

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

English has become a global language due to historical, political, economic, and technological developments, and it plays a central role in international communication, education, and business (Ly, 2022). It is widely used across countries as a first, second, or foreign language, depending on the local linguistic and sociopolitical context (Ibrohimova & Ziyaboyeva, 2022). In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language, not a second language. Even so, it is still considered an important skill for academic and professional success. As a result, English is taught from primary school up to university level (Darma & Widiastuty, 2023). That being said, learning English as a foreign language is considered one of the most important and valuable skills in today's society.

However, learning English in Indonesia still comes with many challenges. One of the main issues is student engagement. Markina and Garcia Mollá (2022) explain that students learn better and feel more motivated when teachers use student-centered methods. These include listening to students' opinions, encouraging critical thinking, and adjusting lessons to fit students' needs. Many English classes still use traditional, teacher-centered methods that do not support student participation, and policymakers have tried to address this issue with recent curriculum reforms, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, that have focused on the student. However, despite these reforms, teachers still face difficulties in implementing this student-centered learning effectively. According to Adnyani (2021), many

teachers struggle to encourage active engagement, with students often feeling hesitant to ask questions or participate in class discussions. This hesitation is rooted in several factors, including students' passiveness, lack of effort, and low confidence. Cultural norms also play a role, as many Indonesian students tend to be more reserved and feel shy or reluctant to speak up in class, especially in teacher-centered environments. She continues to emphasize that this contrasts with more assertive classroom cultures in Western contexts and makes student-centered learning difficult to implement. When students are not actively involved due to lack of interest, confidence, or encouragement, the classroom atmosphere becomes less supportive of exploration and meaningful learning. In addition, Yunus and Latief (2023) showed that student-centered learning significantly enhances learner engagement and motivation among Indonesian EFL students, although many instructors still struggle with transitioning away from one-way, teacher-dominated practices.

This has led to a growing interest in improving English language learning methods in Indonesian schools. One of them includes teacher collaboration, a promising teaching strategy that could enhance student engagement (Sachs et al., 2011; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Hargreaves (2019) defines teacher collaboration as a relationship built on trust and shared goals. Research shows that teacher collaboration can improve student outcomes. For example, Nguyen and Ng (2020) found that when teachers work collaboratively, such as sharing, improving, and spreading instructional innovations, they are more likely to improve teaching quality and positively impact student learning. Further, a study by Mora-Ruano et al. (2019) confirms that when teachers focus their collaboration on student performance, it leads to better student achievement.

In Indonesia, research on teacher collaboration in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is still limited. Many studies focus on higher education or schools with more resources (Asha et al., 2022; Sachs et al., 2011). As middle school classrooms are often diverse and face challenges that collaboration could help address. Also, while collaboration is often discussed in theory, few studies explore how it is practiced in real classrooms, and few studies examine how teacher collaboration affects student engagement.

The motivation for this research comes from a teaching experience at SMP Labschool Jakarta during the *Praktik Keterampilan Mengajar* (PKM) program. In this particular experience, the researcher found out that three 7th-grade English classes are taught using a collaborative teaching strategy, where the teachers work together in lesson planning, co-teaching, and reflective discussions. On the other hand, other grade 7 classes are taught by individual teachers. This study focuses only on the collaborative teaching class to gain a deeper understanding of how it works and what effects it may have on the students, specifically their engagement. The collaboration involved two English teachers who engaged in co-planning and post-lesson reflections consistently. While both teachers were present in some classroom sessions, they did not always teach at the same time. Instead, they often took turns teaching, with one leading the lesson while the other observed or supported. Not all forms of collaboration, such as full co-teaching or parallel instruction, were applied equally. This variation in practice reflects the flexible and evolving nature of teacher collaboration in real classroom settings.

Even though teacher collaboration is widely recognized as beneficial, research shows that its implementation remains complex. Vangrieken et al. (2015)

point out that collaboration often increases teachers' workload, causes time management issues, and may lead to surface-level cooperation rather than meaningful joint work. Hargreaves (2019) also points out that while collaboration has strong theoretical value, it is often misdirected or poorly applied in real classrooms. Many studies have explored the benefits of collaboration, such as improving teacher development (Sachs et al., 2011), student motivation (Anwar et al., 2020; Ollomurodov & Rasulov, 2025), and critical thinking (Asha et al., 2022); however, they tend to focus on higher education, teacher training, or remote school settings, not on student engagement in typical middle school EFL classrooms. Furthermore, most previous studies rely on surveys or experimental methods with limited real-world observation. As a result, there is still a lack of research that closely explores how teacher collaboration is practiced and how it shapes student engagement, especially in Indonesian EFL contexts at the middle school level.

Because of this, the current study aims to explore the effect of teacher collaboration on student engagement in Indonesian EFL classrooms, specifically in a middle school setting. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, supported by quantitative data. By using observations, interviews with teachers and students, and student questionnaires, this research will give a clear picture of how teacher collaboration works and what effects it has on student engagement.

1.2 Research Questions

This research aims to address its purpose through the following research questions:

- a. How does teacher collaboration encourage students' engagement in English as a foreign language classrooms?
- b. How do students experience and display engagement in response to teacher collaboration approaches in English as a foreign language classrooms?

