



## An Activity-Theoretic Analysis of Two Beginning EFL Teachers' Emotional Labor Strategies and Their Pedagogical Responses: A Case Study

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### ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study investigates the emotional labor of beginning EFL teachers concerning their students. Two beginning teachers working at Korean junior high schools in the public sector were recruited for the study, and semi-structured interviews with each participant were the main data source. The transcription of interviews was analyzed using Activity Theory (Leont'ev 1978, Engeström 1999), influenced by Vygotsky (1978), to capture the conflicts and resolutions from a comprehensive perspective. The results indicated that the participating teachers thought they were experiencing conflicts with the instructional instrument and the teaching community while performing emotional labor, and they experienced difficulty suppressing their feelings concerning students exhibiting problematic behavior. In addition, the conflicts in their activity system were resolved by changing their teaching practices, materials, and emotional response to the students. The results imply that beginning teachers should receive help through pre-and in-service training courses, the school, and the system.

### KEYWORDS

efl teacher, emotional labor, efl teacher education, activity theory

## 1. Introduction

Since language teaching is interactive (Chang 2009), beginning teachers experience various feelings while interacting with their students, parents, and colleagues (Imai 2010). Expressing specific feelings by exaggeration or suppression can be one of the instructional strategies for English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers (King 2015) as they try to ease EFL learners' anxiety and to create a supportive environment by adjusting their emotional expressions. Their expression of feelings can influence students' affective status and the level of in-class participation. Whether students actively participate in the learning tasks is also related to teachers' job satisfaction. However, when exaggerating or suppressing their feelings is demanding, many teachers, particularly beginning teachers, can be burdened by emotional labor, showing specific feelings according to the emotional display rules in job-related situations (Hochschild 1983).

The burden of teachers' emotional labor in relation to the school and the system can hinder professional development. As a result, beginning teachers become uncertain of their contributions toward effective learning, and this may adversely influence teacher retention rates (Johnson and Birkeland 2003). As high levels of turnover can negatively influence the workplace atmosphere and teacher quality, each school and policymakers must help beginning teachers remain in the teaching profession.

With a comprehensive understanding of the conflicts beginning teachers experience at South Korean (henceforth Korean) junior high schools, it would be possible to help them remain in the teaching profession by providing adequate support and teacher training courses. As teaching practices are context-specific and require a full and detailed description of what beginning teachers experience (Imai 2010), it would be helpful to adopt a qualitative approach to understand what each beginning teacher experiences in the specific teaching site. Emotional labor can be understood within the contexts, calling for Activity Theory (AT), a theoretical tool encompassing both individual and social contexts. AT is based on sociocultural theory (Engeström 1999, Vygotsky 1978). Using AT would be beneficial to investigating participating teachers holistically, including both individual agents and the surroundings (Kim and Kim 2021).

This study is expected to broaden our understanding of beginning teachers' emotional labor and its impact on their teaching practices. In addition, this study would provide direction for future studies and highlight the practical implications for beginning EFL teacher training in Korea. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What kinds of emotional labor do the beginning EFL teachers experience in relation to their students based on Activity Theory?
- 2) How do the participants pedagogically respond to the burden of emotional labor?

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Emotional Labor

Teachers may perform emotional labor to achieve their professional goals, such as educating successfully and having positive relationships with students (Benesch 2017, Chang 2009, Schutz and Pekrun 2007, Zembylas 2002). Student traits also influence emotional labor. In South Korea, there is a significant English proficiency gap (Kim

and Kim 2018). According to Kim and Kim (2018), students having relatively higher proficiency levels tend to be uninterested in the learning materials in class that are below their current English proficiency levels. On the contrary, those with relatively lower proficiency levels were discouraged because they found most of the learning materials were hard to understand. When the learning materials EFL teachers use cannot benefit most of the students, interacting with both groups in the same class increases the level of emotional labor. The differentiated instruction intends to deal with the issue of the diversity among students in terms of their learning styles, motivation, and proficiency (Tomlinson et al. 2003). However, it has not been fully covered in the pre-service training, causing a significant low level of adopting the differentiated instruction in the teachers with less than five years of teaching experience compared to the teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience (Suprayogi, Valcke and Godwin 2017). Establishing rapport with students seems important as it tends to ease the burden of classroom management that teachers experience (Hagenauer, Hascher and Volet 2015).

According to Hochschild (1983), emotional labor occurs in two distinctive forms: 'deep acting' and 'surface acting'. The former refers to modifying their emotions by reappraising the situation. For example, teachers may recall positive memories to alleviate unpleasant feelings. Surface acting is related to fake unfeared emotions or hide emotions at the workplace. For example, when faced with misconduct of students, teachers may hide their anger and put effort to show a calm attitude to appear to be professional. In this case, teachers do not try to change their inner feelings but display emotions which they find appropriate in their teaching context.

Surface acting can be categorized into two: positive and negative (Acheson and Nelson 2020). Positive surface acting refers to pretending emotions, and negative surface acting is related to hiding emotions. For example, EFL teachers choose to play the role of "cheerleader" to discouraged students even though they find students' level of motivation or achievement unsatisfactory (King 2015).

