

Exploring the emotional geographies of EFL students' participation in group assignments: A narrative inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Research on emotional geographies in EFL learning has been extensively carried out. However, the studies have mostly focused on the context of teachers' rather than students' emotional geographies. Informed by the emotional geographies framework, this study investigated the ways in which three EFL students construct and experience their emotional geographies while engaging in group work assignments. It specifically focuses on the participants' past, present, and future experiences of participating in group work and how they deal with emotional issues. The study employed a narrative inquiry to elicit participants' lived experiences with in-depth interviews to collect the data. This method is considered appropriate for research designs that allow exploration of the emotional dimensions and experiences of participants in their past, present, and future through storytelling. For the data collection, this study conducted interviews in two ways, including direct interviews and online interviews. The findings show various negative emotional geographies experienced by EFL students in their group assignment participation, such as frustration, anxiety, insecurity, and disappointment. It also reveals that participants overcome those emotional issues in several ways, including adjusting their personalities, taking on more responsibility than others, and asking for help from third parties. The limitation of this study is the single data collection method, namely, interviews, which may affect the generalizability of the data. This study suggests more supportive learning environments by providing more information about group emotions and dynamics to students. Future research is encouraged to explore EFL students' emotions in different contexts.

Keywords: EFL student; emotional geography; group work; narrative inquiry

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, there has been a growing interest in understanding the role of emotions in language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Emotions are actions formed in a social context, which can bridge a person's thoughts, behaviors, and goals so that emotions are not merely inner workings resulting from external stimulation (Imai, 2010). Emotional

experiences play an important role in shaping student engagement, motivation, and performance in various academic settings, including group assignment learning. As emotions are always involved in every aspect of the teaching and learning process, an understanding of the nature of emotions in the educational environment is necessary (Ubaidillah et al., 2023). Understanding the relationship between emotions and cognition in academics will improve the welfare and holistic development of educators and students (Cong-Lem, 2023). The affective aspect of language learning has been studied extensively, but the emotional geographies in the context of students has not been widely explored, especially in collaborative contexts such as group assignments. Huang et al. (2023) noted that, despite extensive previous research on the influence of social-emotional interactions on learning challenges, significant gaps remain in the research on the influences of social-emotional interactions, particularly in education, such as group work, which is still underrepresented.

Group assignments are a social space in learning that is suitable for exploration because, in the process, there will always be interactions and social relationships that will later encourage emotional experiences resulting from various aspects of differences among its members. Wosnitza and Volet (2005) revealed that while classroom interactions can infer some aspects of learning, it is more difficult to see how emotional experiences are connected to social dynamics. If a group is unable to regulate their emotions accurate and timely manner, it may create irritation, less interaction, and poor learning outcomes (Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2009). A decrease in involvement and performance in carrying out group tasks will occur if there is emotional misalignment between group members (Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2009). On the other hand, positive impacts such as trust and respect, problem-solving, and creativity in groups can occur if they experience positive emotional geographies (Li et al., 2022). Thus, a deeper understanding of these emotional geographies and how they address emotional issues is crucial for educators seeking to create more supportive and emotionally attuned learning environments that can foster group collaboration and enhance language learning outcomes.

Referring to this emotional context, Hargreaves (2001) proposed the concept of “emotional geographies”, which provides a useful lens for studying how students understand, shape, and control their emotions. Hargreaves (2005) stated that the idea of emotional geography helps in recognizing the factors that contribute to fundamental emotional bonds and the educational understanding that results from varying degrees of closeness or distance in interpersonal interactions. The concept of emotional geographies is relevant in group assignments, where EFL learners not only focus on the cognitive aspects of language learning but also on how they manage their emotional experiences while collaborating to complete the task with their group members. This is because, in carrying out group assignments, discussions and negotiations are required to complete the assignment that meet the expectations of all members. In particular, learning is not seen as merely a particular activity, but as something that is socially produced and negotiated (Ubaidillah & Widiati, 2021). This concept of emotional geographies also applies to collaborative learning, such as group assignments.

Based on the review of existing literature, limited research has been conducted to specifically examine emotional geographies in group assignment cases, particularly those employing the narrative inquiry method. However, there has been research on emotional experiences that uses the narrative inquiry method in a more general educational context, especially in learning and teaching activities. For example, a study conducted by Mänty et al. (2020) investigated emotions in collaborative learning through a variety of emotional processes, including individual emotional experiences, social-emotional interactions, and group-level emotion regulation. The study found that negative group interactions harmed students’ emotional experiences after the task. Then, negative emotions experienced by students related to the task before the group assignment increased the emotional regulation of the group during the task. Furthermore, a study by Watzek et al. (2019) explored a deeper understanding of the process of learning activities in teams and their social, and emotional reactions and relationships within their teams. The results showed that every team member from all teams participated in different kinds of group learning activities, such as exchanging experiences and reflecting on work tasks. Mujab et al. (2023) also conducted a study that aims to explore the emotional geographies felt by students in

microteaching courses in facing challenges in teaching English. It is found that students experienced both positive and negative emotions felt by students in microteaching courses.

