

Interaction and language development through group work: Indonesian EFL learners' perspectives at an Australian university

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Abstract

This study investigates how Indonesian EFL learners are supported by group work interactions during study abroad at an Australian university. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design, driven by the Interaction Hypothesis, the Output Hypothesis, and Sociocultural Theory. Data were collected from a questionnaire completed by 15 graduate students. The questionnaire consisted of 19 Likert items and three open-ended questions addressing performance, learning opportunities, and language comprehension. Open-ended responses were discussed qualitatively with little inference, while Likert-type results were summarized descriptively. Regular group work increased speaking opportunities, enhanced lexical acquisition through peer modeling and simple explanations, and encouraged metacognitive regulation, as well as boosting communicative confidence. However, perceived gains in complexity and accuracy were inconsistent, reflecting differing perspectives on corrective feedback, unequal psychological safety, and challenges arising from peer dominance and peer grouping. Maximum benefits may be obtained when roles equalize access to task scope, tasks require joint approval, feedback is delivered through self-respect-preserving scripts, brief planning–monitoring–evaluation checkpoints are inserted, and peer networks extend beyond nationality-based circles. This study explains how peer interactions are transformed by modified input, encouraged output, and mediated participation in a multilingual and multicultural higher education environment by centering lived experiences and identifying sociocultural moderators.

Keywords

Indonesian EFL learners, small-group interaction, study abroad, peer feedback, perceived language development

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INTRODUCTION

In First Language (L1), Second Language (L2), and Foreign Language (FL) contexts, interaction is considered the primary engine of language development. Interaction in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a crucial part of learning; learners process contextualized input and produce driven outcomes in real time, noticing differences, testing hypotheses, and restructuring the interlanguage through dialogic engagement (Gass & Mackey, 2014; Gor & Long, 2009). Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis emphasizes negotiation of meaning (such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and rephrasing) as a mechanism for making input comprehensible and salient. Swain's (2000) Output Hypothesis states that syntactic observation and processing are driven by production itself. The sociocultural perspective depicts development as mediated action within the Zone of Proximal Development, where more capable peers guide the beginner and where affect, identity, and self-esteem are important components of what is "thought" to be learned in interaction



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(Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Overall, these frameworks converge on a view of interaction as a dynamic nexus where cognitive, linguistic, and social processes co-assemble to foster development.

However, opportunities for authentic and spontaneous interaction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments, such as in Indonesia, are constrained by limited access to English outside the classroom and pedagogical traditions that emphasize accuracy over communication. These conditions often lead to low speaking confidence, error-avoidance behavior, and a reluctance to initiate conversations on their own. These patterns are reinforced by sociocultural norms that value politeness, respect, and harmony (Al Awlaqi and Ghazali, 2023; Alwahaby et al., 2022; Hanifa, 2018; and Nurfitriana et al., 2024). This perspective can lead to difficult actions and highly sensitive corrective feedback (CF) in peer-learning environments. This is true even when students prefer collaborative learning. Therefore, when Indonesian students transition to English-speaking universities, they may encounter differences in performance between their preparation that focuses on the types and requirements of academic discourse interactions, particularly in small group discussions, which are a common pedagogical format in English-speaking universities.

Group work presents a socio-affective challenge and linguistic opportunity in education abroad, such as in Australia. Tasks undertaken in small groups extend the cycle of input, output, and feedback, provide opportunities for experimentation, and offer responsive support. Confidence in expressing opinions, the ability to understand cultural criticism, and the ability to deviate from unfamiliar interaction standards are all prerequisites for this work. Empirical research shows that well-designed group interactions can enhance autonomy, engagement, and understanding of others' perspectives (Amalina & Musthafa, 2022; Kusuma, 2021; Liem et al., 2009; Nanda, 2019; Shih & Huang, 2020) as well as improve output and responsiveness (Harmer, 2015). It also helps develop language fluency, communication confidence, and intercultural development (Sato, 2013; Xu et al., 2019). However, these benefits are highly dependent on design and situation (Budzińska, 2024; Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2015; Mitchell, 2023; Nhan, 2024; Yang, 2016). Whether an interaction becomes a place of growth or inhibition seems to be determined by psychological safety, equality of participation, and common feedback routines (Alfares 2017; Jin, 2014).

