ENGAGING STUDENT-RESEARCHERS IN WRITING UP RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, Community of Practice (CofP) theory has been myriad investigated in some different contexts. However, in the educational field, it still remains sparsely to investigate this concept applied as a method in an EFL context to engage students in a research proposal project. To fill this gap, this participatory action research (PAR) attempts to examine the way of a CofP engages the students in writing up a research project proposal in English education department. Five recruited participants of the student teachers who follow a CofP were observed. The data were collected by using interview and photographs. The photographs were analysed by using SHOWED analysis (Wang, 1999). Then, the whole data were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results showed that the students in CofP were engaged in writing a proposal by (1) writing proposal as a shared domain, (2) members' relationship in student-researcher club (SRC), and (3) joint activities in SRC. This study provides the empirical insights into the contributions of CofP toward student-researchers' proposal writings.

Keywords: *writing up research project proposal, community of practice (CofP), participatory action research (PAR)*

INTRODUCTION

A research project is a part of undergraduate and postgraduate academic programme requirements for awarding academic degrees (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). It is a scientific and systematic investigation to acquire new knowledge, information, facts, appropriate solution to a problem, deduce theory and generalisation (Juni, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2019). In other words, conducting the research will contribute to

the graduation as the outcome of learning in a higher education in particular.

Before conducting the research, the student teachers are required prepare the research proposal and frame their research ideas to gain approval from a faculty committee through intensive supervision to undertake their study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) conceptualize a research proposal as a detailed description of a proposed study designed to carry out an investigation in a particular context. This notion, as a part of the academic writing, aims to prepare student teachers for academic tasks such as thesis writing (Hamp-Lyons, 1988). Hence, it is a crucial skill for completing degree programmes (Ordena & Burgess, 2017).

Writing up a research proposal might be a challenging task for student teachers in a higher education. Firstly, they may need to assess different literacy backgrounds to pick an appropriate and current topic, to think why selected topic is worthy of close investigation, to read suitable sources (e.g., books and published refereed/peer-reviewed articles) extensively and to do negotiating process with their supervisors, and these tasks require students to manage their own time (Widodo, 2013). For this reason, to address this above-mentioned issue, SRC was introduced. It was a community of practice consisting of student teachers who were writing up a research proposal. Also, this club would provide students with a learning platform to discuss, to share and exchange their knowledge, to give feedback, for example. Moreover, as a part of participatory action research (PAR), all aspects of this club were in negotiation.

In the research context, the community of practice (CofP) introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) has been extensively used as a theoretical framework. For instance, a previous research examined how a CofP framework was distinguished from other sociolinguistic and social psychological frameworks (Holmes & Meyerholff, 1999). A study observed the development of non-traditional learners in a networked learning community based on CofP theory (Guldberg & Pilkington, 2006). While most of the studies have explored the issues applied CofP concept (e.g. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Roberts, 2006; Pyrko, et al, 2017; Tajeddin et al., 2023; Teng & Bui, 2022), there is less attention to the method used in writing up a proposal based on CofP perspective. To fill this void, the present study aims explore how CofP theory in a Student-Researcher Club (SRC) fosters student engagement in writing research proposals..

METHODOLOGY
Research Design

This current study involved collaboration and negotiation processes between the researchers and participants in writing up research project proposals. They engaged in designing CofP activities such deciding place and time for gathering and making the community rules (Ramdani et al, 2022). Therefore, participatory action research (PAR) was one of the ways to develop the CofP. Reason and Bradbury (2001) explained PAR as a participatory, democratic process concerning with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. PAR brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Yanto, et al, 2022). In this CofP, both

researchers and participants encouraged one with another in order to accomplish their proposal projects by sharing their knowledge about the proposal, discussing the problems, sharing the sources, doing peer editing, motivating each other.

Setting and Participants

This research has been conducted in a state university, located in West Java, Indonesia because of two considerations: (1) this university has been focusing on encouraging the students to engage in doing research through CofP, and (2) the first author is a student teacher in this university while the second and the third authors are the lecturers who helped the first one in planning, analyzing, and presenting data in this study. To proceed with this program, we required four months to be executed. In this study, purposive sampling was used, which was common in a qualitative study (Duff, 2008). A small proportion of the participants aimed to obtain an in-depth examination of the issue we investigated (Cohen et al., 2017; Ivankova & Cresswell, 2009). Thus, we recruited five student teachers out of 15 members of CofP to become the participants of this study. To protect the participants' confidentiality, all of them were given pseudonyms (Wang et al., 2024). Here is a profile of participants.