A recent study by Ubaidillah et al. (2023) explored emotional geography in the context of teachers who attempted to see the emotional geography of EFL teachers in Indonesia during emergency remote teaching. The results showed that the emergency remote teaching experienced by the participants involved negotiating emotional adjustments that led to sustainable adaptation. Another study by Misdi et al. (2021) discussed emotional geographies in the context of teacher emotional experiences, precisely a female EFL Pre-service Teacher in a Teaching Practicum. Findings showed the participants experience various positive and negative emotions, such as facing people who have a scary image, becoming more attentive using bilingualism during teaching, getting adapted to the variety of learning media, and their existence of good feelings. Besides, another study by Rahayu and Asanti (2023) tried to review the use of the emotional geography framework to the emotions experienced by teachers and their responses, focusing on exploring first-grade teachers' feelings regarding their experiences while teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research findings showed that teachers feel negative emotions influenced by several problems, such as uncooperative parents, working more hours than necessary, limited facilities, unfamiliar relations between teachers and students, learning loss, demands of school rules, and coworkers who are not on the same page.

Previous studies have showcased the emergence of emotion in the teaching and learning process. However, the investigations have focused solely on the context of teachers' emotional geographies and students' emotional experiences; they have rarely explored students' emotional geographies. This creates a theoretical gap in the emotional geography framework, which could be utilized to gain a deeper understanding of students' emotions in an interactive setting, such as a group assignment. Unfortunately, even though teachers' emotional geographies are essential, students' emotional geographies are also worth noting. In addition, previous research tends to focus on general emotional descriptions without exploring personal emotions and their socio-cultural dynamics. Therefore, it is expected that the present narrative inquiry study complements previous research in exploring individual emotional experiences more deeply and the strategies employed to deal with such emotional problems by students. Based on the background above, this study explores three EFL students' emotional geographies in their group work assignments. This research formulates the following questions to achieve the research objectives:

1. What emotional geographies are experienced by EFL students in their past, present, and future group assignment participation?
2. How do EFL students deal with the emotional issues in their past, present, and future group assignment participation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional geographies

Emotional geographies, as conceptualized by Hargreaves (2001, 2005), consist of the spatial and experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance in human interactions and relationships that help create, configure, and color the feelings and emotions we experience about ourselves, our world, and each other. This concept emphasizes that emotional space in the classroom is not merely a site of social interaction, but also a space that provides knowledge about the dynamic relationship between identity, power, and educational experiences through an emotional lens (Zembylas, 2007). Hargreaves (2001) noted that understanding emotions in education is essential because emotions play a major role in learning, engagement, and motivation. Emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or joy can influence how students interact with their classmates and the tasks they are given. This concept is relevant to this study which explores how emotional dynamics are experienced by EFL students during collaborative tasks, a learning space where emotions are often influenced by their collaborative dynamics including in five essential dimensions of emotional geographies identified by (Hargreaves,

2001), physical dimension, moral dimension, social dimension, professional dimension, and political dimension (Hargreaves, 2001).

Mujab et al. (2023) described the five dimensions of emotional geographies as follows. Physical geography refers to the closeness or distance created by time and space. Moral geography refers to the closeness or distance created by the interaction between someone with others who have the same purposes and prevailing norms of society. Meanwhile, socio-cultural geography refers to the closeness or distance created by differences in gender, age, race, ethnicity, language, and culture in classroom interactions. Then, professional geography refers to the closeness or distance created by understanding the norms of professionalism and professional practice. Lastly, political geography refers to the closeness or distance created by different power and status, which can influence interpersonal interaction.

Group assignment

Cohen (1994) defined group work as students working together in small groups, and everyone in the group participating in completing a learning task. It is a learning activity carried out by each team member during group work (Watzek et al., 2019) with more than one person working together, and the purpose of group assignments is to get students to interact with each other to collaborate (Situmorang, 2021). The concept of group work is a relationship where students generally work together in face-to-face groups, engaging in discussions and helping each other understand (Meng, 2009). Experiential learning carried out in groups provides several positive opportunities for students, such as collaborating and engaging in problem-solving, reflective dialogue, and combining various perspectives (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, Hargreaves' emotional geography framework provides an appropriate basis for understanding how emotional dynamics are formed in group-based learning environments, which are interaction spaces that can trigger a variety of emotional experiences.

Group assignments are an important space to explore because they are a learning system that is frequently and effectively used in learning activities. Johnson et al. (1998) noted that group tasks in the context of language learning play an essential role in developing communication and social interaction skills. EFL learners can practice the target language in a real context through group assignments, and their understanding will strengthen through collaboration and the building of interpersonal skills. A study by Storch (2002) depicted how students share learning strategies and improve their language skills through collaboration in group assignments. Working in groups has a positive impact on encouraging language use. This is because students feel safer in discussions in smaller and more meaningful settings, such as groups, without direct teacher correction. Thus, this can enable them to share knowledge and experiences related to language, language skills, and how to use them in social skills (Dörnyei, 2001).