Nevertheless, social network dynamics can limit the opportunities that a study abroad environment should provide. Opportunities for negotiation and uptake can be reduced by coalitions, unequal turn-taking, and peer dominance (Watanabe, 2008), while tendencies toward peer grouping and network homophily can reduce the diversity of linguistic input and pragmatic exposure (Carhill-Poza, 2015; Liem et al., 2009). Norms related to self-esteem, hierarchy, and harmony can make giving and receiving feedback more difficult, limit challenging steps, and influence who feels entitled to speak, how often, and with what right to question or correct peers (Al Awlaqi and Ghazali, 2023; Hanifa, 2018; Hanifa et al., 2024; and Nurfitriana et al., 2024). These observations suggest that group work is not just a type of work; it is a social and interactive space where linguistic growth, identity formation, and social integration occur simultaneously. Therefore, the value of group work for language development is shaped by who is speaking, how feedback is negotiated, and how learners understand peer interactions.

Despite this growing recognition of this duality, existing research has yet to comprehensively investigate how Indonesian EFL learners abroad understand specific interactional processes in which group work supports or constrains their language development. Most of the literature notes global or regional trends, often treating students in general terms, and offering limited and detailed descriptions of Indonesian sociocultural scripts, such as respect and humility. This can hinder open, challenging steps and corrective feedback, even when students hope to collaborate in learning (Hanifa, 2018; Kurniawan, 2024; Kusuma, 2021; Nurfitriana et al., 2024). Though previous studies rightly recognize the benefits of immersion (Mitchell, 2023; Yang, 2016), it rarely examined how learners themselves interpret the micro-processes that link peer interactions to perceived progress across interrelated domains, namely learning opportunities, understanding, and monitoring. Moreover, interactional variables known to shape outcomes, such as group composition, task design, feedback routines, and psychological safety, remain under-researched in Indonesian student groups abroad, leaving institutions with limited evidence for designing linguistically and culturally

responsive, productive group work practices (Amalina & Musthafa, 2022; Carhill–Poza, 2015; Jin, 2014; Kusuma, 2021; Nanda, 2019; Shih & Huang, 2020; Watanabe, 2008). This represents an empirical gap regarding the study abroad experience for Indonesian students and a practical gap regarding how group work can be better structured to support equitable participation, feedback acceptance, and student confidence.

The current study addresses the work experiences of Indonesian language learners are embedded within established interactional and sociocultural frameworks in SLA. The Interaction Hypothesis, the Outcome Hypothesis, and Sociocultural Theory are the foundations of this study. Studies conducted by Gass and Mackey (2014), Gor & Long (2009), Lantolf & Thorne (2006), Long (1996), Swain (2000), and Vygotsky & Cole (1979) emphasize three interrelated domains: learning opportunities, language comprehension, and language performance. The present study uses these theoretical perspectives as analytical lenses to interpret learners' perceptions of such things as exposure, modeling, negotiation, feedback orientation, scaffolding, confidence, fluency, accuracy, and emotional security. They do not aim to measure SLA constructs directly. Thus, four outcomes are offered by this study: (1) an empirical explanation specific to Indonesia regarding opportunities and constraints in peer interaction; (2) a theory-based analytical mapping of how learners view some SLA mechanisms, such as modified input, encouraged output, scaffolding, and negotiation of meaning; (3) an interpretive explanation of sociocultural boundary conditions, such as self-esteem, hierarchy, and homophily, that may influence interactions.

This study aims to answer the following question: How do Indonesian EFL learners perceive the role of small group interaction in improving or hindering their English language skills while they study abroad at an Australian university?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore how small-group interaction supports Indonesian EFL learners' development during study abroad. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it can reveal subjective and complex experiences that are context-sensitive (Dornyei, 2007). Qualitative designs provide a broad and in-depth picture of how students understand their involvement in group discussions and how these interactions influence their language growth because the research focuses on the sociocultural, emotional, and interpersonal aspects of peer interaction. In other words, this design prioritizes participants' language and emic categories while allowing for guided conceptual interpretations that align with the research framework. The data consisted of questionnaire responses aligned with the research constructs, which include performance, comprehension/monitoring, and learning opportunities. In the study abroad context, this design is well-suited to studying learner agency, identity negotiation, affective responses, and interactional dynamics.