Negative surface acting is mostly performed with negative emotions (Cowie 2011). One of negative emotions teachers experience is anger, and the sources of anger are known as students' misbehavior and their disrespect toward teachers (Burić and Frenzel 2019). In Korea, teachers feared in-class expression of anger might ruin their relationship with students (Hwang and Choi 2014, Hwang, Seo and Kim 2010). Also, hiding negative emotion such as anger is related to teachers' agency. When they believe displaying unpleasant emotions will not help them achieve their goals, including student learning and passion, they hide them (Kang 2022).

In addition to these two forms, expression of naturally felt emotions is suggested as the third type (Diefendorff, Croyle and Gosserand 2005). For instructors, showing their care for students' effective learning comes naturally (Hebson, Earnshaw and Marchington 2007). Caring EFL teachers compliment students' confidence (Acheson, Taylor and Luna 2016). Teacher's attitude towards students is known to predict teachers' expression of naturally felt emotions (Dewaele and Wu 2021, Yin, Lee and Zhang 2013).

Emotional labor can vary by intensity. Individual appraisal of an event or situation creates emotion (Lazarus 1991). When teachers feel they have no control over a situation and/or low problem-solving efficacy, emotions would be intense. Unlike hiding negative feelings from English learning difficulties, hiding negative emotions related to students' misbehavior requires more emotional labor (Belt and Belt 2017, Näring, Vlerick and Van de Ven 2012). Teachers may believe that students' disruptive behavior stems from a lack of problem-solving skills to deal with their misconduct, causing anger and frustration (Chang 2013). Moreover, the more teachers believed that students' behavior departed from their goals, the more intensely negative emotions were elicited.

## **2.2 The Impact of Emotional Labor**

This study comprehensively explores the types of emotional labor that participating teachers experience and the domains where they are involved in emotional labor. Previous studies on EFL teacher emotions have revealed that EFL teachers' burden of emotional labor experience influences teaching practices (King 2015, Zembylas 2002) and

job satisfaction (Acheson and Nelson 2020). EFL teachers in Korea hesitate to use speaking activities when emotional labor is intense due to students' diverse proficiency (Kim and Kim 2018). When students do not find lessons useful, they're easily distracted, which upsets teachers. When teachers try too hard to hide their emotions, it affects their job satisfaction and could lead to burnout (Acheson et al. 2016).

However, it is hard to conclude that emotional labor only has a detrimental effect on teachers' well-being. Through reflection, teachers can realize the impact of emotional labor on constructing their professionalism (Gkonou and Miller 2020). In this case, emotional labor is conducted voluntarily to achieve teachers' professional goals. In this case, teachers perform emotional labor voluntarily to assist students learn (Kang 2022). If they reach the professional goal by managing their emotional expression in front of students, they feel more confident in their class management skills. Furthermore, expression of naturally felt emotion is known to be positively related to teachers' job satisfaction (Yin et al. 2013).

### 2.3 Activity Theory

As this study aims to analyze two beginning English teachers at Korean junior high schools and the interaction between participating teachers and the surroundings simultaneously, AT is employed as a method for representing the interaction. Activity is defined by its "object," which "gives it a determined direction" and "evokes and directs activity toward itself" (Leont'ev 1978, p. 98). Engeström (1999) aimed to graphically present the system, representing the whole activity in a unified manner, including the inside of the individuals and the relation between the individual and the surrounding society (see Figure 1). This model helps to investigate both individual teachers and the surrounding within a unified, single framework.

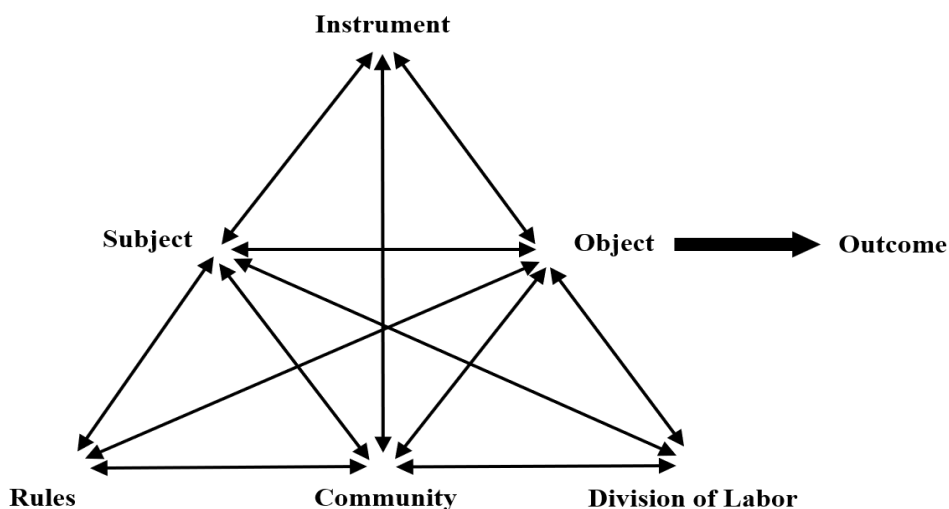


Figure 1. Engeström's (1999) Model

In this AT system, the subject will be a beginning English teacher. Each subject may have different objects, that is, a goal the subject aims to achieve through this activity based on the Leont'ev's (1978) conceptualization. For instance, it can be to improve students' English skills. The object might be the research participants' students based on the Engeström's (2000) conceptualization referring to "the 'raw material' or 'problem space' at which the activity is directed and which is molded or transformed into outcomes with the help of physical and symbolic, external or