METHOD

Research design

A qualitative approach was applied to collect the data in this study. Specifically, this study employed narrative inquiry, as outlined by Connelly and Clandinin (2000), as its research design. This method is considered suitable to understand the emotional dimensions of participants in their past, present, and experiences, and how they deal with emotional issues. It is in line with the aim of the narrative inquiry method, which allows the exploration of a person's emotions and experiences through storytelling (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

Participant recruitment and profiles

This study focused on three female students as participants, who were seventh-semester students of the English Education Department at a private university in Malang. The selection of three participants takes into account more diverse data than studying just one or two individuals, and the number can still be managed comprehensively in narrative analysis. They were Sisi, Momo, and Nina (*pseudonyms*). The first author of this study is the participants' classmates; thus, the author has been

building a good rapport with them. They were chosen because the three of them are academically strong students who exhibit unusual behavior when participating in group assignments, which has given rise to emotional issues and challenges in collaborative learning. The participants' academic achievements are proven by their scholarship achievements. The researcher identified their experience participating in group assignments, which resulted in their poor performance in completing tasks, sparking several emotions such as anxiety and annoyance, and even complaining to their lecturer about their group members. Sisi (aged 22) is a student who is diligent and has good academic performance. This personality can be seen in her, who always does her tasks on time and appropriately. She has also participated in an international exchange student program at a public university in Taiwan, with a partial scholarship from the college. Momo (aged 21) is an active and optimistic student both in class and in organizational activities. This can be seen in her, who is always actively asking questions in class and voicing his opinions. She also has academic achievement as a recipient of a scholarship funded by an Indonesian financial institution. The third participant, Nina (aged 22), is a student with good academic records and active participation in various activities, including community and teaching programs. She has also received one of the government's scholarships. Besides, she is a fairly introverted student; she does not interact much and does not participate actively during learning.

Data collection

This study employed open-ended interviews to obtain the participants' emotional experiences. The interview protocol was adapted from [Ubaidillah et al. \(2023\)](#), which explored teachers' emotional geographies in the teaching context. The questions were recontextualized and expanded to fit the research context. The total number of the questions is five, which contain five dimensions of emotional geographies: (1) The physical dimension explores how the participants' emotionally responses regarding their distance and closeness of their group members before, during, and after the group work, (2) The moral dimension focuses on the participants' emotionally responses to moral issues such as norms and fairness before, during, and after the group work, (3) The socio-cultural dimension uncovers the participants' emotionally responses linked to cultural and personal differences before, during, and after the group work, (4) The professional dimension examines the participants' emotionally responses tied to professional practice and collaboration competence before, during, and after the group work, and (5) The political dimension investigates the participants emotionally responses to the issues of power, voice, and domination before, during, and after the group work. During the interview process, the questions were used in the participant's first language, Bahasa Indonesia, to ensure that the questions can be conveyed according to the context. For data collection, this study conducts interviews in two ways: direct interviews and online interviews via Zoom meetings. The interviews were conducted for approximately 50-70 minutes each and were recorded. Each participant was interviewed individually to maintain their privacy. The researcher conducted interviews by carrying out several steps. The first step is that the researcher introduces himself to the participants. Then the researcher asked for participants' willingness to answer interview questions and explained that this interview guaranteed the confidentiality of participants' backgrounds. After that, the researcher explains the research objectives and procedures clearly. The questions of the interview include five dimensions of emotional geographies, which have the possibility of developing to explore more detailed and in-depth answers. Finally, the researcher closed the interview. The interviews were conducted twice to achieve data saturation. The questions of the second interview included additional and follow-up questions developed based on the initial responses and themes that emerged from the first interview to clarify, validate, and deepen the data.

Data analysis

At the research analysis stage, the researcher used thematic analysis by [Braun and Clarke \(2014\)](#). There are six steps in this method to analyze the data that has been collected in more depth. The first step is listening to recordings of experiences that participants have narrated to highlight important parts of the story. The second stage, copying or changing the recording into written form, is achieved by

transcribing it in detail by typing manually in Microsoft Word. The next step is to read the transcript several times to familiarize ourselves and fully understand the participants' story. After that, there is the coding stage. In this phase, coding is carried out to identify patterns that emerge by marking any of the emotions that participants expressed about the group assignment experience. This is done by marking the emotions using different colored pens. Data that tends to appear to contain emotional feelings is considered emotion. Then, sorting is carried out on codes that are not relevant to the topic. The last step, theming, is done by grouping or classifying according to certain emotions. The themes were named to reflect the essence of the participants' emotional experiences including (1) Emotions in Familiar and Unfamiliar Group, (2) Moral Frustration and Emotional Burden in Dysfunctional Collaboration, (3) Emotional Isolation in Socioculturally Diverse, (4) Emotional Struggles in The Professional Dimension, (5) Emotional Tension in Political Roles. There will also be mini-stories presented to interpret the themes. To avoid and minimize the bias of the data since the participants are considered close friends of the researcher, this study only focuses on answers that match the research question. To ensure the validity of the data, this research used the member checking technique, which involved the participants reviewing and verifying whether the interpretation was appropriate to the context.