Table 1. List of Participants

No.	Participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Description
1.	Pipi	Female	21	She had the background knowledge concerned to a case study.
2.	Alfa	Male	22	He focused on the narrative inquiry design.
3.	Nova	Female	22	The case study about the pre-service teacher was her investigation.
4.	Iwan	Male	22	The case study was accomplished by him.
5.	Ani	Female	22	She used the case study as research design in her research.

They were undergraduate students between the ages of 20 and 22 from English education department. They were in the seventh semester who were taking the seminar proposal course and writing a research proposal. Before this fieldwork was conducted, we arranged a meeting with all of the participants to join the CofP.

Procedures

Inspired by the current work on PAR (Widodo, 2016; Yanto et al., 2022), the design of this participatory action research study was based on CofP (Wenger, 2011) and peer tutoring (Falchikov, 2001), and it was applied as follows:

Table 2. Stages of Student-researcher Club

Stages	Details	
	Community of Practice	Peer Tutoring
Stage 1: Recruiting members	Recruiting members having similar domain (writing up research proposal)	Recruiting members having same level (class or year group, equal status)
Stage 2: Introduction	Introducing the student-researcher club (background, aims, the activities, member role, and setting)	Introducing the role of members
Stage 3: Negotiating process	Discussing the student-researcher club activities proposed (background, aims, the activities, member role, and setting)	Discussing members' role (fixed or changed-role).
Stage 4: Activities / practices	Doing activities/practices in negotiated role and setting	Sharing sources, knowledge about proposal and experiences in supervising, discussing member's problems, doing peer tutoring, and motivating one another
Stage 5: Reflection	Doing the reflection	Reflecting to what members have done whether it is effective or not.

Data Collection

The empirical data was collected using two instruments. First, we used the semi-structured interview because this kind of interview was intended to delve deeper into what the participants felt and thought after joining the club (Harley & Bradley, 2009). In this interview, we developed the instruments to examine how the student teachers were engaged in CofP when writing research proposal for their undergraduate thesis (Richards in Heigham & Crocker, 2009). The interview data was sound recorded using the digital recording to generate more contextual data, to gather richer data, and to do careful micro-interaction and thematic analyses (DuFon 2002; Fetterman 2010). Then, it was listened, shaped, communicated with an interpretive intent, reconstructed and built for the credibility (see Widodo, 2014). Second, we also used the photograph. It aimed to capture an activity in the student-researcher club. Additionally, it supported the reflection process as part of action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1986).

Data Analysis

The data from the interview were transcribed and reviewed. While the photograph data were analysed using photovoice analysis (Wang, 1999) or named as SHOWED analysis. SHOWED is an abbreviation for several questions. These are (a) what is seen here? (Describe what the eyes see in the photo), (b) what is

really happening? (The unseen "story" behind the photo), (c) how does this relate to our lives? (Or my life personality), (d) why are things this way? , (e) how could this image educate people? , (f) what can I do about it? (What will I or we do about it?). Then, the whole data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The thematic analysis aims to classify meanings based on themes; it is an analytical tool for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). This analysis consists of several stages as follows: (a) familiarization with data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes among codes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the final report (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the data were categorized and coded based on recurring themes, which represents datasets relevant to specific research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data thematically, three emerging themes were identified: (1) writing proposal as a shared domain, (2) members' relationship in SRC, and (3) joint activities in the student-researcher club. These general themes indicate how the student-researcher club engages the students in writing up a research project proposal.

Writing Proposal as a Shared Domain of Interest

A community of practice has its own identity named as a shared domain of interest involving the members of CofP (Wenger, 2011). In the student-researcher club, the students learned to understand how to write the proposal collaboratively.

