The Dynamics of Beginning EFL Teachers' Teaching Experiences and Their Emotional Labor from an Activity Theory Perspective

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This study investigates beginning EFL teachers' emotional labor from the perspective of the Activity Theory. Emotional labor is defined as the process of controlling one's emotions and emotional expressions in accordance with the occupational standards for proper emotional expression. Two beginning EFL teachers at Korean junior high schools were recruited by means of a qualitative research method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed based on Activity Theory. The findings indicate that participants' emotional labor in relation to their students was represented as conflicts in their activity system. Additionally, the resolution of the conflicts could be possible if a teacher can join a new teacher learning community and use new instruments. The results suggest that beginning EFL teachers should be encouraged to be empowered with new instruments such as classroom management skills and teaching practices for handling mixed-level students. These new instruments are expected to prevent students' problem behavior and ease the burden of teachers experiencing emotional labor.

Keywords: EFL teachers, emotional labor, activity theory, sociocultural theory, EFL teacher education

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1. INTRODUCTION

For language teachers who constantly interact with learners, emotional display can be an instructional strategy, since it relates to students' emotional status and in-class participation (King, 2015). For example, to encourage uninterested EFL learners who hardly see benefits of learning English, language teachers tend to show positive emotions and suppress negative emotions toward their students' problem behavior. Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild 1983, p. 7), calling attention to the adjustment of emotional displays in professional scenarios.

Teachers may perform emotional labor to achieve professional goals, such as teaching effectively and maintaining positive relationships with students (Benesch, 2017; Chang, 2009; Schutz, Hong, Cross, & Osbon, 2006; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007; Zembylas, 2002). If they find it hard to endure emotional labor, they may make additional efforts toward improving their teaching techniques, which can decrease students' negative behavior and ease the burden of suppressing negative emotions toward them. For example, a teacher may discuss practical ways to prevent students' misbehavior with fellow teachers at the same school or join teacher learning communities comprising teachers from different schools (Andrews, Gilbert, & Martin, 2007; Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Wubbels, 2010). When they find it demanding to suppress or exaggerate their feelings, beginning teachers experience the burden of emotional labor (Kocabaş-Gedik, & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2021). Unsuccessfully dealing with those challenges and feeling burdened by emotional labor may lead to beginning teachers leaving the profession, influencing the turnover rate in the field (e.g., Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Since high turnover could adversely influence the workplace atmosphere and teacher quality, it is crucial for schools and policymakers to retain beginning teachers in the teaching profession.

As emotional labor includes self-regulation of emotional display and its impact on workplace dynamics, it is crucial to systematically investigate the phenomena with a relatively small number of participants, calling for a case study method. In this study, case studies were employed with two beginning EFL teachers to conduct an in-depth examination of complex phenomena within a particular setting.

Despite being considered an individual activity, the degree of emotional labor EFL teachers perform can be determined by the interactions between teachers and others, such as students and colleagues within the contextual elements (e.g., public school, private institute, tutoring, etc.). Accordingly, it is important to understand emotional labor within the socio-educational contexts; this necessitates the use of Activity Theory (AT), a theoretical tool that can encompass both individual and social contexts. AT is based on sociocultural theory (Engeström, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). The elements in the AT framework are interconnected,

and each element directly or indirectly influences the others. Moreover, the AT framework succinctly captures the tensions between elements, such as teachers and their students. The use of AT would be beneficial to comprehensively investigate the dynamic interplay between the individual teachers themselves and their work environment. It is expected that beginning EFL teachers may experience tensions when interacting with students and coworkers. Previous studies (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2022) have reported that beginning EFL teachers in Korea often experience a lack of teaching autonomy and are demotivated to teach when their colleague teachers do not support their communication-oriented, innovative teaching but impose old grammar-focused teaching on them. Thus, the relations with others in the school context may provide varying degrees of tension to these EFL teachers, which can be properly addressed from the lens of AT. Additionally, AT can help analyze the role of institutional structure and work atmosphere in easing the burden of emotional labor on beginning EFL teachers.

This study aimed to investigate two beginning EFL instructors' emotional labor while working in South Korean (hereafter Korean) public junior high schools from the perspective of AT. It aims to examine the following research questions:

1. What kinds of emotional labor do the participating teachers experience?
2. How can AT explain participating teachers' emotional labor?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. EFL Teachers' Emotional Labor

Regarding expressing emotions on the job, employees are expected to follow explicit and implicit norms (Hochschild, 1983). Similarly, teachers are required to adhere to certain rules regarding emotional displays, such as showing affection and enthusiasm for students and being fascinated about a subject matter (Winograd, 2003). According to Cowie (2011), emotional labor can be examined on two contextual levels: students and school. Teachers in Korea are advised to adjust their emotional displays to provide a conducive learning environment for junior high school students.