FINDINGS

Emotional geographies experienced by EFL students in group assignments

Emotions in familiar and unfamiliar groups

Before the group assignment, Sisi, as the first participant, showed that she and her group members had quite a close relationship since the first semester. From that closeness, she hoped that their group assignment would run smoothly. However, on the other hand, she is also worried that this can be the reason for her friends to take their duties for granted and not have good cooperation. She shared that:

"Some of them were my close friends, really close. In my opinion, everything would be fine because we were close friends. There is something that I think worries me. With the thought that my friends might not have good cooperation. It is because sometimes they think that if we are that close, then they cannot respect each other. Instead, think, 'She is my close friend and will not be hurt just because I do not do my homework or underestimate our shared tasks'. So, feelings for each other do not guarantee that they will be looked after by each other, even though we are that close." (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

That situation implies that Sisi, rather than feeling calm in collaborating with someone she knows well, actually raises concerns that the closeness they have will be a reason for her group members to lose their professionalism in carrying out their group assignments.

When it was time for the group assignment, Sisi experienced another challenge that was still in the context of professionalism. She feels that their closeness itself is a challenge in expressing their opinions. She has to be more careful and protect their feelings in expressing what she thinks. Sisi stated that she would be more open if she worked on group assignments with someone who was not too close because of the more guaranteed professionalism. Sisi narrated that:

"It's a bit difficult because I have to pay attention to other people or care about my close friends' feelings rather than my own. When I want to share my opinion, I still think about whether they are hurt or offended by my opinion or not. I have to protect their feelings while I can't be open about my own opinion. However, with friends who are not that close, I can still be open to sharing my opinion. It doesn't mean I don't want to protect other people's feelings, but it feels easier because they know more about professionalism in group assignments than my friends." (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

During the group assignment, it showed that the issue of professionalism really became a challenge in their group assignment. The closeness of their friendship became a barrier for Sisi to express her opinion freely because of the fear of hurting and damaging their personal relationship.

After the group assignment, Sisi shared her expectations about how she would no longer have to worry about working in groups with her close friends. However, in the future, she would prefer to work in random groups with other friends. She also gave some specific expectations about making good contributions to group assignments. She emphasized that:

"I hope that I will no longer feel worried when working in a group with my close friends. Although I think that I should work in a group with others who are not my close friends ... In my opinion, I hope there is good communication, good cooperation, which is equally balanced in its efforts, being able to understand each other, appreciate each other, and take care of each other's feelings both individually and in a group, not underestimating and being able to appreciate time, and completing tasks with enough time before the deadline." (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

This statement shows two conflicting expectations. On the one hand, the participant hopes that she will not have to worry about grouping with close friends in the future. On the other hand, she would prefer not to group with close friends in the future. She realizes that randomly selecting group members will better ensure the fairness and balance of group dynamics that she hopes for.

Moral frustration and emotional burden in dysfunctional collaboration

Before the group assignment, Momo, as the second participant, expects balanced group work as a form of justice. She does not expect group assignments to be just formalities, with the reality being individual assignments. According to her, group assignments must truly represent the name, where everyone contributes and is involved. She said that:

"Before the assignment started, I thought that this was group work, so the work had to be balanced. Because group work means cooperation, the tasks had to be divided equally and fairly, and everyone had to be involved." (Momo, Interview, January 2025)

The second participant did not feel any emotions that bothered her before the group assignment. She just felt that the group assignment would run naturally and collaboratively. However, during the group assignment, Momo felt angry with her partner group, who did not immediately complete the task on time. Most of them did not respond, they did not even work, and even disappeared in the process. From there, Momo decided not to include the names that did not contribute. Momo shared that:

"From group A, I usually remind the group members that the assignment is not finished, and I get angry in the group because they don't answer many times. And I say whoever doesn't do it, I will delete their name from the group. For group B, when the tasks were divided up, but suddenly one member disappeared, it made it difficult for me and my friends." (Momo, Interview, January 2025)

Momo's experience illustrates the emergence of negative emotions such as anger and overwhelm due to the inequality of cooperation in the group. The lack of contribution triggers the urge to demand justice, such as excluding members who do not contribute. This situation shows how the moral dimension plays a role in shaping students' emotional responses in the context of group work.

Momo emphasized the division of group tasks in the future, which should not be done manually to avoid feelings of injustice. Momo also expects external assistance, such as direct supervision from lecturers, for the progress of group tasks in the future. She explained that:

"To be fairer. From the division of tasks, do not divide them manually so that no member feels unfair. I think the supervision of lecturers is important, as supervisors, so that they can be a reference when doing assignments. So that when someone is inactive, lecturers can encourage them to be more active. It is hoped that lecturers will be stricter with each member and monitor each progress one by one." (Momo, Interview, January 2025)

Momo's request for the lecturer to supervise shows a sense of frustration and disappointment with the previous group work experience. She feels it is unfair if the tasks are divided manually without a clear system. This feeling makes Momo feel the need for external support and control, such as lecturer supervision, so that all members can work fairly.

Emotional isolation in socioculturally diverse

Before the group assignment, Nina, as the third participant, shared that her personality background is quite introverted and less comfortable in socializing. She tends to prefer tasks that are individual and do not involve interaction with others. For this reason, Nina has anxiety that her personality background will affect group interactions, especially in communication. She admits that she is less communicative, so she is afraid of offending others. Unlike someone who has a personality background that is easy to mix with and communicative. Nina said that:

"Personally, my background is not very comfortable with socializing with others, and for assignments, I usually prefer independent assignments. If I work in a group, I'm afraid the interaction will affect the work, so it's uncomfortable. Maybe it doesn't matter to them. But in my opinion, there will be challenges that arise from the differences in background. In my opinion, the challenge is more about communication. If our backgrounds are different, for example, their nature is easy to get along with, while I am less able to communicate with others, I am afraid of offending them or vice versa." (Nina, Interview, January 2025)

Nina showed emotions of anxiety, discomfort, and self-doubt related to her participation in group work. As an introvert, she felt more comfortable with individual tasks and experienced concerns that her limited communication would lead to misunderstandings or hurt others' feelings unintentionally. The dominant emotions she experienced were anxiety, worry of being misunderstood, and feeling socially incompatible, reflecting emotional challenges from the sociocultural dimension.