internal tools (mediating instruments and signs)” (p. 67). In the case of the health center, the object of the AT system was “patients with ambiguous problems” (Engeström 2000, p. 88). However, as the framework used in this research is based on the definition of Leont’ev, the object of the AT system refers to the word *predmet* in Russian, “an intentional, social, meaningful, and integrated qualities” (Kaptelinin 2005 p. 8), including helping learners’ effective language learning. The instruments include teaching materials and colleagues’ help. Emotional work, such as hiding negative emotions, is another way teachers attain their goals (object) in the AT system.

Engeström (1999) identified three context conditions: the rule, the community, and the division of labor. Rules are the explicit and implicit norms or social conventions the subject should follow, such as school rules. The community refers to multiple individuals or groups sharing the same general object. In this analysis, a community can be a class, teacher colleagues, or society. The division of labor describes an individual’s job or task to achieve an objective, such as preparing learning materials by student proficiency.

In the activity process, an individual as a subject interacts with other elements in the activity to pursue the object he or she holds. However, those elements in the activity can sometimes experience clashes or contradictions (Engeström 1999). Individuals can use existing tools or build new ones when facing activity system challenges (Wertsch 1998). Ultimately, the elements in the activity can be changed, and the original activity can be transformed into a new one when the object of the AT system changes (Kaptelinin 2005). Teachers use collaborative learning and complements to deal with motivational and emotional obstacles when teaching (Johnson 2009).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

This study included two beginning English teachers in Seoul. At the time of data collection, they had less than a year of experience. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants with a year of teaching experience. A teacher community was contacted to recruit participants, and those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were finally recruited. Both participants were in their mid twenties who passed the National Teacher Employment Exam and worked at public schools. Participants received pseudonyms for anonymity.

Participating teachers had different English learning and teaching experience. Yeji attended international schools in junior high and high school, offering her English reading and writing skills. She was a contract-based teacher for six months before becoming an in-service teacher. Yeji had trouble developing rapport during her teaching practicum.

Jinsu always wanted to teach. He majored in English education and felt confident in English. During pre-service teacher training, he was impressed by the English discussion class. This English discussion course contributed to his ideal English teaching method. During his teaching practicum, he observed his mentor teachers calling on students by name. Even though it was a teacher-centered class, it held his attention. Jinsu regretted not building student relationships during his teaching practicum.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

In this study, semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method. Seidman (2013) stated that in-depth interviews are effective for “understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). Interview questions were based on previous studies (Cowie 2011, Kim and Kim 2018), including “Did your teaching site meet your expectations? If not, how significant is the difference, and what actions have you

taken to minimize it?" and "Could you describe the emotions you have conveyed during your recent lessons in detail, and how have they differed from your true emotions?" Furthermore, the teaching context was inquired for analyzing the data based on AT. Before conducting interviews with each participant, a background profile was collected and informed consent was obtained. Then, the purpose of the present study was explained. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interview data were returned to the participants for verifying the accuracy of the content (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015).

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Transcription of the interview data was analyzed based on Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2014, Strauss and Corbin 1998), which includes three steps: open, axial, and selective coding. First, the transcribed data was read several times, and each element containing emotional labor was labeled (open coding). After the initial coding, coded elements were connected and categorized by constantly comparing themes (axial coding). After the axial coding, the portions related to emotional labor identified in previous studies (e.g., Benesch 2017, Hwang and Choi 2014, King 2015) were chosen (selective coding). In the final stage, the coded portions were compared to the results of the previous studies, and the new elements were added to the coding scheme to expand the understanding of the participants' cases (Strauss and Corbin 1998). To capture the participating teachers' conflict, Engeström's (1999) AT model was adopted. The researchers re-read the data set to identify the essential elements of the individual teacher's activity system.

Another researcher with a master's degree in English education coded the same interview transcripts that the researcher (i.e., first author) coded to substantiate the results. In the case of disagreements, the two coders discussed them to reach a consensus. The issue of validity was assured through member checking based on Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) suggestion. For member checking, the participating teachers were asked to confirm the analysis results and leave comments on them. By asking the participants to ensure the results of the analysis, the research aimed to gain validity. Member checking was performed in person. All the excerpts presented in the study were translated into English.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Yeji's Case**

#### **4.1.1 Teaching Context**

Yeji's school had 12 classes, but the number of students was less than 200. As a result, there were 16 students on average in one class. Considering that the average number of students is 23.8 in Seoul, her school has small classes. According to Yeji, her school was less preferred by both teachers and students because of the low level of academic achievement among students. In her school, 34.1% of the students were supported by the educational welfare programs for resolving educational inequality. Almost half of the students did not reach the basic academic achievement level established by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, most parents did not have the energy to take care of their children and showed little interest in their child's learning.