Participants

This study involved fifteen Indonesian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) enrolled in a postgraduate program at a research-intensive university in Australia. The sampling objectives were students who (a) were willing to reflect on the processes and outcomes of interactions and (b) had recent group work experience in an English classroom environment. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 32, comprising 9 women and 6 men. Participants came from a variety of academic fields, such as Social Sciences, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), Business, Environmental Studies, Planning & Policy, exhibiting differences in academic goals, group work formats, and language use. All participants self-reported their English proficiency with an IELTS score of at least 6.0 (approximately CEFR B2–C1). Participants had been living in Australia for between 6 and 14 months at the time of data collection, and most had participated in several group-based assignments in various locations.

Unlike statistical generalization, the adequacy of qualitative research is assessed based on the strength of the information and thematic adequacy. Indonesian EFL learners in the same institutional context are a relatively identical group in terms of the research objectives. This group

also has conceptually rich and task-relevant questions. Typically, these features allow for robust pattern recognition with a small sample. We observed a decrease in results during the analysis, namely, few to no new codes and stable theme boundaries. We also observed that additional cases expanded the core thematic structure rather than changed it. Consequently, the final sample size ($n = 15$) demonstrated a balance between depth and scope within the boundaries of the target context.

Research Instrument

Data were collected through a theory-based questionnaire consisting of twenty-two items: three open-ended questions, 19 Likert-scale statements (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The core construct of SLA consists of three analytical domains. Firstly, learning Opportunities, which include exposure, peer modeling, and pre-production planning. These domains are based on the pedagogical rationale for group work and the interaction hypothesis (Gor & Long, 2009; Harmer, 2015). Then, language comprehension as monitoring, negotiating meaning, and feedback orientation is based on Sociocultural Theory and the Interaction Hypothesis (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Lastly, language Performance is about things like fluency, complexity, accuracy, confidence, and emotional security which is based on Outcome Hypothesis and a sociocultural perspective on participation and influence (Swain, 2000). Within the 19 Likert items, there are four items identifying interactional opportunities, five items identifying processes related to outcomes, another five identifying sociocultural mediations, and the last five identifying pedagogical features of group work.

All 19 Likert-scale statements and three open-ended questions are included in the complete questionnaire, which can be found in Appendix A. In the three open-ended questions, participants were asked to describe (i) the benefits of group interaction for language development, (ii) the supporting factors that enable effective participation, and (iii) the barriers that hinder language use in group settings. To avoid difficulties unrelated to the construct, all items were written in easy-to-understand academic English. The instrument is grounded in empirical literature and contextually relevant to the research setting.

The quality of the instrument was determined through expert judgements. Two EFL experts with experience working with Indonesian learners assessed the relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness of each item. Based on their comments, the researchers refined the wording, softened overly strong wording, reworded some questions to make them more engaging, and added brief examples to provide a better understanding of each item's purpose. This process improved readability before administration and supported content validity.

Data Collection Procedure

To ensure accessibility, data protection, and participant confidentiality, data collection was conducted through a self-administered online questionnaire hosted on a secure digital platform. This method was chosen because it was flexible, accessible, and able to reach participants across time zones and schedules. At the university, Indonesian student communities and academic networks distributed the questionnaire link. Respondents were first directed to a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, their right to participate, data use, and confidentiality protocols to ensure open participation. Participants could not continue completing the questionnaire until they confirmed their consent digitally.

All fifteen purposively selected participants answered the questionnaire over two days. The asynchronous online format allowed students to reflect on their experiences and respond at their own pace. This was invaluable given the emotional and cognitive depth required for some of the open-ended questions. Participants were asked to respond in either English or Bahasa Indonesia, depending on their comfort and fluency. Researchers carefully translated the responses written in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure semantic consistency while preserving important cultural nuances and original intent. This approach allowed participants to share their opinions in a more authentic manner.

Data Analysis

Following this study's descriptive nature, the analysis was conducted in two coordinated streams. First, a descriptive synthesis of 19 Likert-type items was created, divided into three categories: learning opportunities, language comprehension, and language performance. For each item, frequencies and percentages were calculated to identify patterns of support (e.g., opportunity/exposure; supervision/clarification; self-confidence) and areas of ambivalence (e.g., lexical risk-taking, perceived complexity/accuracy, emotional safety, corrective feedback from peers). These numerical summaries did not employ inferential statistics but were used extensively as contextual markers to guide qualitative interpretation and to indicate areas of convergence or divergence.

