Students Interpersonal Trust in the Context of Collaborative Group Learning

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Abstract

Collaborative group learning, commonly referred to as group work, is widely applied in higher education to enhance students teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills. However, the success of this learning model depends heavily on interpersonal trust among group members. This study aimed to explore students interpersonal trust toward their group members in academic settings. Using a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected from 257 students across various universities in Indonesia through snowball sampling. Interpersonal trust was measured using the Interpersonal Trust Scale, developed based on Rotters framework, which demonstrated strong psychometric properties (item discrimination indices: 0.3330.865; reliability coefficient: 0.947). The findings revealed that most participants demonstrated high levels of interpersonal trust, with reliability as the dominant aspect, indicating that students could rely on and entrust tasks to their peers. Furthermore, no significant differences were found across demographic factors, including gender, field of study, and university status. These results highlight the central role of reliability in shaping effective group work and suggest that lecturers and curriculum developers should foster supportive learning environments, establish clear group norms, and integrate communication and conflict resolution training. This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the literature on interpersonal trust in higher education. It suggests that future research should employ more complex methods and comparative approaches, particularly between online and offline learning contexts, to better understand the dynamics of trust in collaborative learning.

Keywords: Collaborative Group Learning; College; Interpersonal Trust; Student.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The learning model implemented so far generally still uses a conventional approach (faculty teaching), known as Teacher-Centered Learning (TCL). This approach, such as one-way lectures or podium lectures, tends to be instructional in nature and does not fully reflect the increasingly rapid and complex dynamics of the development of science and technology (Muliarta, 2018). Conventional learning systems tend to be less flexible in adapting to changes in lecture material. This poses a risk of producing graduates with low competence, particularly in mastering the latest knowledge and technology. Therefore, the shift from conventional learning or the Faculty Teaching paradigm to Student-Centered Learning (SCL) has become a highly relevant step to implement in the current learning process (Muliarta, 2018).

Student-centered learning is a perspective on the teaching and learning process that emphasizes students responsibility for various activities, such as planning their learning, interacting with lecturers and fellow students, conducting research, and evaluating their own learning outcomes. One form of student-centered learning is small group discussion. Small-group discussion is a learning approach that involves interaction among groups of students and other groups, or between students and the instructor, to analyze, explore, or debate a particular topic or issue. The currently recommended form of small-group discussion is collaborative group learning.

Collaborative group learning has been used as a learning tool at all levels of the education system, from early childhood education (Oktaviani et al., 2023) to higher education (Esteves et al., 2018). In universities, collaborative group learning is one of the learning strategies applied because collaborative skills are highly needed in the workplace. Thus, universities implement group-based learning so that students can develop teamwork skills from an early stage (Palamarchuk, 2017). Collaborative group learning usually takes the form of group work, assigned by the instructor for students to solve problems and complete tasks together. Group work is one form of collaborative learning, involving interaction, collaboration, and the use of each members competencies to complete a task or project (Kvellestad et al., 2021). The main purpose of implementing collaborative group learning is to enable students to discuss, explain, and clarify concepts to one another, thereby deepening their understanding (Taniguchi et al., 2018).

Brame and Biel (2015) define collaborative learning groups as small groups used as a teaching method, where student learning is enhanced by encouraging students to learn from each other. Collaborative learning is widely used in educational institutions to encourage knowledge transfer. Based on Vygotskys theory, collaborative group learning is a process of learning through cooperation within a group rather than individually. The implementation of collaborative group learning usually involves students working in pairs or small groups to achieve the same learning objectives (Barkley et al., 2012). Examples of collaborative learning in higher education include structured group discussions, project-based learning, case studies, flipped classrooms, peer teaching, and role playing.

Although the main goal of collaborative group learning is learning effectiveness, it also provides many other benefits. These include improving communication skills, teamwork, and empathy through intensive interaction within the group (Ghavifekr, 2020). Working in groups helps students become more engaged in learning because they feel supported by their peers (Garcia & Privado, 2023). Group work also fosters a sense of responsibility, as each member is accountable for their role and contribution, thereby increasing their ownership of the learning process (Tarimo & Hickey, 2017). These studies demonstrate that implementing collaborative group learning offers numerous benefits, both personal and interpersonal, for students.