#### **4.1.2 Activity System**

Initially, Yeji was the subject in the activity system (see Figure 2). Her activity was defined by her object—her goal to help all students learn. In the interview, she mentioned that it was to help her students at all levels learn at

least one thing (see Excerpt 1)

Excerpt 1

I always think that I want my students to learn at least one thing in class regardless of their proficiency levels.

To achieve her object, Yeji utilized three types of instruments: textbooks, giving compliments, and showing anger. Giving compliments was one of her strategies to encourage student participation. Most of her students were underperforming; therefore, she tried to encourage her students by giving compliments (see Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the semester, I tried to be nice to my students. (...) If they complete the given task, I said "That's awesome!" and stamped their worksheets to recognize my students for their hard work. At first, **I just had an ideal image, trying to induce students with only giving compliments.**

Yeji's ideal image of teaching led to unconditional praise and encouragement to reinforce positive behaviors. However, it did not seem successful, leading to showing anger (see Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

By the end of the semester, I recognized that some students still didn't do anything during the class despite constant compliments. And then I started to get angry with them, asking them why they couldn't do this.

Despite the positive reinforcement, Yeji's students did not show any improvement in their classroom behavior. It was challenging for Yeji to encourage underperforming learners. They seemed to have already lost interest in English learning.

Yeji's surroundings and her roles in school are described at the bottom of the activity system, having three elements in Engeström's (1999) AT system: 1) rules, 2) community, and 3) division of labor (see Figure 2). The first element (i.e., rules) refer to the teaching conventions Yeji needed to follow. She needed to comply with three rules: the assessment plan set by the English department in her school, classroom rules, and her school rules. The second element (i.e., community) refers to the surrounding where she was located. As an English teacher, Yeji interacted with her students. In particular, her students had a huge gap in terms of English proficiency and did not show interest in English learning. Division of labor, the third element, includes her shared responsibilities among community members as an English teacher in her school. As a subject teacher, she was supposed to 1) teach English and 2) assess her students through performance evaluation.

In Figure 2, there are three double-headed dotted arrows, showing that Yeji had conflicts with the elements in the activity system. One arrow between the subject and the community refers to the conflict between Yeji (the subject) and her students having a low level of interest in English learning and not having a positive relationship with the teacher (the community).

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<sup>1</sup> The texts in the bold face indicate an emphasis in the excerpt.

Another arrow between the subject and the instrument refers to the conflict between Yeji and giving compliments and showing anger. The other arrow between the instrument and the community indicates the conflict between the textbooks and her students with a low level of interest in English learning. This arrow represents that her students' difficulties following the national curriculum.

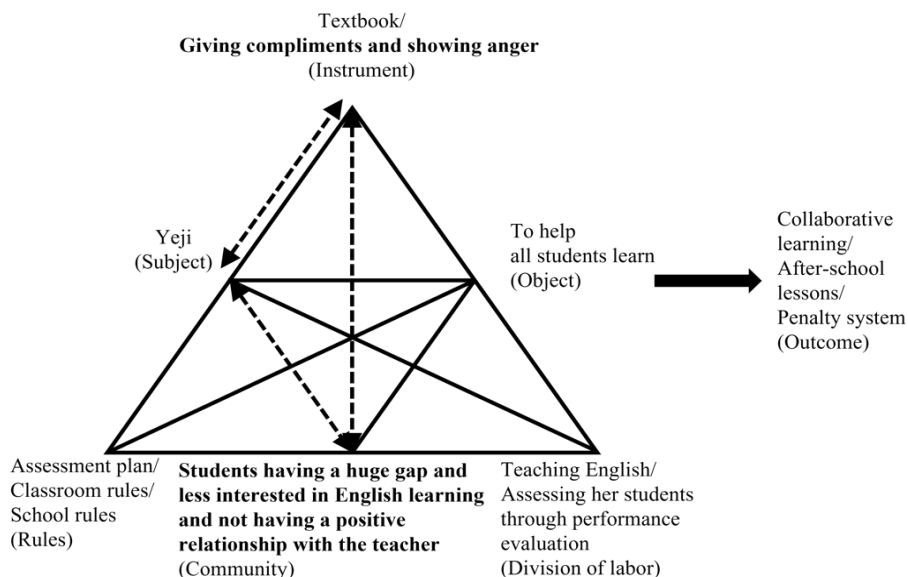


Figure 2. Yeji's AT system

The arrow between Yeji and giving compliments and showing anger indicates that Yeji was still confused about what kinds of emotional expression would be appropriate in terms of achieving her object (see Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

For some students, giving compliments works, but for others, it doesn't. I still haven't figured out how to encourage learners to do the given task. I found that just praising or encouraging them doesn't always make them study. **Blaming them made things only worse.**

Yeji's choice on her instrument was helping her students learn. However, her students did not seem to demonstrate significant behavioral changes. This means that her instrument did not fulfill its purpose, leading to her disappointment.