During the group assignment, Nina mentioned that her relationship with group members who have different backgrounds is not good. However, it is limited to a lack of communication and inappropriate work on tasks; other than that, there is no significant conflict. From their less responsive treatment, Nina also feels that she is not very accepted in the group because she is considered bossy and too ambitious. She narrated that;

"I feel that my relationship with friends from different backgrounds is not good. Because of the lack of communication and inappropriate work, I don't think there are any serious conflicts other than that. In my own opinion, I am very unwelcome in this group. Because when I give directions, I am afraid they think I am very bossy or very ambitious. Moreover, when there is no response, I feel less accepted; I don't know how they feel." (Nina, Interview, January 2025)

Nina's experience showed emotions such as discomfort and a sense of not being accepted in the group. She felt that her relationships with group members from different backgrounds were not going well due to the lack of communication and incompatibility in completing the assignment. The lack of response from her friends reinforced her feelings of alienation and not being accepted.

In the future group assignment, Nina has a thought if something similar happens. She admits that she would prefer to force herself as the one who adjusts to others. She mentioned that:

"If the same thing happens later, I will be forced to be a different person by forcing myself to initiate the interaction first. If they are easy to talk to, we will balance them too. If they cannot adjust and want the group assignment to run, we will adjust ourselves." (Nina, Interview, January 2025)

Nina showed a sense of obligation within herself to do the same thing if faced with a similar situation in the future. She felt the need to force herself to change and adapt to the good results of the group assignment, even though it was contrary to her comfort as a person who tends to be introverted

Emotional struggles in the professional dimension

Before the group assignment, Sisi saw collaboration as a means of mutual learning, where group members could act as evaluators and correctors for each other. Sisi expects that the group assignment will help them develop their English language skills, where they will be evaluators and correctors of each other in developing their English. Besides, Sisi does not think she will have a big responsibility later because she believes that they will get equal duties later. She said that:

"I think it's important because we don't always learn alone; we need other people to chat with and give feedback when we make mistakes. And from that, we can develop each other to be better, so learning with a group is important to correct each other's mistakes. In my opinion, my responsibility in the group will not be too big either. Because I will also have the same duties as the other." (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

Sisi showed a positive perception of group work in developing English language skills. She saw collaboration as a means of mutual learning, where group members could act as evaluators and correctors for each other. In addition, Sisi expects that the division of tasks would be fair and equal, as well as the expectation that each member would contribute professionally.

During the group assignment, it does not reflect Sisi's expectations that the division of tasks would be fair and equal, as well as the expectation that each member would contribute professionally. Sisi also said that they did not appreciate the assignments that she mostly did; they just relied on her. She shared that:

"I think it's not appreciated, because they also can't give me appreciation when I've done my best and as much as possible in the group assignment. But even so, I still do my work when it's a group assignment, they don't want to do their work with full contribution, and let someone else, namely me, do everything. Usually, I've reminded them in the group chat. And they always say they'll do it later. But when we meet in class again and I ask, they still haven't done it and take it easy. So that's what makes me feel unappreciated." (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

Sisi felt disappointed and unappreciated. Although she did her job well and covered the work of other members who were indifferent and uncommitted, her efforts did not get a good response. In addition to feeling the emotional burden due to the inequality of contribution, she also felt the emotional burden and did not have a safe space to grow professionally because of their ridicule.

For this, in the future group assignment, Sisi hopes that each member can support and give their best and equal efforts so that the results of the group assignment will be maximized. Sisi also shared her hopes that she does not want to be a leader with greater responsibilities, as well as bear the mistakes and negligence of other members. She shared that:

"I hope my friends can be more supportive and can do their best to improve our English skills. So we don't depend on others, so we can make the same effort, so we can get maximum results. And I don't want to have thoughts like 'He can do it better, so he can do it. Why should I do that too?'. I just

want to be a regular member and don't want to be dominant in the group because I feel that the burden I bear will be heavier than other members. What makes me not want to be a leader is that I feel that I have to be responsible for negligent members and be responsible for other people's mistakes.” (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

Sisi expressed her hope for future group work to have equal cooperation, where each member shows the same professional responsibility. This hope arose from previous experiences that made her feel burdened, unequal, and emotionally vulnerable when having to take care of the group tasks alone.