At the student level, previous studies have shown that Korean junior high school students have a negative attitude toward English as a subject and show a gradual decrease in their English learning motivation (Kim, 2012). Additionally, there is a significant English competency gap among students (Kim & Kim, 2018) owing to different opportunities of private education as a result of parents' attitude toward education and household income. Accommodating students' varying abilities is crucial; however, it would be laborious to plan

a balanced lesson without a teacher's guidebook that contains effective strategies for dealing with mixed-level classes. In this case, it would be demanding to ensure that all students are engaged and challenged. If lessons are not appropriate for their level, some students may easily lose interest, necessitating emotional support from teachers.

Adopting unique and innovative teaching techniques is one approach to consider, especially in communicative teaching contexts, where teachers must exhibit specific traits, such as openness and strong interpersonal interactions with students to encourage learners to participate in speaking activities (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015). However, if managing students' behavior while employing communicative teaching approaches proves difficult, teachers might avoid using that method due to the burden of emotional labor (Kim & Kim, 2018). In particular, beginning EFL teachers in Korea are more prone to students' misbehavior than seasoned teachers (Kim & Kim, 2016), which causes difficulties in suppressing their negative emotion toward students' misbehavior.

At the school level, teachers, particularly beginning teachers, perform emotional labor even for their colleagues. Insufficient autonomy in their teaching methods could lead to them doubting their choice of profession (Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Beginning teachers are sometimes unaware that they are being assigned difficult jobs beyond their ability due to a lack of proper support from fellow teachers (Lee & Kim, 2020). Acknowledging seniority and showing respect toward elderly members of the community is prioritized in Korea and other East Asian nations (Sung, 2001). Administrative tasks rob teachers of time to plan more effective lessons (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). When novice teachers are unable to visualize their lessons and prepare detailed guidelines for students' activities, students can show unexpected behaviors, such as a lack of participation and loss of focus. This can lead to teachers' impatience toward students, which increases their emotional burden to suppress their negative emotions.

Research shows that the burden of emotional labor that EFL teachers undertake in the classroom may cause teachers to adopt teacher-centered instructions which requires less emotional labor (King, 2015; Zembylas, 2002). For example, Kim and Kim (2018) demonstrated that EFL teachers changed their teaching practices from conversational to teacher-centered due to the burden of emotional labor. The teachers explained that their students hardly participated in activities based on communicative language teaching and misbehaved in class, leading to teachers experiencing impatience toward students. Having to suppress their feelings of being overwhelmed required teachers to perform considerable emotional labor; consequently, they changed their future lesson plans to decrease the level of emotional labor required. Their past experiences with emotional labor resulted in teachers developing a tendency to avoid integrating speaking exercises into their daily instruction.

When teachers put too much effort into managing their emotions, it has a negative effect on the overall job satisfaction, potentially leading to burnout (Acheson, Taylor, & Luna,

2016). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) defined job burnout as a "psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job" (p. 399), represented by overwhelming fatigue, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. Thus, to reduce the burden of emotional work before they experience burnout, teachers must prepare techniques, such as sharing their emotional issues with colleagues (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001). This can be performed by participating in teacher learning community, where teachers can observe model teaching, and collaborate with other teachers who share common interests; co-learning in the teacher learning community this can lead to changes in their knowledge and practices (Andrews et al., 2007; Bakkenes at al., 2010; Zheng, Zhang, & Wang, 2019). Beginning teachers, in particular, can learn how to conduct meaningful analyses of their teaching practices through community discussions (Johnson & Worden, 2014). However, teachers' participation in these communities can be sustained only with the support of schools and colleague teachers (Jung & Cheon, 2014; Song & Park, 2014).

2.2. Activity Theory

AT enables us to investigate the dynamics between participating teachers and the surrounding environment, including the social context. Engeström (1987) aimed to graphically present the system which can represent the whole activity in a unified manner, including an individual participant (i.e., subject in Figure 1) and the relation between the individual and society. This model helps investigate both individual teachers and their proximal and distal environment within a single framework. For example, a beginning EFL teacher can be a subject in the Figure 1.

Object refers to a goal to achieve through the activity, such as helping students learn. Instruments are implemented to achieve the object, such as textbooks, previous learning experience, and emotional expressions. Rules are the conventions that regulate the subject's behavior. Beginning teachers are expected to follow school rules. Community includes the classroom, the school, and the teacher learning communities. Division of labor specifies the roles of the subject, such as teaching English and handling administrative work.

