themes from local traditions or community issues, students perceive the learning process as more relevant and meaningful.

At the same time, Indonesian classrooms face challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and varying teacher expertise. In such situations, CL can be both a solution and a challenge. On the one hand, grouping students can reduce the teacher's burden of addressing individual needs by encouraging peer support. On the other hand, without clear guidance, group work may devolve into unequal participation, with some students dominating while others remain passive. Hence, the success of CL depends heavily on teacher facilitation skills, role assignment, and monitoring mechanisms.

In contrast, International or multicultural classrooms, such as those in Indonesia's ICP, where students differ in culture, language, and prior educational experience, present distinct pedagogical challenges that require adaptive strategies. Ryan & Deci, (2000) While CL has demonstrated benefits across varied contexts, its implementation in multicultural or international classrooms presents unique challenges. Time constraints, group dynamics, and teacher preparedness remain significant obstacles (Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha, 2023; Malusà, 2020). In multicultural settings, cultural differences, language barriers, and unequal participation may hinder the success of group work (Naz et al., 2023).

The dynamics of CL shift dramatically in multicultural classrooms. Unlike homogenous classrooms where students share similar backgrounds, multicultural groups bring together learners with distinct cultural norms regarding communication, authority, and group collaboration. For instance, in some cultures, students may be more reserved and reluctant to voice disagreement, whereas others may value assertiveness and debate. These contrasting tendencies can create misunderstandings unless teachers actively cultivate norms of respect and inclusivity.

Language is another crucial factor. When students have varying levels of proficiency in the instructional language, group discussions may become dominated by fluent speakers, leaving less confident peers marginalized. Teachers must therefore design scaffolds, such as structured turn-taking, sentence starters, or visual supports, to ensure equitable participation. Additionally, differences in prior educational experiences influence how students perceive collaboration. Learners who are accustomed to teacher-centered instruction may initially resist peer-led learning, while others may embrace it readily. Managing these differences requires patience and continuous modeling from the teacher.

These challenges are especially relevant in the Indonesian context, where international and ICP classrooms are increasingly common and multicultural. However, empirical evidence regarding how CL functions in these settings is limited. Most local studies have focused on conventional schools, leaving a gap in understanding how CL strategies must be adapted for multicultural environments (Cavell, 1954). To address this gap, there is a growing need to investigate CL within the specific sociocultural dynamics of international primary classrooms. The Indonesian context, where programs like ICP blend national curricula with global pedagogical models, presents a unique case for studying CL in culturally heterogeneous environments. Studies such as (Karmina et al., 2024) begin to explore this intersection, yet further research is essential to understand the practical adaptations, teacher competencies, and student responses required to make CL effective in diverse settings.

The rise of ICP programs reflects Indonesia's attempt to prepare students for global citizenship while maintaining national identity. In such classrooms, students are not only expected to master academic subjects but also to develop intercultural competence. CL, when adapted effectively, can serve as a bridge between these dual goals. By engaging students in collaborative projects that require negotiation of cultural differences, teachers can nurture both linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness.

Nevertheless, these classrooms also highlight the tension between global pedagogical ideals and local realities. Teachers often find themselves balancing the expectations of international standards with the constraints of national curriculum guidelines. For example, while international pedagogies may emphasize inquiry-based group work, national exams often prioritize individual knowledge recall. This misalignment can discourage teachers from fully embracing CL, as they fear students may be disadvantaged in high-stakes assessments. Thus, understanding how teachers navigate these competing demands is essential for designing sustainable CL practices in ICP contexts.

In the context of multicultural and primary education in Indonesia, recent study has provided empirical support for effective pedagogical models (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020).

For instance, a quasi-experimental study demonstrated that a problem-based learning model infused with multicultural content significantly improved elementary school students' social attitudes and critical thinking skills in thematic instruction (Qondias et al., 2022). Similarly, a case study conducted at MIN 3 Grobogan demonstrated that CL strategy, when integrated with multicultural education, fosters character development, nationalism, and religious understanding, underscroring the importance of institutional support and teacher facilitation in diverse classroom settings (Efendi & Lien, 2021). More broadly, a pedagogical review by (Wulandari, 2024) emphasized the effectiveness of combining cooperative, project-based, and problem-based learning strategies in multicultural classroom settings, while also highlighting persistent challenges such as teacher readiness and institutional capacity.