They developed their knowledge about proposals. It came from their same interests in writing up the proposal. This interest is based on several general reasons. Some students remarked the following:

> **Excerpts 1**
>
> *"Why did you decide to join the student-researcher club (SRC)?"* (Researcher's Question)
>
> *"I followed the student-researcher club because I needed the guidance from the peers, and I thought it would be more difficult to do the task by myself. Then, because I had limited knowledge about research".* (Alfa, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)
>
> *"I decided to join the student researcher club because I felt that the student-researcher club has many positive things. Moreover, I was a beginner who did not have any ideas about proposal, I thought it could help me write the proposal".* (Pipi, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)
>
> *"Basically, I was a student who has not known much about research. There was discussion activity about research and how to write the proposal correctly, so I thought the student-researcher club would help me for solving my lack of knowledge. Also, I thought it was valuable".* (Nova, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

The data showed that the students' interest is based on two considerations. They followed the SRC because they had limited

knowledge about the proposal, and they needed friends for discussing the proposal. These reasons motivated them to engage in the student-researcher club. The first motivation for joining the club was limited knowledge. Researchers (Tajeddin et al., 2023; Teng & Bui, 2022; Wenger, 2011) have contended that the members of CofP have differently shared competence. In other words, some of them had sufficient prior knowledge dealing with how to write the proposal while others could not do it. For this reason, they supported one with another to fulfil their limitations.

The next consideration is students' needs toward friends for sharing. The interaction with peers can result in the development of cognitive or intellectual skills or to increase knowledge and understanding (Falchikov, 2001; Ramdani, 2023). Piaget (1971) emphasized that cooperation between peers is like to encourage the real exchange of thought and discussion. Those notions show that sharing with peers is valuable and help them complete their research proposals. Consequently, the students within similar goal learned how they finished their proposal tasks acceptably and systematically to pick themselves passing the proposal examination.

Members' Relationship in the SRC

As a CofP, SRC also consists of members' relationship which appeared since the students negotiated and agreed with having the commitment to learning collaboratively. This relationship was built by the members' having same interest in writing the proposal that engaged them emotionally. Below are the data how some students argued dealing with their relationships:

Excerpts 2

"How close are you with all the members of the student-researcher club?" (Researcher's Question)

"Because all members are my friend, there is not social distance among us. I think I am close to them. It is close because when I shared the problem or asked something to them, I did not feel awkward. I always talked with them once or twice a week in the meeting. Then, I almost communicated with them when I felt stuck in writing proposal, and it could be every day". (Nova, Semi-structured Interview, 4th January 2018, Authors' Translation)

"I am close with the members because I always asked them when I felt stuck. I also attended the meeting three times a month and I communicated with them using social media every day". (Ani, Semi-structured Interview, 9th January 2018, Authors' Translation)

"I am close enough to all members. They were intended to help me. It showed from how one of them wanted to lend me the laptop for writing the proposal, gave me guidance, motivated me, and I often interacted with them twice a week in a meeting. Sometimes, I chat with the members in social media".(Ridwan, Semi-structured Interview, 4th January 2018, Authors' Translation)

First, the data showed that they interacted with all of the members freely without being clumsiness because they had the equal status. The diversified status among individuals influenced the social distance which can decrease the similarity

in attitudes between two individuals (Hipp & Perrin, 2007). Hence, the way they communicated was same to one with another, and it created the good relationship among them.

Second, the data showed that their relationships were formed by their mutual engagements which can be seen from how they held the meeting in certain times and places (e.g. a campus, one of the member's house, and a cafe) such as in Photos 1 below.

Photos 1: Gathering at member's house and campus

In addition, it can be found from how they were in contact with using online media as an alternative for their limited times to meet each other directly. Wenger (1998 cited in Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999) contended that the basis of the relationship that makes a CofP is a mutual engagement which typically involves a regular interaction. He (1998) claimed this mutual engagement as an analogy: The mutual engagement is like people who work together in policy units typically interact regularly: casually, as they pass in the corridor or share morning tea; intensively, in pairs or small groups to discuss particular projects; and, in a unit, comprehensively, as a large group which meets once a week to discuss more general issues (p. 76).

Those situations occurred in this CofP as the implementation of members' mutuality. Mutuality in doing a collaborative task is one of the important factors for creating a collaborative learning atmosphere and leading to the success of collaborative work (Gratton, 2019; Yang, 2014). In brief, they maintained their relationships with their communications carried out frequently which support them to reach their targets in completing the proposal project.

Joint Activities in the SRC

The members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems in short a shared practice (Dingel & Punti, 2023; Wenger, 2011). As well in this CofP, the students participated in joint activities facilitated them in learning proposal. It entails several activities, these are:

Sharing Experiences and References

These activities gave the students opportunity to distribute their understandings related to the proposal.

Here, they told what they experienced in the supervising process with their supervisors, and they were not forbidden for expressing their good or bad experiences.