While working and learning in groups can be a positive experience that leads to successful learning, implementing it also poses challenges and obstacles. One challenge in implementing collaborative learning is the lack of experience among instructors in using collaborative teaching strategies and the unpreparedness of students to work in groups (Saito et al., 2021). Unequal contribution among group members, low motivation in some students, and difficulties for instructors in managing the facilitator role are also common problems in implementing collaborative group learning (Lane, 2016). Furthermore, issues of trust among group members can lead to reduced team cohesion, lower productivity, and increased group conflict (Arakal & Mampilly, 2016).

Some examples of trust-related problems in collaborative group learning include poor or ineffective communication that disrupts group workflow and leads to misunderstandings. Differences in perceptions of roles and responsibilities can also lead to conflicts within the group. While group-related issues are normal, problems with trust among group members can significantly affect group performance.

Trust among members in a learning group is referred to as interpersonal trust. According to Ma et al. (2019), interpersonal trust is an individuals belief in others and willingness to be vulnerable to their actions. Being vulnerable in this context means that when we trust someone, we allow them to act in ways that can either benefit or harm us. For example, in a group work setting, we entrust certain tasks to other group members, and if they fail, the entire group is negatively impacted. Interpersonal trust in a group or organization determines the extent to which individuals can rely on one another, influencing group cohesion and the effectiveness of cooperation

(Arakal & Mampilly, 2016). Previous studies have shown that interpersonal trust significantly influences group effectiveness in collaborative learning. Therefore, it is important for each member of a collaborative group to develop interpersonal trust when working together.

Interpersonal trust consists of several aspects. According to Rotenberg et al. (2021), there are three aspects of interpersonal trust. First, reliability, which refers to a person keeping their word and fulfilling their promises. This means that individuals not only speak of their abilities but also demonstrate them through action, making their words trustworthy. Second, emotional trust, which refers to a person refraining from causing emotional harm, such as accepting disclosures, maintaining confidentiality, refraining from criticism, and avoiding actions that cause embarrassment. Third, honesty, which refers to a person telling the truth and engaging in behavior guided by good intentions rather than malicious ones, using genuine rather than manipulative strategies. These three aspects form the foundation of interpersonal trust among members in the context of collaborative group learning.

Several previous studies have also examined interpersonal trust in the context of group work or collaborative group learning. Arakal and Mampilly (2016) found that interpersonal trust plays a key role in strengthening group cohesion and enhancing the effectiveness of group cooperation. Another study found that team trust affects the collaborative learning experience in online settings, showing that low trust can undermine the effectiveness of cooperation in online learning (Tseng et al., 2015). Nortvedt et al. (2019) also found that interpersonal trust in learning groups enhances collaboration, supports interprofessional learning, and strengthens students confidence in collaborating with peers. Based on these studies, it can be seen that when each member possesses interpersonal trust, it supports the effectiveness of collaborative group learning and improves individuals socio-emotional skills. However, most of these studies have relied on experimental or correlational designs that examine the influence of trust on other variables, rather than using descriptive quantitative designs that assess the distribution, profiles, or characteristics of students trust across universities.

This study fills that gap by quantifying students interpersonal trust and providing a demographic overview of the current state of interpersonal trust in collaborative learning environments among Indonesian students. Based on this literature review, interpersonal trust is crucial for students in the implementation of collaborative group learning. When members of a group have high interpersonal trust, collaborative group learning is more effective. However, to the best of the authors knowledge, there has been no research specifically focused on describing the condition of interpersonal trust among students when they are required to work and learn in collaborative group settings. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study that examines the description of interpersonal trust in the context of students collaborative group learning. This research is important because understanding students interpersonal trust profiles in collaborative group learning can help lecturers and educational administrators identify appropriate strategies to implement collaborative group learning more effectively.

2.　 RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research method. According to Nasir (Rukajat, 2018), descriptive quantitative research is a method used to study the status of a group of people, objects, conditions, systems of thought, or events in the present. Descriptive research aims to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the phenomenon being investigated. The sampling method used was non-probability sampling with a snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a sampling technique that begins with a small number of participants, who are then asked to invite their acquaintances to participate, and so on, thereby increasing the sample size (Sugiyono dalam Mamik, 2015). The subjects of this study consisted of 257 students from various universities in Indonesia.