These findings indicate that the intersection between CL and multicultural education is not merely a matter of pedagogy but also of broader social significance. In an era where societies are increasingly diverse, classrooms become microcosms of multicultural coexistence. CL, when embedded with multicultural content, trains students to navigate differences respectfully, to appreciate diverse perspectives, and to resolve conflicts constructively. This is particularly important in Indonesia, a country with immense ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. Institutional support plays a critical role here. Even the most innovative teachers may struggle if school policies, assessment frameworks, or administrative expectations do not align with collaborative approaches. For instance, scheduling, classroom layouts, and class size policies can either enable or hinder CL. Teachers also require ongoing professional development to build confidence in managing diverse classrooms, handling sensitive cultural issues, and assessing collaborative work fairly. Without such support, the implementation of CL risks being superficial rather than transformative.

This study aims to enrich that growing body of knowledge by examining the lived experiences of teachers implementing CL in an international primary classroom. By critically comparing its findings with recent global and local studies, it aims to offer both theoretical insights and pedagogical implications relevant to multicultural educational practice.

Ultimately, the literature demonstrates that CL is more than just a method of grouping students; it is a philosophy of education that aligns with contemporary demands for collaboration, criticality, and intercultural competence. The Indonesian case, particularly in international and ICP settings, offers fertile ground to study how universal principles of CL are negotiated within local cultural, institutional, and policy frameworks. Understanding teachers' lived experiences provides not only practical insights for classroom management

but also contributes to broader debates about how education systems can prepare young learners for a world that is increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of CL in a multicultural primary classroom. It aimed to answer three research questions: (1) What are the benefits of CL in international primary classrooms? (2) What challenges do teachers face when implementing CL? And (3) What strategies are used to address these challenges? A case study was chosen to gain in-depth insights from a specific, bounded context involving experienced EFL teachers.

The study took place in a private Islamic school in East Java that runs an ICP. Two English teachers were purposefully selected as participants based on their extensive experience and active use of CL strategies in their classrooms. While the sample size is small, the selection was intended to generate rich, detailed narratives, not statistical generalizability. These two participants provided deep insight into the teaching practices and pedagogical reasoning behind CL implementation in a multicultural environment.

Data were collected through two primary sources: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Each teacher participated in two interview sessions, each meeting lasting around 45 to 60 minutes. The interview protocol included both structured and open-ended questions to encourage teachers to reflect on their experience, challenges, benefits, and strategies they used when implementing CL.

In addition, four classroom observation sessions were conducted to document real-time teaching practices and student interactions during CL-based activities. During these observations, the focus was on how teachers organized group work, how students interacted in their groups, and how the learning activities unfolded. For example, in one observed session, the teacher divided students into small groups to match pictures and names of traditional celebrations from different countries. The teacher gave clear instructions, encouraged teamwork, and ended the session with a reflective activity using a *"pohon apel"* (apple tree) where students wrote down their feelings about the lesson for illustrating emotional engagement.

Although the study discussed student engagement, direct student interviews or surveys were not conducted. The focus was limited to teacher perspectives and observed classroom behavior. This was due to ethical and procedural constraints regarding research involving minors. Future studies are encouraged to include student voices to enrich the understanding of CL implementation from multiple perspectives.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher conducted open and axial coding manually to identify patterns related to the three research questions. Themes were generated inductively and refined through an iterative process. To enhance credibility, triangulation was applied by cross-checking data from interviews, observation, and lesson documentation such as lesson plan. Member checking was also conducted by sharing preliminary themes with the participating teachers to validate interpretations.

Before collecting data, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study followed ethical research procedures, ensuring confidentiality by replacing real names of participans and the institution with pseudonyms. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any point. All research activities were conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. All research steps were systematically recorded and documented to ensure transparency and reliability. Since this research focused on small sample size and lack of student data present limitations, the results may not be generalizable, but they offer valuable insights into the dynamics of CL in a multicultural primary EFL classroom, providing valuable implications for teaching practice and future research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and classroom observation notes revealed four main themes: (1) benefits of CL, (2) challenges during implementing CL, (3) strategies applied by teachers, and (4) areas identified for improvement. These themes provide insight into the pedagogical realities of implementing CL in a multicultural primary classroom.