Excerpts 3

"What are the activities that you have joined in the student-researcher club?" (Researchers' Question)

"I joined peer supervising in writing proposal, sharing sources, sharing the experience of supervising process". (Alfa, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

"I have followed several activities such as sharing the experiences in the supervising process, ideas, and references". (Pipi, Semi-structured Interview, Authors'Translation)

"I was in sharing something related to proposal such content, grammar, references, experience of supervising, discussing the problem, motivating activity , for example, I was motivated to write the proposal since I followed the student-researcher club" (Ani, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

When sharing ideas, they talked regarding what they should write in their proposals. Instead, they shared the research topic too. Also, they share the articles or books which they needed for supporting their proposals and the way to get it.

Conducting Peer Tutoring

The SRC involved peer tutoring activity where the knowledgeable students led less knowledgeable students in writing the proposal. Peer tutoring is characterized by specific role taking. In other words, someone fulfils the role of the tutor while another or others take the role of tutee (Dingel & Punti, 2023; Topping, 1996b as cited in Falchikov, 2001).

Excerpts 4

"What is your role as a member in the student-researchers club?" (Researcher's Question)

"I play the role as a member who gives and accept the information or knowledge about the proposal. And generally, all of the members of student-researcher help each other". (Pipi, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

"As a member, I become a problem solver, especially in the narrative inquiry context. I mean all members can discuss more about it with me because my study uses this design. I also become a member who listen the ideas from other members" (Alfa, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

"I play the role as a problem solver, a motivator". (Ridwan, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

Furthermore, this peer tutoring activity can be classified as same-level peer tutoring where the participants have equal status (Falchikov, 2001; Toulia, 2023). Definitely, it was namely as think-pair-share technique. This technique encouraged the students to respond to questions and their participations such as

part of students' SHOWED analysis   below:

H — "What is really HAPPENING?" (The unseen "story" behind the photo)

They were English students. They were discussing about writing the proposal. They were talking about the problem faced by one of them in writing proposal. The problem was about the focus of her proposal. She was confused to decide her focus although she has got some suggestions from his supervisors. Then, a male student tried to give the solution. He suggested her to focus on language acquisition. (Researcher's SHOWED analysis)

They were discussing about their personal problems in making a research proposal. Each person was asked to tell their problems and to give their solutions for the problems. In that moment, a girl talked about her problem to all students. Then, a boy responds it and gave her some advice. (Pipi's SHOWED analysis)

O — "How does this relate to OUR lives?" (Or MY life personally)

This activity relates to my personal life. It helps me to finish my proposal. By joining this activity I was motivated to write, and I can solve the problems that I faced when I was writing the proposal. (Ani's SHOWED analysis)

They thought and discussed the solutions collaboratively in order to cope with the obstacles faced by each student. This finding is in line with Vygotsky's theory that people develop cognitive abilities in social context supported or

mediated by peers and mentors, then these cognitive abilities can be exercised by each person. As a result, by involving this activity the students can enhance their knowledge about proposal.

Because of writing project proposal as a shared domain in this CofP, it also involved peer editing process which facilitates the students for checking their proposal writings and giving it the feedback mutually.