FIGURE 1
Engeström's (1987) Model (p.78)
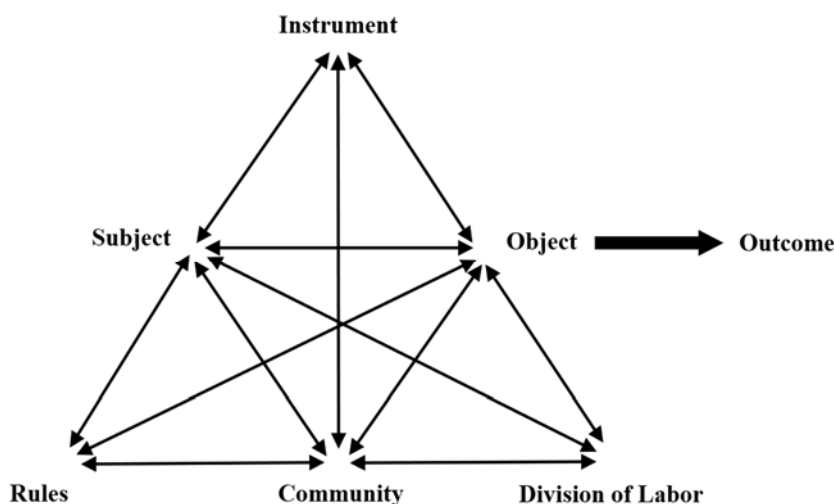
When the elements in AT are not in harmony, the subject experiences conflicts. In Kim and Zhang's (2013) study, Emiko, a beginning EFL junior high school teacher in Japan, experienced conflicts between the subject and the community, English learning community referring to her students. She experienced a conflict with her students who showed less-than-ideal English proficiency. Another conflict she experienced was with the division of labor, that occurred due to her extensive administrative duties.

Employing Engeström's (1987) model in this study can help focus on the individual's qualitative change through interactions between individuals and their surrounding in a social and cultural context. It can help analyze how each participating teacher perceives the surrounding teaching context, as well as the interaction between teachers and the context (Kim & Zhang, 2013). It can also help find the tensions that exist within the activity system. The revealed implications can lead to possible solutions (Engeström, 1999).

The burden of emotional labor can also be explained by the tension between the subject and the instrument, as emotional labor is included in the instrument in the activity system. Uninterested students may reflect uninterested attitudes toward the lessons, causing the teacher (subject) to feel anger. When the teacher suppresses anger to achieve the goal, suppressing feelings is the instrument in the activity. However, despite the suppression, students may continue to show uninterested attitudes and problem behavior, increasing the level of anger in the teacher. In this case, the teacher may have difficulty suppressing emotions, causing them to experience the burden of emotional labor. This burden can be

represented as tension in the activity system. Even though it would be possible to explain emotional labor by implementing AT system, it has not been explored in an empirical way. For this reason, this study aims to explore how to use AT to explain emotional labor.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants

In this study, beginning teachers are defined as individuals with less than one year of in-service teaching experience in the public sector at the time of data collection. Two beginning English teachers—Dahyun and Homin (both pseudonyms)—from junior high schools in Seoul took part in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to find individuals with less than a year of teaching experience for the study. Both participants passed the National Teaching License Exam and went on to work in public schools. They were in their late twenties. For the sake of confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

Dahyun started to learn English when she was seven. She attended a foreign language high school where most students had high English proficiency. Surrounded by proficient students, it was difficult for her to enjoy English learning. However, at university, she became interested in English learning; she took English speaking and writing courses, which improved her language skills. Studying abroad further enhanced Dahyun's English skills. By observing her mentor teacher's lessons in a teaching practicum course, Dahyun was able to establish an ideal English class, a discussion course where students can interact with each other.

Homin spent two-and-a-half years in a junior high school in an English-speaking country. Before studying abroad, he only knew how to pronounce the English alphabets. After returning to Korea, Homin attended a high school where most English classes were teacher-centered, focused on delivering knowledge for tests. Consequently, during the pre-service training courses, Homin found it challenging to survive, being surrounded by proficient colleagues. Before working in the public school as an in-service teacher, he taught English as a tutor.