The arrow between Yeji and her students shows her regret in terms of her object. She reflected on her teaching practices to analyze why her class differed from her expectations. In particular, Yeji regretted a lack of rapport with her students (see Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5

When I look back my lessons, I feel regret. 'If I had made the lessons more interesting or had a better relationship with my students, would they had concentrated more on the class?' It makes me sad. You know, if you like a teacher, you focus more on the lessons.



Yeji considered it important to make her students focused on the lessons based on the rapport. Those having negative impressions of her tended to show disrespect and did not follow Yeji's instructions. Unsurprisingly, conducting the lessons in this context intensified her emotional burden. This means that she experienced emotional labor in terms of classroom management.

As Yeji found it difficult to resolve the conflict between the community and the instrument, by only using the textbook, she tried to introduce three novel methods: collaborative learning, organizing after-school lessons, and a penalty system. Collaborative learning was implemented in her class to fully encompass students from different levels in one class. For this, she organized a group of four and assigned a group task (see Excerpt 6).

#### Excerpt 6

In the second semester, I organized small groups in class and gave each one a role. (...) I expected that students who were good at English to teach students who were not good at English. So, I made a point system based on their participation as a group. I said, "Parents (=students who are good at English) can teach their "children" (=students who are struggling with learning English). Those who receive help from your group members should give a presentation in front of the class without any help. **In this way, I tried to encourage students to participate more.**

A group comprised both high-performing and low-performing students. Yeji gave each of them a role in class and hoped all students would understand what was taught. In addition, Yeji actively conducted after-school classes to help the underperforming students. However, she mentioned that those classes were somewhat exhausting (Excerpt 7).

#### Excerpt 7

But if you want to teach students in an after-school class, you have to have a war of nerves. When they ask, "Can we play around other than studying?," then I sometimes had to agree with it to get these students involved somehow. (...) It's not that hard for me to do more after-school classes. **What is difficult is to coax uninterested students.**

In the after-school classes, Yeji needed to encourage struggling students actively. She expended more energy to combat their negative attitude toward English learning. Those two did not contribute to achieving her goal, to help all students learn.

Regarding management of problem behavior, Yeji gave a penalty point to avoid expressing anger by the middle of the second semester (see Excerpt 8). She also expected that giving penalty points would not hurt students' feelings.

#### Excerpt 8

I try not to show my anger toward a student when I give a penalty point. **By doing this, I found that my relationship with the student doesn't get much worse.** This is because I just say, "Here, you see? This is the rule in this class, you understand?" Some teachers said that if you get angry in front of students a few times without specific reasons, they would not bother you. **But I don't want to be such a strange person who gets angry with nothing.**

Yeji calmly gave penalty points to those refusing to follow directions, not hurting her students' feelings. By doing this, some of the burden from emotional labor decreased. Her students seemed to accept the penalty points without

emotional responses, depriving her of a source of anger. In addition, she did not want to be unpredictable in terms of emotional display.

In summary, Yeji's mixed-level students, with a high proportion of beginners, experienced conflicts with the instrument, especially emotional expression. At first, Yeji expressed anger toward her students' disobedience, worsening the teacher-student relationship. Furthermore, it intensified the level of classroom management, increasing the emotional burden. As a result, Yeji set up a disciplinary system for misbehaving students which did not require explicit emotional expressions, decreasing the burden of emotional labor.

## 4.2 Jinsu's Case

### 4.2.1 Teaching Context

At the school where Jinsu was assigned, the students and their parents in this school had a high level of interest in academic achievement. As a result, several advanced students attended private institutions where they had already mastered what would be taught at the school. It is reflected that the ratio of students who attended a special-purpose high school or autonomous high school (7.2%) after graduation was higher than the average number of students in the city (4.3%). In particular, 6.5% of the graduates attended foreign language or science high schools, considered elite high schools in Korea.

### 4.2.2 Activity System

During his first semester, Jinsu was faced with a teaching reality that was different from his ideal teaching. In his activity system, Jinsu is the subject (see Figure 3). His goal while conducting lessons was to organize English discussion classes (object). The ideal class Jinsu envisioned was to foster learner participation in the form of discussion (see Excerpt 9).

#### Excerpt 9

By attending English courses at the university, I had chances to talk about one topic and express my opinion [in English]. I felt that that kind of courses significantly improved my English skills. Based on this experience, **I thought that it would be nice to provide students with opportunities to express their opinion even in the class of the junior high school, rather than that of the university as I did.**

Jinsu described the English discussion class he had attended in college when asked about his ideal English class. He believed that learning a language through discussion can improve students' proficiency. He thought that students would improve their English skills when expressing their opinions and that they would see the purpose of learning English.