Second, a content-oriented, low-inference method was used to conduct a qualitative descriptive analysis of the open-ended narratives. Collecting original and translated responses completed the corpus. Responses were then read and reread for broader understanding, and analytical memos were recorded. Line-by-line open coding of the content appeared to be conducted, prioritizing participants' own words, such as "confidence," "no pressure," "dominance," "stuck on grammar," "proper conversation partner," and "body language." Similar codes were categorized into descriptive categories that corresponded to, but were not limited to, these three domains. Exposure and modeling, planning and reflection, monitoring and clarification, ambivalence of corrective feedback, equality of turn-taking, lexical risk-taking, and psychological safety are some examples of these categories. These categories were then combined into simple language themes that summarized recurring patterns while remaining close to participants' expressions. The excerpts represent both typical and deviant/negative cases.

Coding was conducted in four analytic steps to make the qualitative procedure more transparent: (1) finding meaningful units within each open-ended response, (2) creating initial descriptive codes, (3) grouping similar codes into broader categories, and (4) synthesizing these categories into themes related to the three analytic domains. Appendix B shows an example coding flow of how selected raw comments moved from participant responses to codes, categories, and themes. By making the interpretive movement from data to themes clearer, this process aims to increase reliability.

Each stage of this research involved researcher reflection due to the nature of interpersonal and cultural interactions within Indonesian learning groups. Theories about interaction "best practices," cultural beliefs about hierarchy and self-worth, and personal relationships with the learning group were recorded in a reflection journal maintained by the lead researcher. To identify potential biases, these notes were reviewed during coding meetings. They also provided information about alternative interpretations, such as interpreting "silence" as appearing to be intentional or polite rather than absent. An audit trail revealed the components of reflection that influenced analytical choices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Three analytical domains were used to present the results: Learning Opportunities, Language Comprehension, and Language Performance. Interpretations focused on participants' experiences rather than measurable language improvement because Likert-scale data were used descriptively. To demonstrate response patterns, item-level distributions are maintained in Tables 1–3. Furthermore, the included qualitative interpretations explain how participants perceived group interactions in relation to their English language development.

Chances of Learning

Peer modeling, preparation before speaking, opportunities for feedback, and strategic communication are all part of this domain. According to the seven items listed in Table 1, participants generally viewed group discussions as a beneficial setting for receptive and productive language practice. However, participant responses also indicated that learning opportunities were not equally available in all group situations.

Table 1. Participants' Responses in Terms of Chances of Learning

Item No.	Statement (in Phrase Form)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Not Sure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	Learning English better through peer interaction	-	-	13.3%	40%	46.7%
4	Acquiring new vocabulary/language structures during group interaction	-	6.7%	26.7%	40%	26.7%
8	Receiving simplified explanations of unfamiliar language items	6.7%	-	26.7%	33.3%	33.3%
10	Using uncommon words or terms during group discussions	-	33.3%	20%	33.3%	13.3%
11	Asking peers about confusing language features	6.7%	-	6.7%	60%	26.7%
14	Using phrases or expressions heard from group members	-	-	40%	46.7%	13.3%
18	Organizing ideas before speaking during discussions	-	-	40%	46.7%	13.3%

Participants perceived group discussions as a space where they could listen to their peers' creation, gain an understanding of conversational vocabulary, prepare ideas, and reuse phrases in subsequent turns. For example, one participant said that group work helped them learn "conversational vocabulary and basic conversational structures—how to open, develop, and close a turn," which encouraged more coherent participation. Other participants noted that repeated interactions helped them "clarify key points," "practice spoken and academic English," and made speaking feel "more spontaneous and less like a classroom exercise."

The data do not indicate that group work automatically enhances learning. Rather, when given sufficient exposure, opportunities to speak, and time to prepare their ideas, participants found group work beneficial. Comments about turn-taking are the most obvious example of this. While some participants reported that group discussions provided "consistent opportunities to practice," others noted that when "peers were too dominant" or they couldn't "get a chance to speak," their progress was hindered. Therefore, the availability of appropriate opportunities to participate depends on the learning value derived from group work. Group work here does not serve as a guarantee of development. Rather, it is more akin to a learning environment shaped by access to turn-taking, peer support, and a manageable pace of discussion.