Benefits of Cooperative Learning

One of the most salient benefits of CL was the increased student engagement. Both teachers observed that students were more active and enthusiastic during CL activities. Teacher 1 stated: *"The students become more active when collaborating in groups, they don't get bored easily and are more enthusiastic."* Teacher 2 added, *"When doing group work, the students are more confident to speak up, even those who are usually quiet are willing to try."* These observations were consistent with classroom notes, which documented active participation and increased student attentiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, this engagement aligns with Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction as a catalyst for learning. In diverse classrooms, students benefit from peer support, which can scaffold confidence, particularly for those with lower language proficiency.

Development of Collaboration and Communication Skills

Another benefit of CL was the development of collaboration and communication skills. Teachers noted that CL improved students' ability to cooperate and communicate with peers. Teacher 1 shared, *"Through group discussions, they understand their peers better, help each other, and learn to listen."* Teacher 2 also mentioned, *"I noticed that they learn to respect others' opinion and sometimes remind each other when something is wrong."* This is consistent with inclusive pedagogical theory, which posits that structured group interaction fosters mutual respect and empathy in multicultural settings.

Positive and Meaningful Learning Experience

Both teachers emphasized that CL made learning more enjoyable and meaningful. Teacher 1 explained, *"Learning is more enjoyable when done together… they can share information or knowledge, so it doesn't stop with just one student."* Teacher 2 said, *"The children prefer group projects because they gain new experiences instead of just sitting and listening."* Observation notes highlighted that the classroom atmosphere was interactive, positive, and students were motivated to participate. This aligns with Vygotsky, (1978) view that social interaction enhances engagement and contributes to meaningful learning experiences.

In addition to classroom observations, lesson plan, such as weekly teaching plans and students' reflection worksheets, also revealed intentional efforts to embed collaborative projects into the learning process. These documents consistently outlined group-based tasks, indicating that the positive atmosphere and student engagement reported by teachers were also supported by planned instructional design.

Challenges in Implementing Cooperative Learning

One of the main challenges in implementing CL was uneven student motivation. Teachers found that not all students were always motivated to participate. Teacher 1 noted, *"Sometimes a student is not good in mood, so they are less willing to participate during group activities."* Teacher 2 confirmed, *"There are also some who feel less motivated when they're not grouped with close friends."*These findings suggest a need to better understand socio-emotional dynamics in group composition, especially in culturally diverse settings. According to (Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, 2009) positive interdependence is essential for effective CL, lack of motivation or peer connection may weaken this element, leading to disengagement.

Time Constraints

Both teachers struggled to complete group activities within the allocated class time. Teacher 1 stated, *"A one-hour lesson is often not enough for activities like jigsaw or think-pair-share"* Teacher 2 remarked, *"Sometimes the time runs out during the discussion, so the presentations are not delivered optimally."* Observation notes showed that some group tasks were left unfinished due to time limits. This reflects a misalignment between the complexity of CL activities and rigid classroom scheduling, echoing (Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, 2009) emphasis on the need for structured planning to support CL success.

Group Dynamics and Role Management

Maintaining balanced participation remained a challenge. Teachers frequently assigned roles to ensure accountability. *"Sometimes there are students who just go along without really contributing, so we have to be smart in assigning tasks."* said Teacher 1. These findings suggest that without clearly defined roles, group work may become superficial or dominated by certain students. This aligns with (Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, 2009) principle of individual accountability as a key element in preventing passive group behavior.

Observation notes indicated that these reflections helped students become more aware of their contributions and responsibilities. These findings were further supported by lesson plan, including teacher-prepared reflection forms and peer-assessment templates that were regularly used. The presence of these structured tools in teaching documents reinforces the consistency and intentionality of the teachers' CL practices. These strategies align with inclusive pedagogy and foster meta-cognitive peer accountability (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Strategies Applied by Teachers

One of the strategies applied by teachers was the use of diagnostic assessment and student choice**.** Teachers conducted initial assessments and involved students in group formation based on interests. Teacher 1 explained, *"I usually use a test at the beginning of the year to understand who each student works well with and what their abilities are."* She also described, *"Before starting a new topic, I ask the students what kind of project they would like, and then I form the groups based on their interests."* This aligns with culturally responsive teaching by valuing students' interests and backgrounds, which emphasizes recognizing and incorporating students' backgrounds and preferences into classroom practice (Gay, 2018). By allowing student voice in project and group formation, teachers created a more inclusive and meaningful CL experience.