3.2. Data Collection

To obtain rich and detailed information on how EFL teachers manage their emotional display while interacting with others in their teaching context, case studies were employed with two beginning EFL teachers. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in December 2018 to capture "the lived experience of others and the meaning they create of

that experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 9). One in-person interview was conducted for each participant. Previous studies on contextual elements (Kim & Kim, 2016; Kim & Zhang, 2013) and emotional labor (Cowie, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2018) were reviewed to develop interview questions. For example, questions such as "What do you think of your English class? Are learners participating well in the given tasks?" and "What do you think about your administrators and colleagues?" were asked to understand participants' teaching contexts. In addition, questions "Have you recently experienced not expressing the emotions you wanted to express in relation to the school management? If so, please tell us in detail" were employed to identify participants' emotional labor. During the interviews, participants were asked about their (de)motivational issues and emotional obstacles. Each interview lasted around one-and-a-half to two hours. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. After transcription, the transcripts were provided to the participants to see if they agreed with the accuracy (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

3.3. Data Analysis

Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to examine the interview transcription, which included three steps: open, axial, and selective coding. The transcribed data were first read iteratively, classifying each element containing emotional labor (open coding). For example, "Changes of feelings on teaching materials and methods" and "changes in responding to students' problem behavior" were classified and coded. Following the initial coding, coded data were constantly compared, connected, and categorized (axial coding). For instance, in the axial coding stage, "students," "administrative work," and "colleague teachers and administrators" were extracted and categorized from the open-coding excerpts. Finally, themes relating to emotional labor (e.g., Benesch, 2017; Hwang & Choi, 2014; King, 2015) were selected (selective coding). To broaden the understanding of the participants' educational setting, the final stage included modifying and refining the existing coding categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To adopt AT model, the researcher re-read the dataset and ascertained the activity system components that each teacher possessed. To ensure the analysis based on the AT framework, both researchers constantly discussed that the dataset is appropriately assigned to each component in the AT framework.

To ensure the results of the coding, one researcher with an M.A. in English education coded the same interview transcripts. When there were disagreements, the two coders discussed them and eventually came to an agreement. The validity of the data was confirmed through member checking (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) by asking the participating teachers to confirm the outcomes of the analysis and provide their comments via e-mails and phone calls.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Dahyun's Story: The Power of Teacher Community

The school Dahyun started her teaching career in was located in the East of Seoul city. The average number of students in one class was 23. In the interview, she mentioned that parents did not show a high level of interest in their child's learning. She believed, students did not have a high level of EFL learning motivation, which resulted in low academic performance.

Dahyun, the subject of the activity system, set a goal to help students learn English (object). She did not want to leave underperforming students unattended. Thus, to achieve her object, she utilized collaborative learning as an instrument (see Excerpt 1).

> *Excerpt 1*
> Student who don't know the alphabet at all would not understand anything for 45 minutes. Highly proficient students understand everything I teach. **The proficiency gap is too large. I think that's why we need group activities.** In the group, proficient students feel they are playing important roles in their group. In the case of underperforming students, no matter how much I explain to them, they do not listen to me. They always say, "I don't know, Ms. Kim. I can't do it." However, if the proficient students explain to them, the underperforming students listen, thinking, "oh, their age is the same as mine and they know this. They are smart."

At the beginning, Dahyun expected every learner to play a role in the class to overcome her difficulties of handling a mixed-level class in terms of English proficiency. For example, high-performing students could be "teachers" and relatively low-achieving students could be "students." High-performing students can reinforce and hone their existing knowledge by explaining it to the low-performing students. Low-performing students can learn better from the explanations of high-performing students, acting as familiar role model. According to Dahyun, for those who considered teachers' explanations hard to understand, explanations coming from their peers were often found more comprehensible and familiar than that of the teacher. With this better understanding, they tried to participate in the activity. The active participation of the students made her feel accomplished, leading to an increased level of satisfaction in her own teaching.

Understanding the context surrounding Dahyun's teaching is possible by analyzing three elements at the bottom: rules, community, and division of labor. Rules refer to the convention teachers are expected to follow, including classroom rules and school rules. Community refers to the students, especially those showing problem behavior and disturbing

the lesson. As presented in Figure 2, as an English teacher, Dahyun initially set her division of labor, which is to conduct English lessons.