Despite his ideal image, expressing opinions in English, the instrument that Jinsu utilized while teaching includes the teaching materials (i.e., the textbook and supplementary materials) and the teaching method, a lecture-style lesson. Regarding supplementary materials, Jinsu and his colleague teachers employed numerous worksheets containing additional examples, vocabulary, and explicit grammar rules. This was partially due to a high level of interest in academic achievement in this school (see Excerpt 10).

#### Excerpt 10

Because students go to private institute a lot and try to learn every single thing, if they are tested only with textbooks, most of them would get A or B. So, teachers give extra materials to increase what is covered in the test.

A number of high-performing students, being already familiar with all the linguistic features in the textbook, made it necessary to use extra materials for the multiple-choice test to differentiate the learner levels. Furthermore, a huge number of extra materials made him difficult to organize other in-class activities such as in-class discussions (see Excerpt 11).

Excerpt 11

My colleague teachers had used worksheets for every class. **So, I couldn't do anything else when I tried to cover all of them.** I couldn't organize the lessons as I had thought before.

To cover all of the materials provided by his colleague teachers, giving up his ideal image of teaching focusing on the students' discussion was inevitable for Jinsu. This shows that colleague teachers focusing on grammar points with the extra materials influenced Jinsu's current teaching practices, which were different from his hope of implementing in-class discussions where students express and exchange their opinions in English.

Three elements are placed at the bottom of Engeström's (1999) AT system: 1) rules, 2) community, and 3) division of labor. Regarding the rules, the conventions he was supposed to follow were the assessment plan set by his colleague teachers and the classroom rules. Community refers to the people he interacted with while teaching, including students and colleagues. In particular, some of his students tended to sleep. His colleagues' use of a lecture-style method heavily influenced his teaching method (instrument); therefore, they were also included in the community. Division of labor refers to his responsibilities, including conducting English lessons and measuring students' achievement quantitatively.

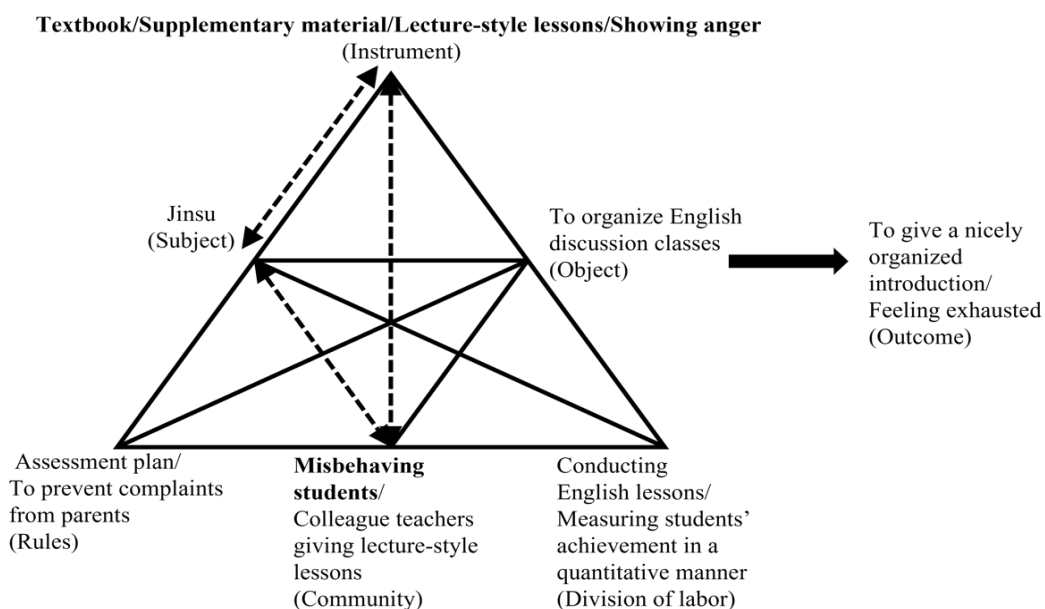


Figure 3. Jinsu's AT system

In his activity system (see Figure 3), there are three arrows: 1) between the subject and the instrument, 2) between the subject and the community, and 3) between community and instrument. Similar to his colleagues, Jinsu also

utilized a lecture-style teaching method (instrument). While he conducted lecture-style, his students easily fell asleep in his class, creating a conflict between the community and the instrument. This made him feel uncomfortable, resulting in the conflict between the subject and the community.

Jinsu wanted to conduct a lesson focusing on learner engagement. However, he could not find things he could change when surrounded by the teaching reality and previously arranged teaching curriculum by his colleagues. His class was different from what he had learned in the pre-service teacher training courses (see Excerpt 12).

Excerpt 12

**When I was a student in the College of Education, I learned how to design classes, and I also learned that it is important to consider learners' gap in terms of proficiency when designing learning tasks.** However, I am just giving a lecture. Some really active students may feel difficulty in just sitting down and just read worksheets. I need to make something that students can participate in, but I can't. I feel responsible for this situation, so I feel frustrated, too.