Language Comprehension

Participants' perceptions of peer monitoring, clarification, negotiation of meaning, and feedback were investigated in this domain. Table 2 shows that participants demonstrated a strong awareness of their own language use, frequently checking whether their peers understood their intentions, and frequently seeking clarification when they failed to understand others. At the same time, peers' responses to correction were more varied, indicating disagreement with explicit corrective feedback.

According to participants, comprehension is an interactive process. They said they check to see if their peers understand what they are saying, ask for clarification, correct themselves if they make mistakes, and use peers' responses as signals to change. One participant said, "I check to see if people understand my main idea," while another said, "They pay attention and adjust based on their reactions." These comments indicate that participants see group interaction as helping them discern meaning and improve communication during discussions.

Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of interpersonal cues. They were able to maintain conversation and feel understood by using open posture, eye contact, and nodding as supportive body language. Moreover, access to more experienced peers appeared to be beneficial because it provided them with opportunities to use better phrases and gentle corrections. The results

Table 2. Participants' Responses in Terms of Language Comprehension

Item No.	Statement (in Phrase Form)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Not Sure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
5	Being aware of own language mistakes during peer interaction	-	-	6.7%	53.3%	40%
6	Checking if peers understand conveyed meaning	-	-	-	60%	40%
7	Asking peers for clarification when confused	-	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%	53.3%
9	Talking to oneself to aid understanding or memory	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%	40%	13.3%
11	Asking for clarification on confusing language features	6.7%	-	6.7%	60%	26.7%
12	Self-correcting after noticing language errors	-	-	6.7%	60%	33.3%
13	Receiving peer corrections or confirmation questions	-	26.7%	26.7%	20%	26.7%

suggest that understanding support is not only linguistic but also interpersonal: learners rely on peer reactions, clarification routines, and the emotional tone of interactions to maintain understanding.

To avoid repetition to the section on Language Performance, the issue of confidence—accuracy was only discussed in the context of comprehension and monitoring. Participants acknowledged that monitoring can sometimes be difficult. Some said they struggled to “get caught up in thinking about whether my grammar is correct,” struggled to find the right words, or struggled to understand different accents. Corrective feedback can be helpful when given gently, privately, or as a suggestion; however, when given abruptly or in public, it can be discouraging. Consequently, the results demonstrate a tension between attending and inhibiting. Although monitoring helps learners become more aware of language use, excessive concern about correctness can interfere with their comprehension and reduce their willingness to participate.

Language Performance

Participants' perceptions of fluency, complexity, accuracy, confidence, and emotional comfort were discussed in this domain. The benefits of speaking opportunities, reflection, and confidence are shown in Table 3, but the responses to complexity and accuracy were more cautious. Compared to the accuracy or complexity of formal language, this pattern suggests that participants more readily perceived increased confidence and fluency.

Table 3. Participants' Responses in Terms of Language Performance

Item No.	Statement (in Phrase Form)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Not Sure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
2	Having more opportunities to use English in group discussions	-	6.7%	6.7%	33.3%	53.3%
3	Reflecting on language production through peer interaction	-	6.7%	6.7%	40%	46.7%
15	Expressing more complex language after peer assistance	6.7%	6.7%	46.7%	13.3%	26.7%
16	Using more accurate language forms after discussing difficulties	6.7%	-	60%	26.7%	6.7%
17	Feeling more confident speaking English after group discussions	-	-	20%	53.3%	26.7%
19	Feeling less pressure using English with peers than with lecturer	-	26.7%	26.7%	20%	26.7%

Group discussions were associated with more frequent English use, increased confidence, and a greater desire to speak. Participants reported experiencing "better fluency and increased vocabulary," "practical ways to use English confidently," and increased self-confidence after speaking with peers. A supportive group atmosphere was crucial to these perceptions. One participant stated that "the lack of peer pressure allowed me to practice freely," while another emphasized the importance of having confidence and letting the discussion unfold.