In achieving her goal through collaborative learning, she experienced conflicts, represented by two arrows: 1) one between the subject and the community; and 2) the other between the community and the instrument (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Dahyun's Activity System
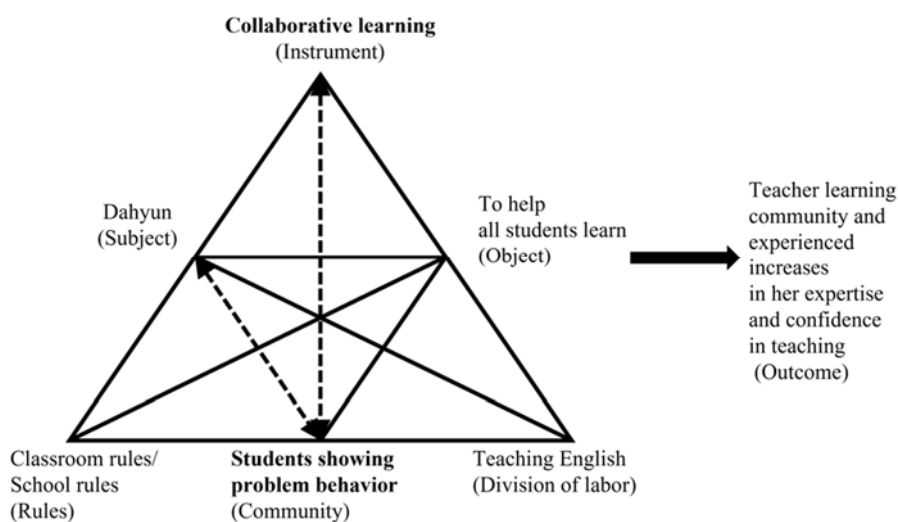
The first arrow implies that Dahyun (subject) experienced difficulty in managing her students showing problem behavior (community). The second indicates that her students did not participate in the collaborative learning tasks. When students sat with their classmates, it increased the possibility of problem behavior (see Excerpt 2).

> *Excerpt 2*
> I could not manage students who kept talking. In this school, students are seated in a row. There is no pair. Then, if you instruct them to make a group of four, the students are out of control.

When Dahyun's students gathered as groups, they tended to make noise and disturbed the class, causing Dahyun to be impatient (see Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

Why do they get so noisy when they're together? They couldn't finish the group activities that I had prepared so hard for, and they were out of control. **I could not love my students at that time.**

For the first month, Dahyun's students only seemed to enjoy talking with group members and did not perform the group work she prepared. Thus, the lesson did not proceed as planned. She could not endure her students not being fully attentive. It was hard for her to understand her students' behavior. Due to the struggle she experienced in the first month of her teaching, Dahyun became too frustrated to try collaborative learning—she decided she would not be able to implement collaborative learning.

To resolve conflicts in her activity, she joined a teacher learning community, focusing on the application of collaborative learning methods in the English lessons. This community comprised teachers from different schools (see Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

After I joined the teacher learning community, I realized that if I didn't prepare really carefully, the students would naturally become noisy. (…) Going through trials and errors is only natural. Only then will I be able to learn how to do it well. So now, I don't hate my students even if I fail. I just think I should do better next time.

By having conversations about the different classroom situations with other teachers in the community, Dahyun gradually learned that it was natural for students to talk in class. When she became a part of the new community, Dahyun productively reflected on her teaching practices. Additionally, the conversations with the community members provided her with opportunities to decrease the feeling of being overwhelmed and deal with disappointment with students; thus, subsequently, it decreased the burden of suppressing negative emotions. As a result, Dahyun could conduct lessons focusing on collaborative learning in most of her classes (see Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5

I am teaching four classes in the first grade. While students in three of the four classes understood my intention to conduct collaborative learning, students in the other class had a lot of problems. There were many students who sulked and frequently expressed their negative attitude and disappointment toward the lessons and their school life. They showed a lot of problem behavior; this made it really difficult to manage. (…) **As a result, I gave up on group activities with those students, and now, I just give a lecture.** As a beginning teacher, I simply wanted to survive.

Even though her teaching style could not be employed in all her classes and though she was still sensitive to students hurting her feelings, constant interactions with the members of teacher learning community helped Dahyun retain collaborative learning in class.

In summary, Dahyun went through a trial-and-error process with the help of the teacher community and saw the immediate changes in her teaching practices. This successful experience enabled her to continue putting effort into her professional development outside of the school. The sustained effort to achieve her object with the mediation of the instrument helped yield positive outcomes regarding her activity, increasing in her expertise and confidence in teaching. Consequently, she was able to resolve the conflicts she had experienced. This implies that active reflection and constructive sharing was beneficial in mediating her objective by resolving in-class conflicts with students.

4.2. Homin's Story: Suffered from the Burden of Administrative Duties

The school where Homin was assigned was located in the southern part of Seoul. It had seven classes per grade, with each class having an average of 25 students. According to Homin, students and parents both had a relatively low level of interest in learning in general. Except for one or two students who seemed interested in English learning, half the students found it difficult to understand the given textbooks.

Homin, the subject of the activity system who was educated through novels in an ESL environment, aspired to teach a class that stimulates students' interest by using English novels. However, because he received only lecture-style education in the EFL environment, it was difficult to immediately implement literature as instrument (see Excerpt 6).

> *Excerpt 6*
> **I only knew lecture-style classes, so I had no idea how else to prepare for my lessons.** I took some English classes in Canada, but they're not about English as a foreign language.