Emotional tension in political roles

Before the group assignment, Sisi shares two different sides from two different group members. In one group, her friends chose her as a leader because there was no enthusiasm from other members. In another group, there was one member who was the most dominant. She thinks that there is a tendency for egoism in this group, where they do not listen to other members' opinions. She explained that:

“In group A, usually my friends choose me to be the group leader because they know I can organize and divide our tasks.... My contribution is bigger because my friends are not that enthusiastic about doing assignments. But for group B, I have a very dominant friend who cannot accept other friends' opinions or rejections. He does listen, but tends not to want to know and only wants his opinion to be followed. So, we do feel heard but not appreciated and not allowed to argue. Because she always controls the group according to her own. When they couldn't accept my opinion, I thought maybe this was my fault because I couldn't do my best for our group assignment. So I ended up feeling like I was putting myself down because I felt inadequate.” (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

Sisi experienced contrasting emotional dynamics in two different groups. In one group, she was often pushed to be a leader because she was considered capable, but felt given excessive responsibility. In the other group, she only followed directions because of the dominance of her friends, who did not listen to other people's opinions and made unbalanced decision-making. Both of these situations made her feel pressured and inferior in the process.

Sisi admitted that this one friend often did not want to hear other members' opinions and did not want her decisions challenged. This made Sisi often feel inadequate and belittle herself when her opinions were always declined. She mentioned that:

“In one of the groups, I have a very dominant friend who cannot accept other friends' opinions or rejections. He does listen, but tends not to want to know and only wants his opinion to be followed. So, we do feel heard but not appreciated and not allowed to argue. Because she always controls the group according to her own. When they couldn't accept my opinion, I thought maybe this was my fault because I couldn't do my best for our group assignment. So, I ended up feeling like I was putting myself down because I felt inadequate.” (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

Sisi experiences emotional stress due to the dominance of power by one of the group members, who is not open to other opinions. Sisi feels that her opinion is not valued and does not have space to express her opinion equally, which gives rise to feelings of not being good enough and blaming herself. This narrative reveals the importance of a space for power balance so that each member feels equally valued.

In Sisi's perspective, just as before, openness is needed in listening and considering the opinions of each member to improve the results of the group's work later. She emphasized that:

"I think it is most important to take into account the opinions of the group members and to remain open with each other. When we know the feelings of each group member, we can improve the group's work." (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

Sisi emphasizes the importance of openness and listening to each other in a group so that all opinions are valued and considered. She is aware that good communication can be the key to successful collaboration in a group.

How EFL students deal with emotional issues in group assignments

Being forced to be another version

One of the participants, Nina, made an unpredictable decision during the group assignment. She said that she usually obeys when doing a group task or a collaborative task. She prefers doing something with others' directions the most. However, when it comes to this group assignment, the situation forces her to force herself to do the opposite. Most of her group members did not have the initiative to start the assignment. Nina reluctantly forced herself to take the initiative first and volunteered to be the leader of the group. She felt angry at that time, especially when they did not give any response, and the deadline for the assignment was already close. In the end, she started by dividing the assignment for each member, following up about the progress, and leading them on what to do. She described that:

"At that time, I took over to divide it because none of them took the initiative. When I had divided it, it turned out that there was no response in the group. I had to volunteer to take the initiative to start communicating first to start the assignment. When I was working on it, I was angry at the time, because the time was close, but they didn't respond at all. So, I decided to ask them directly in private via chat to ask whether their part of the assignment had been completed or not. However, after the private chat, there was no further discussion until the day before the submission deadline. About 2-3 days before the submission, I contacted them again to ask about the progress of the assignment." (Nina, Interview, January 2025)

Participants showed negative emotions, namely disappointment and anger, because she had to bear responsibility as a leader by force due to the passivity of other members. The efforts made by these participants showed a pattern of poor collaboration, where there was no equal effort. In addition, the emotional geography of group dynamics that she experienced also changed her personality during the work process to become more active.

Becoming the one in charge

Fair division of group assignments did not necessarily make their group members do it fairly. Three of them had similar experiences that made them contribute more to cover the work of their negligent friends, and to get good grades. Sisi shared that her group members did not have a sense of ambition to complete their assignments. They procrastinated more until they had not finished it until the deadline was approaching. This made Sisi feel responsible for completing it alone, even though it meant she had to do most of the assignment. She said that:

"My friends are mostly lazy and not very ambitious, so completing a task a few weeks or a few days before the deadline is like an impossible thing. When they know the deadline is long and they know they don't have to rush, they won't do it before it's too late. I usually finish it myself. I try by myself and don't care about others, whether they don't do it or not. The important thing is that this task is finished, even though in the end I'm the one who fully contributed to the task. The important thing is that it's finished even if they don't do it." (Sisi, Interview, January 2025)

Momo also experienced something similar. She shared that:

"When the tasks were divided up, but one member suddenly disappeared, that made it difficult for me and my friends. Thus, in the end, I was the one who did most of the work. I feel responsible for the unfinished assignment. From there, I accept it and just do the assignment because what else can I do? No one is doing it." (Momo, Interview, January 2025)

In addition to frustration and disappointment towards group members who are considered passive and irresponsible, participants also feel unappreciated, even though she has divided and completed tasks well. She chooses to complete the task alone without considering the contributions of other members. Although this effort is effective in completing the task, it does not reflect a form of collaboration at all, where only one person works more.