Rather than repeating the previous points about grammar anxiety and peer dominance in detail, this section synthesizes them as conditions that shape perceived performance. With supportive peers, clear opportunities to speak, and opportunities to make mistakes, participants' confidence appeared to increase. However, their perceived improvement in complexity and accuracy remained unclear. Some participants remained uncertain whether group work helped them use more accurate or complex forms, particularly when they over-monitored grammar, struggled to remember vocabulary, or received inadequate feedback. This suggests that, rather than measurable improvements in accuracy or complexity, group interaction led to improvements in confidence, fluency, and participation.

Overall, the results indicate that participants enjoyed working in groups when three conditions were met: engaging speaking opportunities, supportive peer interactions, and feedback that did not compromise self-esteem. Therefore, rather than being direct evidence of language development outcomes, the descriptive Likert-type data and open-ended responses should be interpreted as evidence of perceived opportunities and constraints. Learners viewed group work in all three domains as a place for practice, confidence, monitoring, exposure, and clarification. However, these benefits did not come instantly. Among the factors that may have diminished the perceived benefits of group interaction were peer dominance, unequal turn-taking, self-esteem-threatening correction, and excessive use of grammar.

Discussion

This study investigates how Indonesian EFL learners perceive small-group interactions while studying abroad, whether they help or hinder their English language progress. Rather than claiming objectively measured language improvement, this discussion interprets the experiences shared by participants based on the descriptive and perception-based nature of the data. Results indicate that participants generally value group work as a source of exposure, practice, clarification, and confidence. However, they also believe its benefits depend on the interaction and socio-affective context.

Participants initially viewed group work as a productive setting where modeling, exposure, and planned language use could occur. This interactionist view of language learning, particularly the role of comprehensible input, negotiation, and forced output (Gass & Mackey, 2014; Long, 1996; Swain, 2000), aligns with their descriptions of learning peer phrases, reusing useful words, and organizing ideas before speaking. The current findings should not be taken as evidence that these SLA mechanisms emerge in a measurable progression. Rather, the data suggest that learners interpreted their group work experiences in accordance with these theoretical mechanisms. This distinction is important because this study relies on learner perspectives rather than direct observations or measurements of linguistic development before and after instruction.

Second, participants' comments indicated that clarification, confirmation, self-correction, and peer feedback supported understanding and monitoring. These findings support previous research showing that interactions in the classroom and abroad can enable feedback, self-improvement, and communication adjustments (Budzińska, 2024; Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2015; Nhan, 2024; Sato, 2013; Xu et al., 2019). Indonesian students view these processes as socially conditioned. Comments are not simply perceived as helpful or unhelpful; their value depends on how they are delivered. Abrupt or public corrections can threaten self-confidence and reduce risk-taking, but feedback given in the form of suggestions or privately is more acceptable. This study aligns with debates about the preference for maintaining self-esteem and socio-affective sensitivity in collectivist learning (Alfares, 2017; Ilmi & Degaf, 2024), and it also resonates with Rochma et al. (2024),

who reported that when used in speaking courses with structured peer engagement, peer assessment can help students' language skills, learner autonomy, and metacognitive awareness.

Third, the results indicate that group work supports confidence and fluency, but not necessarily accuracy and complexity. Even if learners are unsure about formal language improvement, this pattern helps explain why they value discussion. Peer-based cues of support, repeated opportunities to speak, and unpressured interactions appear to increase willingness to speak. This is consistent with international research on collaborative interactions and communicative confidence (Budzińska (2024; Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2015; Nhan, 2024). Nastiti (2023) suggests that speaking in a foreign language can be perceived as intimidating and associated with foreign language anxiety, especially when learners are required to communicate in an open social environment. Conversely, accuracy and complexity appear to depend more on clear feedback, sufficient processing time, and opportunities to develop or revise language. Therefore, opportunities alone are not enough; learners need systematic support to transform engagement into more controlled and confident production.

Fourth, this study shows that equality of participation is an important factor influencing how students enjoy group work. Participants have opportunities to practice, test their expressions, and receive reactions from their peers when turn-taking is balanced. Quieter participants have fewer opportunities to speak and experience fewer developmental benefits when dominant peers control the conversation. This verifies previous research emphasizing that task design, participation structures, and the socio-affective climate are crucial for producing group interaction outcomes (Abbasi & Anthony, 2024; González Reséndez, 2024; Li & Hu, 2024; Nhan, 2024). Equitable access to public speaking may be particularly important for Indonesian students abroad because norms of politeness, harmony, and respect can make interruptions or explicit disagreements more difficult.