Flexible Grouping Structures

Groups were frequently rotated to encourage broader interaction. Teacher 2 shared, *"I often change the groupings so that they don't always work with the same friends."* This strategy supports the social integration aspect of CL, fostering intercultural communication and encouraging students to work across differences, essential in a multicultural classroom (Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, 2009).

Structured Reflection and Peer Evaluation

After group activities, reflection and peer assessment were conducted to improve self-awareness and accountability. Teacher 1 said, *"After each group activity, I have a discussion with the students about what went well and what needs improvement."* Teacher 2 added, *"There's also peer assessment, so they learn to evaluate group work."* Observation notes indicated that these reflections helped students become more aware of their contributions and responsibilities*.* These practices align with inclusive pedagogy and foster meta-cognitive peer accountability (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In addition to interviews and classroom observations, lesson plan such as lesson plans and students' reflective worksheets provided supplementary insights. For example, teacher records indicated recurring use of group-based tasks accompanied by structured reflection forms, which reinforced the classroom observations on peer evaluation and self-assessment practices.

Areas for Improvement

One of identified for improvement was the need to strengthen Individual Accountability. Some students were still passive in group tasks. Teacher 1 remarked, *"There are still some students who just put their names on the group work without actually contributing."* Teacher 2 suggested integrating individual components within group work to ensure all students contribute. This reflects (Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, 2009) emphasis on the balance between interdependence and individual accountability within CL frameworks, ensuring that group success does not mask unequal effort among members. These results offer a foundation for further interpretation, which will be elaborated in the discussion section through theoretical lenses.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore how CL fosters not only academic engagement but also social participation among students in a multicultural classroom. Notably, students who were initially quiet became more vocal and confident during collaborative tasks, indicating that CL supports both behavioral and emotional engagement. This reflects (Deci

& Ryan, 2013). Self-Determination Theory, particularly in how CL environments fulfill learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Additionally, the observed growth in peer communication and mutual respect supports (Vygotsky, 1978) view that social interaction plays a central role in cognitive development. In culturally diverse classrooms, such interactions are particularly vital, as they enable students to negotiate meaning, bridge cultural differences, and co-construct knowledge in inclusive ways (Gay, 2018).

Beyond Self-Determination Theory and Vygotskian perspectives, the findings of this study can also be interpreted through the lens of Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, 2009). This theory emphasizes five key elements of CL: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing. The observations in this study revealed that while positive interdependence was fostered through shared goals, the element of individual accountability was not always fully achieved, as some students tended to rely on their more dominant peers. This imbalance suggests that teachers must deliberately scaffold accountability structures, such as peer evaluation and rotating leadership roles, to ensure that all students remain actively engaged. Furthermore, the emphasis on promotive interaction resonates (Vygotsky, 1978)argument that social dialogue is central to learning, yet in multicultural classrooms, these interactions also function as spaces for cultural negotiation. This highlights how cooperative learning does not only serve cognitive development but also cultivates intercultural competencies, aligning with (Gay, 2018) concept of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Despite its benefits, this study revealed key challenges in the implementation of CL, particularly related to student motivation and time allocation. Teachers noted that some students became disengaged when grouped with peers outside their close social circles. This highlights how peer relationships and cultural familiarity can significantly influence students' willingness to participate. In multicultural classrooms, where students bring different communicative norms and social expectations, building trust within groups becomes essential for fostering positive interdependence (Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, 2009). When this interdependence is weak, the collaborative process can break down.

Time constraints also posed a consistent obstacle. CL activities such as jigsaw or think-pair-share require adequate time for students to process content, interact meaningfully, and reflect. However, rigid schedules often led to rushed discussions and incomplete tasks. This finding supports (Smith et al., 2005)who emphasized that the success of CL depends on careful time planning and structured implementation. To address this, teachers must be supported in designing flexible lesson structures that prioritize depth over coverage, allowing students adequate time to engage in both collaboration and reflection.

Another prominent challenge identified in this study was related to group dynamics and the distribution of roles. Teachers reported that some students remained passive, relying on more dominant peers to carry out tasks. Although role assignment (e.g., leader, note-taker, presenter) was used to promote individual responsibility, passive participation persisted in several groups. This suggests that assigning roles alone may not be sufficient to cultivate equitable collaboration. Instead, a deeper emphasis on fostering student accountability is needed, particularly in multicultural settings where communication styles and participation norms may differ (Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha, 2023).