Homin discovered a large gap between learning the English as a second language and as a foreign language. For him, it was challenging to teach in the public education system, as he had learned to speak in an English-speaking country. With no immediate resources which would help him organize learner-centered lessons, Homin's goal was to avoid a teacher-centered lesson (object) and the instrument he employed was textbooks.

His school context too can be understood by identifying elements at the bottom of the activity system: rules, community, and division of labor. Regarding rules, he was expected to follow the assessment plan set by other teachers, classroom rules, and school rules. Homin was located in two types of communities: students and colleagues. His students did not seem

interested in English learning, especially in the EFL context. Regarding the division of labor, Homin was in charge of demanding administrative work. Additionally, he was supposed to teach all the students of the same grade by himself. Because he was coping with a challenging job with no assistance from his coworkers, he could not find time to prepare for the lessons. Without enough time to explore tasks which students would find interesting, it was difficult for Homin to locate useful teaching materials easily available to him.

When Homin's teaching hours were decreased in the second semester compared to the first one, he attempted to improve his lessons. However, increased burden of administrative work made him revert to the lecture-style teaching, which led to waning of students' attention. He experienced regret at being unable to fulfill his obligation of making his lessons dynamic and interesting; he tried to suppress his negative feelings, such as being impatient and overwhelmed by his students' problem behavior.

The conflicts Homin experienced are represented with four arrows in his activity system: 1) between the subject the instrument, 2) between the subject and the community, 3) between the subject and division of labor, and 4) between the instrument and the community (see Figure 3).

The first arrow between the subject and the instrument implies that Homin was not satisfied with the current teaching resources, that is, school textbooks. Regarding instrument, he found that the current textbook was uninteresting for students (see Excerpt 7).

> *Excerpt 7*
> I wonder why people don't teach literature in English class at school. Why not teach novels, which might be most interesting for students? But reading material in the textbook is mostly about delivering information. Frankly, I don't think reading materials in the textbook would be fun for students.

From Homin's perspective, based on his previous learning experience in an English-speaking country, the textbook he was supposed to use did not seem effective enough to stimulate students' interest and increase their level of motivation.

FIGURE 3

Homin's Activity System
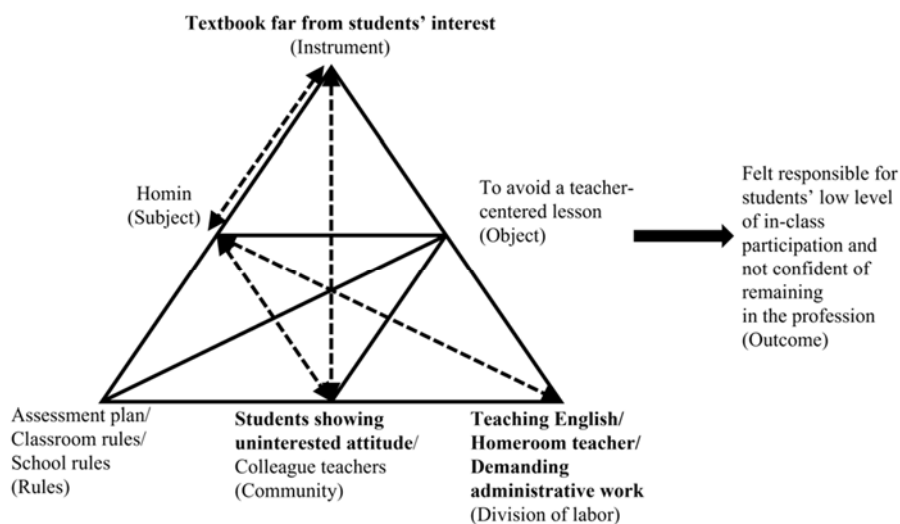
The second conflict between the subject and the community shows the conflict between Homin and his colleagues, who were unwilling to offer help. His colleagues were not available for questions while dealing with administrative work. The former teacher who was responsible for the same administrative work as Homin's had transferred to another school; there was no one to ask about the administrative work he was in charge of (see Excerpt 8).

Excerpt 8
Homin: The person who had been in charge of the student council was a temporary teacher, and after three years, the teacher moved to another school.
Researcher: Did you have enough time to learn about the task?
Homin: I had a chance to sit down and listen to what the teacher explained to me for about an hour, but I couldn't understand anything. **I actually started from the scratch. I could only refer to the documents the teacher made.**

Homin did not have detailed guidelines to deal with the given administrative work, causing him to spend long hours figuring out the procedures he would take for specific administrative work.