Seeking third-party assistance

The sense of injustice that arose due to unfair contributions in completing group assignments made Nina feel that the grades she and her group mates got should have been different, considering their unequal contributions. She then dealt with the injustice by asking for justice from the lecturer about their grades. Nina narrated that:

"I also told the lecturer about the problem because I didn't want our grades to be the same. I said that out of the two friends, only one could communicate, and their assignments weren't appropriate at all. I didn't want our grades to be the same, while the only ones who did a lot of work were I and friend A, so the lecturer finally said he wouldn't match our grades." (Nina, Interview, January 2025)

The participant exhibited emotions such as frustration due to an unbalanced effort. However, she not only took over the task but also asked for fairness in the assessment from the lecturer, as the final assessor. This strategy still reflects less-than-ideal collaboration, but it demonstrates an awareness of the importance of fairness and shared responsibility in group work.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the participants experienced several emotional geographies during the completion of group assignments. Negative emotions, such as insecurity, anxiety, frustration, and disappointment, emerged significantly, as captured through Hargreaves' (2001) emotional geography framework, which encompasses physical, moral, socio-cultural, professional, and physical dimensions in the context of EFL group tasks.

Regarding the physical dimension, the emotional responses by the participants were influenced by the degree of closeness or distance among them. Some participants felt comfortable working in groups with their close friends. Interestingly, the participants who grouped with close friends tended to worry about professionalism that is not guaranteed due to familiarity, as they had expected before the group assignment. This is in line with Hargreaves (2001), who emphasized that emotional understandings can be formed by the distance or physical proximity created by time and space, which can build or reduce interactions and relationships. The study by Mujab et al. (2023) also investigated that familiarity with the physical environment can positively influence one's emotional state. Afterward, from the group dynamics experienced by participants, they hoped that future groups would feel fairer if the members were grouped randomly.

In terms of moral dimensions, the emotions that emerge tend to focus more on matters related to fairness in the group assignment process, which do not reflect the same goals and objectives. The analysis highlights Emotions such as injustice and anger that arise from unequal responsibility and workload distribution, which is in contrast to their feeling before group work, where they tended not to be bothered by such feelings. There is an unfair division of tasks where most of their group members are not responsible for doing their part, and they also contribute less to it. Participants

thought this was called a 'group assignment', but it felt more like an individual assignment because they were doing most of the work themselves. This is in line with [Hargreaves \(2001\)](#), who emphasizes that emotional geography can be shaped by physical distance or proximity created by shared goals and objectives or defensive attitudes that do not take into account the goals and objectives of others. [Sulistiyo et al.'s \(2023\)](#) study, focusing on EFL pre-service teachers' emotional geographies in their teaching practicum, also showed something similar, where participants experienced moral emotions created by differences in goals and disagreements on certain views. To avoid similar feelings of unfairness, they hope that the division of tasks in future group assignments will be carried out more fairly using random task distribution media. In addition, more supervision is needed from lecturers for each stage of their assignments to prevent negligence from their students.

In the socio-cultural dimension, the participants perceived that their interaction and cohesion in the group assignment could be affected by different socio-cultural aspects. Analysis highlights that the participants experienced several barriers in emotional disconnection due to several variations of academic passion, habit, attitude, personality, and specific cultural backgrounds, such as communication styles both before and during group work. The participants found it difficult to express their opinions and fears about having misunderstood communication. This shows the existence of socio-cultural emotions, which are described by [Hargreaves \(2001\)](#) as emotional geography, which is shaped by the proximity or distance created by differences related to cultural aspects. It is supported by [Sujiatmoko et al.'s \(2024\)](#) study, which focused on EFL teachers in the context of online assessment and illustrated how cultural aspects, namely passive communication habits in the classroom, can contribute to emotional frustration in the learning environment. Previous research by [Mänty et al. \(2020\)](#) supported this finding, which emphasized a reciprocal relationship between individual emotional experience and socioemotional interaction and the regulation associated with it. The emotions felt by the participants gave rise to a sense of obligation within them to force themselves to adapt, even though this conflicted with their introverted personalities. To avoid similar feelings of unfairness, they hope that the division of tasks in future group assignments will be carried out more fairly using random task distribution media. In addition, more supervision is needed from lecturers for each stage of their assignments to prevent negligence from their members.

The professional dimension shown in this study is regarding the professional dimension of group assignment; it turns mixed perception among the participants. The mutual learning expected by the participants is contrary to what they experience during group work. Emotions such as disappointment and not being appreciated arise due to inconsistencies in the way members carry out tasks with collaborative learning values. It is emphasized that this emotional dimension can be formed from the closeness and distance created from the understanding of the norms and practices of professionalism itself ([Hargreaves, 2001](#)). However, participants' positive emotions resulting from the appreciation and respect received from their peers and the lecturer indicate the importance of a supportive social atmosphere ([Mujab et al., 2023](#)), where social validation played an important role in shaping emotional experiences during the collaborative task. The future group work they desire is a group with cooperative and professional responsibility.