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of teacher collaboration on student engagement in an Indonesian EFL classroom. Teacher collaboration in this study is understood through the lens of Hargreaves' (2019) theory of collaborative professionalism, which includes five key principles: expert knowledge sharing, strong collegial relationships, shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, and structured collaboration. Student engagement is examined based on Bond and Bedenlier's (2019) multidimensional framework, with a focus on behavioral engagement and affective engagement. By doing so, this study aims to examine whether and how teacher collaboration practices, both in and outside classroom instruction, encourage more active and emotionally engaged participation among students and contribute to a more responsive and interactive English learning environment. In particular, it seeks to explore how students experience and display engagement during English lessons that are shaped by collaborative teaching efforts, especially in a middle school setting.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Research

This research focuses on 7th-grade English classes at SMP Labschool Jakarta, in which collaborative teaching methods are implemented in three out of seven classes. Students at this age are in their developmental stage, where, in this stage of education, they are in a critical period where they begin to form their identity and develop higher-order thinking skills (Sukmayadi & Yahya, 2020), making it an ideal time to observe the effect of teacher collaboration on student engagement. By choosing one class for the observation and distributing the survey to all three classes, this study will provide a clear and manageable context to deeply explore teacher collaboration in a real classroom context. However, the findings may be limited in terms of generalizability to other schools, regions, or higher grade levels, where teaching conditions and student characteristics could be different.

The two main variables of this research are teacher collaboration and student engagement. It does not analyze or look into other factors that may also impact student engagement, such as students' socioeconomic backgrounds, parental support, emotional development, or their English proficiency. Although these are important, they fall outside the scope of this study due to time and resource constraints. And due to the study being conducted at the end of the school year, the data collection process faced additional time constraints. Only three students were interviewed, as most were preparing for their final exams or had stopped attending school regularly. This limited sample was selected based on availability to gain deeper insights into student perspectives. Classroom

observation was done in only one class, specifically the class the researcher had previously taught. This choice was made to maximize observation quality and minimize classroom disruption. And to prevent a low response for the survey, the questionnaire was distributed to three different classes in order to increase the response count.

However, despite these limitations, this research aims to offer valuable insights into the effect of teacher collaboration on student engagement and how they are applied effectively in EFL classrooms. By connecting the real classroom practice with educational theory, the findings of this study will serve as a useful reference for teachers or future researchers who are interested in enhancing student engagement through teacher collaboration methods.

1.5 Significance of the Research

This study is important for both academic research and real classroom teaching, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia. It adds to the existing knowledge about how teacher collaboration can affect student engagement, a topic that is still not widely studied in Indonesian schools. By focusing on collaborative teaching methods, this research provides useful ideas for future studies that explore student-centered learning methods. It also highlights how working together as teachers can help build better learning environments where students feel more involved and motivated. These findings can support researchers who are interested in studying classroom practices that improve student participation and outcomes.

A unique contribution of this study lies in its focus on the middle school level, particularly 7th-grade classrooms. Middle school is a critical stage in students' educational development. At this level, students experience major changes physically, emotionally, and socially, which directly impact their learning attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, this age group is often overlooked in research, which tends to focus more on higher education or early childhood. Conducting the study at the middle school level allows for a deeper understanding of how collaborative teaching methods influence younger students' engagement in EFL learning, especially as they are building foundational language skills. Exploring these dynamics can help develop more effective strategies for improving English instruction in this crucial developmental stage.

In practice, the study is useful for teachers, students, and schools. For teachers, it offers insights into how teamwork in planning, teaching, and reflecting can improve the way they teach and connect with students. It can encourage more teachers to try collaborative methods in their English lessons. For students, the study shows how teaching methods that involve more interaction and cooperation between teachers can lead to higher motivation, better learning experiences, and stronger English skills. Schools can also benefit by supporting collaboration as part of professional development and improving the overall quality of education. By connecting theory with real classroom practice, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to both academic knowledge and practical teaching methods.

1.6 State of the Art

Teacher collaboration has received growing interest as a strategy to enhance instructional quality and improve student engagement. International studies such as those by Hargreaves (2019) and Vangrieken et al. (2015) have emphasized that while collaboration offers benefits like increased job satisfaction and improved student achievement, it also comes with structural and interpersonal challenges that can hinder its implementation. These studies often discuss teacher collaboration in general terms or within Western educational systems, with limited empirical focus on how collaboration directly affects student engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Other studies, such as Sachs et al. (2011), focused on collaboration within teacher education programs rather than classroom-level dynamics.

In the Indonesian context, existing research has begun to explore the potential of teacher collaboration. Anwar et al. (2020) studied a collaborative teaching model between local teachers and university lecturers in a remote school, showing improvement in students' motivation and participation. However, their study focused more on co-teaching in under-resourced areas, without an in-depth look at student engagement. In addition, Asha et al. (2022) examined the impact of collaborative professional development on English teachers at the university level, emphasizing critical thinking outcomes rather than engagement.

Although these works highlight the potential benefits of teacher collaboration, they often remain theoretical or occur in different educational contexts, such as higher education or remote schools. Very few studies investigate

how teacher collaboration operates in everyday classroom settings in Indonesian middle schools. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how students themselves experience and respond to collaborative teaching strategies, particularly in terms of engagement.

This study addresses those gaps by exploring the practical implementation of teacher collaboration in a real classroom setting at SMP Labschool Jakarta. It focuses specifically on 7th-grade EFL classes taught collaboratively and examines how such collaboration influences student engagement. Using a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative data, this study offers original insights into how collaborative planning, co-teaching, and reflective discussions among teachers contribute to students' active engagement. By centering its analysis on student engagement, a key yet underexplored outcome in prior research, this study offers a unique contribution to both local and international discussions on effective teaching practices in EFL education.