In Jinsu's class, students were supposed to be seated and work on the study sheet. He felt that he should have organized the lessons to engage the students, but there was no option for him to implement other student-centered activities when surrounded by colleagues using a grammar-translation method. Jinsu felt discontent and dissatisfied with his current teaching practices when faced with his students showing a low level of engagement. As a result, he felt sorry for students who did not find the lessons interesting and thus fell asleep.

Giving a lecture-style lesson could not be aligned with his object—to organize an English discussion class; this led to conflicts between the subject and the instrument. When asked about how he had felt about the current teaching practices, he expressed ambivalent feelings: a sense of embarrassment and a feeling of convenience (see Excerpt 13).

Excerpt 13

**The way of teaching and assessment was totally different from what I had learned about English education at college.** At first, I even felt a sense of embarrassment. Now, I do not feel that much, but giving a teacher-centered lesson is really easy to organize.

Initially, Jinsu found it disappointing to give teacher-centered lessons and quantitatively assess learners. However, following his colleagues' ways, teaching and assessment were easy to adopt. The prearranged teaching materials significantly eased the burden of lesson preparation.

Another difficulty Jinsu experienced was in building positive relationships with his students. He wanted to build rapport and be connected with his students. One of the strategies Jinsu employed was to give compliment. Unlike his intention, what the teacher sincerely said did not seem to be conveyed to students. He found it difficult to convey his genuine care and concerns to the students (see Excerpt 14).

Excerpt 14

**I'm not good at showing my sincerity. Even though I sincerely tell something to my students, they often don't feel it.** For example, if I say, "Wow you look really cool" or "You're really good at it", my students say my words sound soulless.

Jinsu thought that his students felt it hard to believe what the teacher said nicely. According to him, students did not seem to consider that he gave them sincere compliments.

When asked about students showing problem behavior, Jinsu said that he tried to stop them. However, he expressed that he was emotionally hurt when students did not show behavior changes and kept showing problem behavior (see Excerpt 15).

Excerpt 15

At first, I yelled at the noisy students for the purpose of discipline, thinking that I was helping them learn. I kept quieting each of the students. **Nowadays, I feel hurt because I think that these students remain the same.**

Jinsu felt uncomfortable with those interrupting his lessons. What further aggravated this displeasure was a lack of proper means to discipline students who showed aggressiveness toward teachers<sup>2</sup>. No means to stop the students from causing problems provoked intense disappointment and disillusionment (see Excerpt 16).

Excerpt 16

**There's no way to discipline students showing really rude attitudes.** One student just shouted out loud in class, "Why are you doing this just to me!". It was too loud so even students in another classroom could listen. After shouting, the students hit the window, slammed the door and just stomped out of the classroom. Then all I can do is just glowering at the student. This is what is happening in the classroom. I felt extremely disillusioned with that.

Jinsu hid his anger about students' misconduct. According to school and Office of Education policies, emphasizing students' right to learn, he could not discipline problem students effectively. Jinsu could not make disobedient students leave class since it would violate their right to education. Jinsu could not stop unruly students from violating others' rights. Without disciplinary measures, he hid his discomfort and anger.

From the perspective of AT, Jinsu's emotional labor can be represented as the conflicts between the subject and the community and between the subject and the instrument. Jinsu, a beginning teacher, followed his colleague teachers conducting teacher-centered lessons. However, his students did not appear interested in the lecture-style lessons and showed problematic behavior. It caused Jinsu to exacerbate negative feelings, but he did not attribute the students' misbehavior to their own problems. Rather, he felt responsible for misbehaving students as he did not organize interesting classes. Consequently, the instrument he employed in his activity system was to suppress his negative emotions toward students. Despite his effort, the students' problematic behavior continued, and Jinsu felt burdened with continuing to use this instrument. Also, he was dissatisfied with his students who did not show changes in their behavior, depicted as the conflict between the subject and the community in his AT system.

## 5. Discussion

In previous studies, teachers conducted emotional labor on students (Benesch 2017, Diefendorff et al. 2005, King 2015) in three forms: deep acting, surface acting, and expression of naturally felt emotion. In this study, participants

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<sup>2</sup> In Korea, teachers are not allowed to physically punish students according to a ban on corporal punishment which came into effect in 2011.

did not appear to conduct deep acting, reappraising their situation. Rather, teachers tended to naturally express both positive and negative emotions. Expression of positive emotions conveyed their satisfaction as teachers, such as feeling rewarded when their students accomplished a given task. Sometimes teachers conveyed pleasant feelings to establish a helpful learning atmosphere, especially for underperforming children (see Excerpt 2). Yeji aimed to create a helpful environment by acknowledging English learning difficulties. While teaching, teachers naturally express their care and passion for students' successful learning (Hebson et al. 2007). Negative emotions were also expressed by teachers feeling uncomfortable with the misbehavior of their students (see Excerpts 3 and 15). Yeji and Jinsu exhibited unpleasant sensations for discipline. This shows that expressing negative emotion can be a way to assist students focus and accomplish activities.