In the political dimension, power dynamics play a crucial role in group work, especially in the decision-making process. Participants' negative emotions, such as frustration and annoyance, can be formed due to the powerlessness that is created from the unbalanced dominant side of some members compared to other members. It is

In line with [Hargreaves' \(2001\)](#) framework that this emotional dimension can be caused by differences in power and status, which can influence interpersonal interactions. Feelings are not taken into consideration, and most decisions were made unilaterally by the dominant party, who tended not to listen to others, forming a sense of exclusion, which is in line with what they imagined before the group assignment began. In this case, the task completion process is not carried out through a proper joint discussion process, whereas in a group, a shared understanding is needed to achieve the expected task results. However, to gain a comprehensive understanding of team learning concerning emotions during teamwork, observations combined with team discussions are necessary ([Watzek et al., 2019](#)).

In future group work, the importance of good communication that ensures openness and equality of voice is what makes the group work they hope will run well. The analysis of the results reveals the way participants face the emotional issues they felt during their participation in group assignments. The results reveal that the participants made an adaptation effort by forcing themselves to change their natural personalities to adapt to the group dynamics. It is similar to the study by [Sujiatmoko et al. \(2024\)](#) showed that there were efforts from participants to adjust or get used to various problems and weaknesses related to their emotional geography to solve the issues. It suits the previous studies, in which the participant strives for various adjustments and also improves their adjustability skill to cope with the situations that are different from the participants' previous habits and elicit negative emotions such as self-doubt or insecurity ([Megawati et al., 2023](#); [Ubaidillah et al., 2023](#)).

Afterward, there was a recurring theme in the findings that participants ended up doing more work than other members to complete the group assignment. This burden leads to frustration, as they have to take the responsibility to complete the neglected task. At the same time, they are faced with the dilemma of maintaining group harmony and their grades or sacrificing fairness. From the perspective of Social Impact Theory, students who form their groups are more likely to help each other and cover the shortcomings of inactive members, because they feel more socially connected ([Rajaguru et al., 2020](#)).

Furthermore, regarding the problem of unbalanced assignment work, participants sought help from external authorities, namely their supervisors, who were the ones assessing the assignments. The participant felt injustice and was unwilling to get the same grade as the others. Finally, they reported the problem to request a grade adjustment for each member according to their level of involvement. This reflects the way diligent students report group members who merely 'ride along' (i.e., contribute nothing but get their names included) ([Yasin et al., 2022](#)).

This research was conducted in a university-level EFL context, using a narrative inquiry approach and in-depth interviews to explore students' emotional experiences in collaborative learning. One of the strengths of this study is that it allows for a deeper understanding of students' emotional realities in group work through narrative methods. However, this study also has limitations, including the fact that the data reflects a specific context that may not fully represent the general EFL learning context. Furthermore, the study's reliance solely on individual participant narratives may introduce bias.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study provide valuable insights for researchers, educators, and curriculum designers seeking to improve emotional well-being and collaboration in EFL classrooms. Based on the findings, all of those emotions can have a pedagogical impact on participant involvement, willingness to participate in future group work, and their negative perceptions of collaborative learning, such as fairness, ineffectiveness, and others. In previous research, the influence of emotions on the context of adult learning has been under-researched because they are believed to be able to control their emotions so as not to affect the learning process ([Mustafina et al., 2020](#)). Therefore, this study highlights the pedagogical implications of emotional factors in learning activities, especially group work. Thus, it emphasizes the importance of considering emotional aspects in improving learning to create more effective and inclusive group learning experiences for future research.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the emotional geography that is formed in EFL students' participation in group assignments. Based on the results of the data analysis, the researcher highlights the complex emotional geographies experienced by EFL students in their group assignment participation. Various negative emotions, such as frustration, anxiety, insecurity, and disappointment, arise due to several factors during the group work process. The factors include physical proximity or distance, unbalanced workload, socio-cultural differences, unappreciated efforts, and the domination of power. All of these emotions ultimately have a negative influence on participant involvement, willingness to participate in future group work, and their negative perceptions of collaborative

learning, such as fairness, ineffectiveness, and others. Besides, to cope with the emotions and discomfort of the situation, this study found that participants often use forced coping strategies to deal with these emotional challenges. Participants forced themselves to change their natural personalities to adapt to and tolerate the situations and challenges. For example, reluctantly taking on leadership roles, taking on excessive responsibility to ensure task completion, and even seeking external intervention from supervisors or lecturers to address fairness concerns. However, these coping mechanisms demonstrate a lack of true collaboration, which means they just prioritize task completion over meaningful and real teamwork. Interestingly, the findings found that all three participants preferred random group formation over self-selection. This was done to reduce emotional geography and group dynamics caused by familiarity or unfamiliarity.

Those findings have practical implications for EFL educators. They are expected to pay more attention to emotional dynamics in group assignments, such as ensuring equitable group and task distribution, encouraging interactive work and communication, and other aspects that mitigate the emotional issues. Furthermore, the theoretical implications of this study include the application of Hargreaves' emotional geography to students' experiences in collaborative learning, which has not been widely explored in previous research.

From the conclusion, it has several points that could be suggested for future research related to EFL students' emotional geographies and group assignment participation. First, since the focus of this study is limited to the five dimensions of emotional geography in group tasks, it is suggested that the focus be broader. Perhaps the focus could be expanded to other general learning, or from gender and personality differences, and could also investigate the effectiveness of various teaching strategies in reducing emotional challenges in group tasks. Then, regarding the data collection, which only used interviews as the research instrument, future studies are encouraged to employ multiple instruments to strengthen the results.

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