Doing Peer Editing

Photos 2: Peer editing process
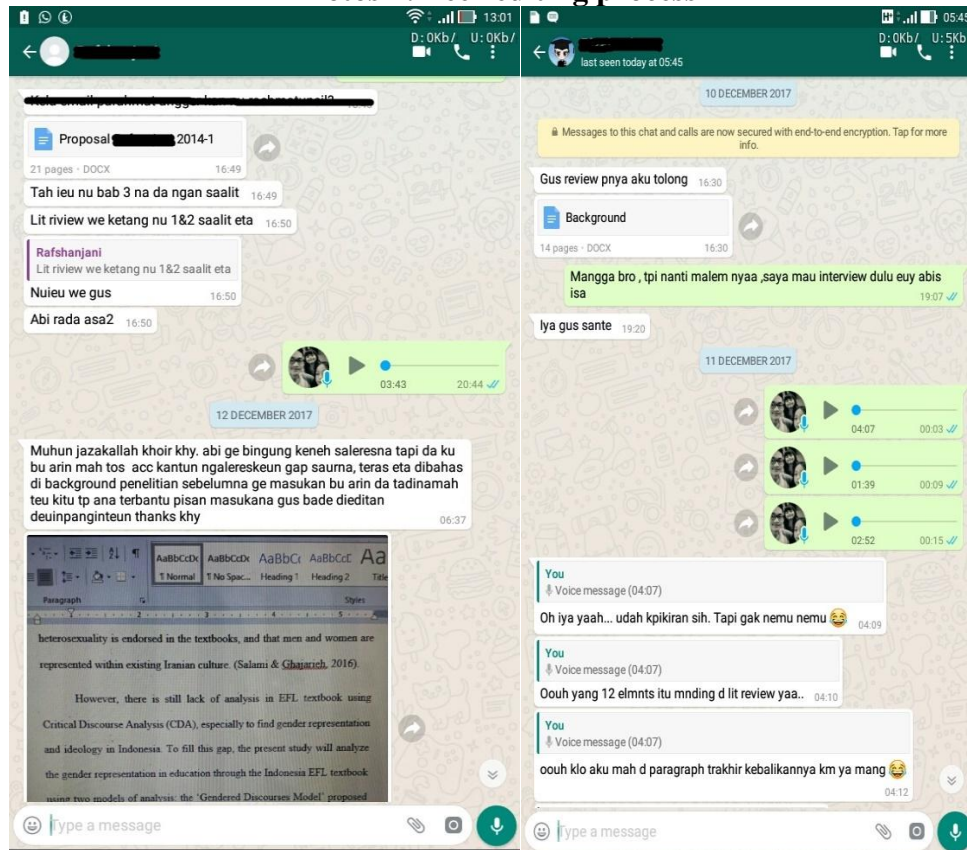
Photos 3: Online peer editing

In photos 2, some students were gathering in a cafe. While photos 3 is evidence that the students employed the social media to send their proposal writings to be edited by

their peers before they met with their supervisors. These photos showed that they were motivated to engage in peer editing process. They attempted to do it without time and place limitation.

Excerpts 5

"Peer editing helped me to write, I felt the difference between doing peer editing and without doing peer editing. I got a lot of revisions when I did not do it, but little revisions when I did it. Why? Because it had guided me what should I write". (Ani, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

"Peer editing made my proposal better". (Alfa, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

"For me, peer editing is helpful, it solves my weakness in grammar. It helps me in developing idea too" (Pipi, Semi-structured Interview, Authors' Translation)

With all those pieces of evidence, it can be shown how the students were more prepared to negotiate with their supervisors after they did peer editing. It means that peer editing makes students do the supervising process more effectively and efficiently.

These joint activities proved that the students were involved actively in SRC to complete their tasks. It is classified as behavioural engagement which is comprised of students' action and participation in academic and social or extracurricular activities (Fredricks. et al., 2004). Their participations with peers in SRC enable them to develop their

comprehensions about the proposal. Number of studies show that students' friendships in school can exert the positive effect on academic development (e.g. Altermatt & Pomeranz, 2003; Ladd, 1990; Kandel, 1978). When students participate in their own learning and become involved in school-related activities, they often begin to identify with school, leading to increased completion (Voelkl, 2012). Consequently, students completed their proposals and passed their proposal examinations. Additionally, this engagement affects their completions and graduations from the academic program, and protects them from dropout (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

CONCLUSION

In closing, for the student-researchers, writing up a research project proposal is a complex and staged process which imposes them to select a topic, think the rationale of a selected topic, find the supported references, and negotiate it with their supervisors (Widodo, 2013). Throughout the process of writing up a proposal using SRC as a CofP, the student-researchers were actively engaged in sharing personal supervising experiences, giving out references, conducting peer tutoring, which was problem-solving in, and doing peer editing. This SRC hones the student-researchers' multidimensional skills, which not only develop their writing skills but also enhance their content knowledge about research. This CofP empowers the students to be editors as they did in peer editing process. Also, they played the role as problem solvers too. This community encourages the students to learn collaboratively. This indicates that the SRC facilitate the students for accomplishing their proposal projects as

part of requirement for graduation and being credible researchers. Pedagogically speaking, the research provides an example of how the CofP can be organized and implemented in writing up a proposal context.

A Research dealing with writing up research project proposal can be developed by providing the student-researchers with plenty opportunities to use the different framework as ways of completing this task. Focusing on the use of CofP in writing proposal, further research needs to investigate in what way the CofP build pupils' identities as researchers. The next researcher can observe the CofP concept which is applied in writing a thesis. Moreover, an investigation can be conducted toward the CofP involving lecturer as members of the club because the present study only examined a community which consists of equal level and status.

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