These dynamics underline the importance of culturally responsive classroom management and teacher facilitation strategies that address variations in student engagement across diverse cultural backgrounds. The lesson plans analyzed in this study also revealed that role assignments and structured participation strategies were not incidental, but rather integral to the design of each CL session. This reinforces the interpretation that the observed classroom practices were aligned with the teachers' instructional intentions and not merely situational responses.

To address these challenges, teachers in this study implemented a range of context-sensitive strategies that enhanced the effectiveness of CL. These included diagnostic assessments, flexible grouping, structured reflection, and peer evaluation. For instance, Teacher 1 conducted diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the academic year to understand students' personalities and learning profiles. This information was then used to design groupings based on compatibility and shared interests, aligning with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018). This practice contributed to smoother group interactions and more inclusive participation. Group memberships were regularly rotated to prevent social cliques and broaden students' exposure to different working styles. After each CL activity, teachers facilitated group reflections and peer feedback sessions, which encouraged students to evaluate both their own contributions and their peers'. These strategies cultivated metacognitive awareness and reinforced a sense of personal accountability within group tasks (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). These practices were also evidenced in the lesson plan, which included schedules for rotating group members, guiding questions for reflection, and rubrics for peer evaluation. Such documentation served not only as teaching aids but also as tools that scaffolded students' reflective habits and supported teacher consistency in applying CL strategies.

From a practical standpoint, these findings point to the need for sustained professional development programs that equip teachers with advanced CL strategies and skills to navigate multicultural classroom dynamics. Institutional support is crucial; schools should allocate dedicated time and resources for teachers to collaboratively design,

implement, and reflect on CL practices. Additionally, integrating CL-focused modules into pre-service teacher education programs would prepare future educators to use cooperative approaches effectively and inclusively.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its small sample size and single-site context, involving only two teachers from one school. As such, the findings may not be generalizable to all international primary classrooms in Indonesia. Future research should expand the participant pool across varied regions and school types, and include student perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how CL impacts engagement, social dynamics, and learning outcomes over time.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical insights into the implementation of CL in a multicultural Indonesian primary classroom. The findings affirm that CL not only enhances student engagement and social participation but also promotes communication, collaboration, and inclusivity as key components in culturally diverse educational contexts. These results highlight the importance of integrating collaborative approaches into classroom practice to support both academic and social development.

Practically, this study highlights several teacher-led strategies that can improve the effectiveness of CL, including diagnostic assessments, flexible groupings, structured reflection, and peer evaluation. These approaches offer adaptable models for educators seeking to foster meaningful collaboration among students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

However, this study is limited by its small sample size and single-site context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the absence of student voice in the data collection process limits the interpretation of engagement solely from the teachers' perspectives. Future research should consider including multiple school sites and incorporating student perspectives through interviews or reflective journals. Longitudinal studies may also help to evaluate how CL practices evolve over time and impact students' academic and social development more holistically.

In conclusion, while challenges such as time constraints and group dynamics persist, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on inclusive pedagogy and offers concrete strategies for improving CL in diverse classroom environments.

Beyond its immediate classroom implications, the findings of this study also point to the broader role of CL in shaping educational practices that are aligned with 21st-century competencies. In multicultural and international contexts, CL becomes not only a method for academic learning but also a means of cultivating empathy, intercultural awareness, and

mutual respect among young learners. Teachers, therefore, are positioned as key agents in bridging curricular demands with the lived realities of diverse student populations.

The contribution of this research lies in its ability to demonstrate how localized practices, developed within the Indonesian primary school system, can resonate with global debates on inclusive pedagogy. By capturing teachers' lived experiences, the study provides nuanced insights into both the potential and the complexity of implementing CL in culturally heterogeneous classrooms. This suggests that innovation in pedagogy must always be responsive to context, drawing strength from cultural values while also addressing structural barriers such as assessment pressures or institutional readiness.

Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of reimagining classrooms as collaborative communities rather than individualistic spaces. Such a shift not only supports academic achievement but also prepares students to engage meaningfully with diversity in their future educational and social environments.

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