This lack of support from his colleagues resulted in him experiencing more burden on dealing with his administrative work, represented as the third arrow between the subject and the division of labor. Surrounded by unsupportive colleagues and a large amount of

administrative burden, Homin could not secure enough time to prepare for the lesson; he had no choice but to use the given textbook (see Excerpt 9).

Excerpt 9

I was almost knocked down during the first semester. (…) **It's a series of mental breakdowns every day.** There was an incident in the homeroom class, and suddenly, I was told to organize a student council meeting. I didn't know what to do with the English class. During the weekend, I was so tired, I just wanted to rest rather than prepare for the next week's class. I didn't meet any of my friends in the first semester.

While dealing with the administrative work, there was limited time to be equipped oneself with methodological knowledge and practical ways of bringing changes into his classroom. Finally, it caused his students to be less involved in his lessons. This is described as the fourth arrow between his students (the community) and the textbook (instrument). As a result, Homan felt responsible for his students' low level of in-class participation; this led to him suppressing his anger and disappointment toward those showing problem behavior (see Excerpt 10).

Excerpt 10

For students who don't even know the alphabet, I feel bad to say "Be quiet" while teaching. They cannot understand the lessons. (…) Once I told one of them, "I totally understand that English is incredibly difficult for you, but please be quiet because other students still have to listen to me." Sometimes, I get really impatient, but I persuade them to listen. **This is because I feel sorry for those who do not know English. I can't show my anger or disappointment in front of them.**

Homin believed that some of his students did not actively participate in class because they did not understand the language. He felt responsible for not organizing lessons they could easily understand. Demonstrating that he understood students' problems and difficulties was his way of engaging with students while teaching.

Due to a series of conflicts in his AT system (see Figure 3), Homin was unable to introduce an instrument or community in terms of changing his teaching practices throughout the year. Thus, he could not resolve the tensions he experienced (see Excerpt 11).

Excerpt 11

I feel a little helpless now. I feel very sorry for my students, too. I wonder if this way of teaching is beneficial for them. In every lesson I feel like I'm "enduring" for

> 45 minutes. I'm teaching as written in the textbook. I don't know how much this will help them.

In addition, Homin felt sorry and regretful that he did not fulfill his responsibility to help his students improve their English proficiency level through enjoyable lessons. This stemmed from his doubt about his teaching being beneficial to the students. He was not sure that his way of teaching was truly helping students, believing that following the textbook alone would not improve his students' proficiency.

In the outcome of his activity system, Homin seemed to spend the first year of teaching by enduring the situation. He was not confident of remaining in the profession at the end of the year.

5. DISCUSSION

As presented in Dahyun's and Homin's cases, conflicts in AT system can explain the emotional labor performed by beginning EFL teachers suppressing unpleasant feelings toward their students. First, conflicts between the community and the instrument might arise when students (community) find lecture-style classes (instrument) boring, and engage in behavioral problems. Considering Korean EFL context where secondary school students show a low-level of English learning motivation (Kim, 2012) and a huge gap of English proficiency (Kim & Kim, 2018), students struggled to comprehend class materials in the teacher-centered lessons. Students who have difficulty grasping the content of lessons are more likely to either be quickly distracted or fall asleep, which adds to the teachers' emotional load (Tuxford & Bradley, 2015).

When a new instrument, such as student-centered lessons, to resolve the conflict between the community and the instrument is not implemented effectively, the students may continue to engage in problem behavior, subsequently resulting in a conflict between the students (community) and the teachers (subject). Both Dahyun and Homin experienced these two types of conflicts in their AT systems, based on Engeström's (1987) model. When the instrument they were using failed to prevent students from misbehaving and they continued to behavior in an unruly manner, it caused negative emotions in teachers, such as impatience and anger. Suppressing negative emotional expression increases the burden of emotional labor on teachers.

To ease this burden, it is crucial to implement a new instrument to prevent students' negative behavior. For instance, a novel teaching technique that increases students' engagement with the lessons while lowering student interruption; or a new teaching method can be introduced when teachers participate in a new community. However, participation in

the new community requires additional time, and is not solely determined by the beginning teachers' desire or enthusiasm; indeed it is also determined by whether the teacher (i.e., the subject) is in conflict with the teacher community (i.e., division of labor).

In Homin's case, he was experiencing a significant conflict with the division of labor because none of his colleagues utilized the same textbook as he did. This aggravated the stress of class preparation, and he faced significant administrative burden. Furthermore, it is difficult for teachers to disregard administrative tasks because they are often evaluated by their ability to complete paperwork, rather than their teaching practices (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). Additionally, without sufficient guidance from experienced colleagues, the difficulty of dealing with administrative work becomes severe.