While these findings have pedagogical implications, they should be understood as theory-based recommendations rather than as direct data. First, group work assignments in English-speaking universities could benefit from clearer participation structures, such as opportunities for quieter students to contribute, responsibility for turn-taking, or role rotation. Such structures could help distribute speaking opportunities more equitably and prevent a few dominant speakers from controlling the discussion. Furthermore, feedback practices should be culturally and emotionally sensitive. Learners can engage in negotiation and feedback without feeling embarrassed in public by using prepared structures for clarification, polite disagreement, and suggestion-based correction. Third, students who need to organize their ideas before speaking in English may benefit from brief periods of time to prepare for discussions. According to interactionist and sociocultural perspectives, learning opportunities are shaped by negotiation, outcomes, direction, and participation (Harmer, 2015; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Long, 1996; Swain, 2000; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Group composition and input diversity have additional implications. Grouping with fellow citizens can provide a sense of emotional security and shared cultural understanding; however, it can also limit exposure to a variety of pragmatic and linguistic resources. However, groups with mixed backgrounds can increase exposure to diverse uses of English. Conversely, if learners feel insecure or socially disconnected, this can also lead to anxiety. Therefore, these findings suggest that joining groups with linguistic diversity and a sense of interpersonal security can be beneficial for students. This interpretation is in line with research on social networks, study-abroad learning, and interactional opportunities (Carhill-Poza, 2015; Heinzmann et al., 2024; Mitchell, 2023; Octavina et al., 2025; Paradowski et al., 2021; Resch & Amorim, 2021; Yang, 2016).

Finally, the findings of this study are still limited by the current situation. The data are based on the perceptions of Indonesian EFL learners at a single Australian university. Consequently, the study did not find direct evidence of measurable improvements in fluency, accuracy, complexity, or long-term language development. When peers provide support, fair participation, and self-esteem-sensitive feedback, participants can reasonably be said to find group interactions beneficial. Combining perceptual data with classroom observations, interaction analysis, stimulated recall, or ongoing measurement of language development across courses, disciplines, and study abroad contexts could expand these findings.

CONCLUSION

In light of the findings, this study describes group work in a classroom abroad as a potentially productive environment but sensitive to perceived language development design. It is not an engine that guarantees measured improvement. Students demonstrated numerous opportunities to use English and clear monitoring and clarification behaviors, such as checking their understanding, noting language problems, and self-correcting. These experiences suggest that peer interactions can enable modified input, encouraged output, and structured participation. Because this study relied on the students' own accounts, these patterns should be considered perceived opportunities rather than direct evidence of objectively measured language improvement. Participants' development was also constrained by several barriers, particularly related to complexity and accuracy. These included varying psychological safety, uneven lexical risk-taking, limited speaking opportunities, and ambivalence toward corrective feedback from peers. Participants' experiences suggest that group work was perceived as more beneficial when learners had equal access to turn-taking, emotionally safe opportunities to contribute, and feedback provided in a manner that fostered self-esteem. This was influenced by sociocultural norms about self-esteem, harmony, and respect.

Therefore, rather than empirically tested solutions, this study offers theory-based pedagogical recommendations. These include role rotation to increase access, tasks requiring negotiation to enhance interaction, self-esteem-preserving feedback scripts to distinguish meaning-checking from form-focused prompts, brief plan-monitor-evaluate checkpoints to enhance metacognitive awareness, and carefully structured group composition to balance interpersonal safety with language learning. These recommendations should not be taken as predetermined outcomes indicated by the current data; rather, they should be considered as implications of relevant SLA theory and participants' perceptions. This study cannot confirm improvements in fluency, complexity, accuracy, or long-term language development due to its perception-based design, small cohort in one setting, and descriptive Likert-type data. There is no evidence in this study that group work actually translates exposure and monitoring into measurable language gains. Rather, as these findings suggest, Indonesian EFL learners in this context view small-group interactions as beneficial because they provide opportunities for conversation, support comprehension and monitoring, increase confidence when participation is equitable, and provide culturally sensitive feedback. Classroom observations, micro-analysis of interactions, longitudinal performance sampling, and design-based or quasi-experimental research should be conducted to test these possibilities.

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