Besides expressing both positive and negative emotions, teachers tended to conduct negative surface acting. They disguised only negative, not positive emotions. They hid negative emotions to appear professional. Yeji restrained unpleasant feelings despite students' disruptions due to her ideal image of the teaching profession (see Excerpt 8) as reported by Kang (2022). She feared anger would harm her relationship with her students (see Excerpt 4) as discussed in the previous studies (Hwang and Choi 2014, Hwang et al. 2010). With such concerns, Yeji tended not to display temper outbursts toward students.

Hiding negative feelings associated to students' misbehavior needed more emotional labor (Belt and Belt 2017, Näring et al. 2012). Teachers may perceive that students' misbehavior is caused by their ineffectiveness in dealing with the issue (Chang 2013). Jinsu also experienced anger from students' disrespect and violent behavior (Burić and Frenzel 2019). Jinsu saw that students' disruptive behavior reflected disrespect to him as teacher, but he could not solve it (see Excerpt 16). Low efficacy can intensify emotion, making it harder to hide.

When the burden of emotional labor grew, participating teachers showed different emotional responses. Jinsu's statements showed disillusionment (see Excerpt 16). Yeji regretted not building strong relationships with problem students (see Excerpt 5). She stated that positive teacher-student interactions increase student receptivity to instruction, resulting in fewer disciplinary issues (Hagenauer et al. 2015). A lack of rapport may increase emotional labor when pupils misbehave out of disbelief for the teacher.

Emotional labor affected teachers' classroom goals and strategies. The practical experiences and knowledge on how to adopt the differentiated instructions or classroom manage skills would have relieved the burden of emotional labor and finally solved their conflicts as suggested by Suprayogi et al. (2017). However, without the pre-service training focusing on them, they could not introduce the new instrument helping them carry out the student-focused lessons. Instead, Jinsu changed his classroom focus from student learning to dealing with the textbook highlights. He may not like the revised tools and goals, but at least he could finish textbooks without tiredness from emotional labor. Teachers are less likely to be irritated by misbehaving students with lecture-style instruction. In addition, his lecture-style teaching can be a result of socialization as his colleagues' lessons were lecture-style. As the lecture-style teaching was the pre-existing sociocultural practices within the school, this adaptation can be perceived as a form of socialization on the part of the teacher. As a result, the tensions in his AT system can be temporarily resolved. From the perspective of communicative language learning methods, this type of lesson would not develop English proficiency in speaking and listening. However, EFL teachers can avoid burnout by maintaining emotional stability.

Another way to resolve the conflict in the AT system in terms of emotional expression is to establish a system that does not involve the display of emotion. At first, Yeji tried to express negative emotions for discipline. However, it negatively impacted her relationship with her students as reported by Kang (2022). Instead of exhibiting negative emotion, she developed a penalty system (see Excerpt 8). It reduced emotional effort by suppressing negative feelings and seemed to resolve the conflict between the teacher and the instrument.

## 6. Conclusion

By adopting Engeström's (1999) AT model, the current study aimed to determine the kinds of conflicts in terms of emotional labor the participating teachers experienced and its impact on their teaching practices. The results show that participating teachers experienced two kinds of emotional labor related to their students: surface acting and expression of naturally felt emotion. The burden of emotional labor can be explained as three conflicts in their AT system: between the subject and the instrument, between the subject and the community, and the instrument and the community. The effort to reduce emotional labor is linked to the resolution of conflicts in their AT system. The participating teachers tried to change their instrument to address them, relying on an instructional means unrelated to emotional display (Yeji) or using the grammar-translation method (Jinsu).

The results show that the participating teachers chose to avoid student-centered teaching methods. The reason teachers avoid student-centered teaching methods—such as implementing task-based language teaching and communicative language teaching—cannot be attributed solely to their lack of qualifications. Adopting the grammar-translation method seems an inevitable choice for teachers to survive and remain in the teaching profession because that method does not result in a huge amount of emotional labor, leading to emotional exhaustion. As a result, this study suggests that adopting student-centered approaches should be carefully discussed considering both student English skill development and teachers' class management and their emotional labor. In addition, their choice can be seen as the results of socialization by adopting the pre-existing practice in their teaching context. It implies that the student-centered teaching methods can be widely spread when the practices of teacher community also change in their AT systems.

To help the participating teachers stay in the profession, they need to receive help through the pre- and in-service training courses. Beginning teachers should be equipped to design differentiated instruction and build rapport with students. Classroom management skills to prevent students' problem behavior. Those skills will play an important role in successfully implementing collaborative learning to resolve the issue of mixed-level classes in English. Considering that teachers' attitude towards students predicts expression of naturally felt emotions and it is positively related to teachers' job satisfaction, teachers' classroom management skills can prevent disruptive behavior, depriving the source of anger at first. When equipped with those management skills, the frequency of class disruption would decrease. As a result, teachers do not have to suppress their negative emotions heavily.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Tertiary