In this situation, Homin was unable to actively participate in the new community or introduce new teaching materials in line with students' interest. Consequently, he was unable to mitigate the excessive emotional labor and he seriously considered leaving the teaching profession, stemming from his doubt regarding the efficacy of his teaching improving his students' proficiency. A heavy burden of emotional labor can lead to feeling of exhaustion (Chang, 2009). When participating teachers believe that they do not contribute to students' effective learning, it deleteriously affects teacher retention rates (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Homin's case implies that emotional labor burden can be decreased with the help of the school level support, resolving the conflict between the subject and the division of labor. By adjusting the administrative burden, the participating teachers may secure time to develop lesson plans and implement innovative teaching methods in their institutional context (Song & Park, 2014), decreasing the level of emotional labor.

However, Dahyun's case requires an analysis different from Homin's. She encountered no significant conflict with the division of labor, which provided her with extra time and energy to join a teacher learning community comprised of teachers from various schools. Supportive educational communities can provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on their teaching practices, and be prepared to implement in the classroom, what they discuss (Farrell, 1998; Johnson & Worden, 2014; Lee, 2013). In addition, teachers can share ideas, teaching resources, and planning strategies with the community members (Zheng et al., 2019).

By becoming a member of the new community, Dahyun acquired two new instruments: 1) a new teaching technique and 2) constructive feedback from other colleagues to reflect her lessons. To begin with, she could acquire practical skills for implementing collaborative teaching to deal with a mixed-level class in terms of students' English proficiency and eventually, appropriate it as per her medium of instruction. By implementing the new teaching method, her students were able to become more involved in class and remain active. Thus, the newly introduced method decreased problem behavior and the teacher's negative emotions toward her students.

When she was not overwhelmed by negative emotion, it was easier for her to maintain agentive control over her emotional responses to her students. Additionally, discussions with community members provided her with novel perspectives on her teaching. For example, she realized it was natural for the class to flow differently from her lesson plan. She also tried to be flexible according to the students' responses, rather than stick to the lesson plan. Therefore, she abandoned the idea that lessons can be successful only when it works as planned, and experienced less stress.

6. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to explore emotional labor of two beginning English teachers working in Korean public junior high schools, from the perspective of AT. The results indicate that teachers perform emotional labor by suppressing their negative emotion caused by their students' misbehavior during lessons. An increase in the burden of emotional labor can be represented as conflicts in Engeström's (1999) AT system. Conflicts between the community and the instrument may emerge when students become uninterested with lecture-style English classes and exhibit behavioral problems. Students who struggle to comprehend lessons are more likely to become distracted or fall asleep, which adds to teachers' emotional burden (Tuxford & Bradley, 2015).

To decrease their burden of emotional labor, beginning teachers may need to resolve conflicts in their AT system by adopting new instruments. This, however, requires assistance from, for example, pre-service training courses, the school, and the system. On the preservice training course level, beginning teachers should be given opportunities to practice creating innovative instruction and assessments to prevent students' problem behavior caused by a mismatch between their proficiency level and the learning materials (Kim & Kim, 2018). Thus, novel practice will help them deal with significant disparities in English proficiency among their students. In addition, classroom management skills are necessary to prevent students from engaging in disruptive behavior, considering beginning teachers' sensitivity toward their students' problem behavior (Kim & Kim, 2016). These abilities are critical for successfully implementing collaborative learning to address the issue of mixed-level English classes. It is critical to prevent disruptive behavior at first because it is difficult to repress unpleasant feelings when teachers view students' troublesome behavior as disrespect.

At the school level, the burden of administrative duties should be kept manageable, allowing beginning teachers to productively reflect on their lessons and improve their teaching skills. Reflection on teaching and discussion on how to improve can be possible outside of school, in the form of teacher learning communities. Community members can encourage or empathize with the emotional difficulties encountered by beginning teachers

(Hiver, 2016). By sharing experiences with members in the community, beginning teachers can realize that lessons could be beneficial even if they are not conducted as planned, and that it is natural for the performance in class to be different from what was intended.

At the system level, beginning teachers should be provided with chances to effectively manage their personal frustrations arising from the belief that their teaching might be detrimental to their students. Beginning teachers should avoid blaming only themselves for their students' lack of achievement (Johnson & Worden, 2014). Furthermore, in the examination of teacher ability development, policymakers must pay close attention to accurately evaluating teachers' learning effort. The school culture should also be transformed to keep teachers motivated and flourish as professionals.

As this study is based on interview data from two beginning EFL teachers, future research might adopt various sources such as classroom observation, teaching notes, and teaching materials for data triangulation. In addition, future studies need to investigate longitudinal changes in teachers' handling of the burden of emotional labor as they gain teaching experience.

Applicable levels: Primary, secondary, tertiary

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