The data were collected using the Interpersonal Trust Scale, which was developed based on the aspects proposed by Rotenberg et al. (2021), namely reliability, emotional trust, and honesty. The data collection instrument underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure each item accurately measured aspects of interpersonal trust. The scale consisted of 32 items, with item discrimination indices ranging from 0.333 to 0.865, and a reliability coefficient of 0.947. Item validity was determined through correlation analysis between the item scores and the

total score, while reliability was calculated using Cronbachs Alpha, which indicated very high internal consistency. These results demonstrate that the Interpersonal Trust Scale is suitable for measuring students' interpersonal trust in this study. The scale used a five-point Likert format, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The use of a five-point Likert scale provided respondents with flexibility in expressing the extent to which they agreed with each statement, allowing for a more nuanced capture of variations in perception. Several sample items for each aspect of interpersonal trust are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Item Samples

Aspect	Item Samples
Reliability	*Saya tahu bagaimana teman satu kelompok saya bekerja. Dia dapat diandalkan.* *Saya memberikan bagian tugas yang adil untuk teman satu kelompok.*
Emotional Trust	*Saya percaya teman setu kelompok dapat memberikan dukungan yang positif.* *Saya yakin teman satu kelompok dapat menjaga perasaan saya.*
Honesty	*Teman satu kelompok selalu menepati janji.* *Saya mempercayai kebenaran yang dibicarakan oleh teman satu kelompok.*

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic data for the study participants are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Data of Participants

Category	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	85	33.1%
Female	172	66.9%
Semester		
1	1	0.4%
2	159	61.8%
3	18	7%
4	65	25.2%
5	4	1.5%
6	6	2.3%
7	1	0.4%
8	3	1.16%
Domicile		
Central Java	24	9.3%
West Java	80	31.1%
East Java	25	9.7%
Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY)	4	1.6%
Banten	4	1.6%
Bali	9	3.5%
DKI Jakarta	19	7.4%
West Kalimantan	3	1.2%
South Kalimantan	1	0.4%
Central Kalimantan	1	0.4%
East Kalimantan	3	1.2%
North Sumatra	7	2.7%
South Sumatra	2	0.8%
West Sumatra	7	2.7%
Aceh	1	0.4%
Jambi	2	0.8%
Riau	50	19.5%
Riau Islands	1	0.4%

Category	Number	Percentage
Lampung	6	2.3%
West Nusa Tenggara (NTB)	1	0.4%
West Sulawesi	1	0.4%
South Sulawesi	2	0.8%
Central Sulawesi	1	0.4%
Southeast Sulawesi	1	0.4%
Field of Study		
Social Sciences and Humanities (SOSHUM)	95	37%
Science and Technology (SAINTEK)	162	63%
University Type		
Public	189	73.5%
Private	68	26.5%
TOTAL	257	100%

Based on Table 2, the 257 research participants are categorized. In the gender category, most participants were female (66.9%), followed by male participants (33.1%). Regarding domicile, most participants lived in West Java Province (31.1%). Regarding academic discipline, most participants were from the STEM (SAINTEK) field (63%), followed by participants from the social sciences and humanities (SOSHUM) field (37%). Furthermore, regarding university status, most participants were from public universities (73.5%), followed by those from private universities (26.5%).

Table 3. Independent T-Test Results Based on Participant Demographic Data

Demographic Category	Mean	Levenes Test F	Probability	Equal variances assumed
				Sig. (2-tailed)
Gender				
Male	115.32	1.244	0.266	0.988
Female	115.28			
Field of Study				
SOSHUM	113.32	1.125	0.290	0.124
SAINTEK	116.46			
Type of University				
Public	116.46	0.007	0.936	0.420
Private	113.97			

Table 3 presents the results of the Independent T-Test analysis examining whether there are significant differences in interpersonal trust scores across participants demographic characteristics, including gender, field of study, and type of university. Based on Table 3, the average interpersonal trust score for male participants was 115.32, while that for female participants was 115.28. It can be seen that the average interpersonal trust scores differ between males and females. For the gender category, the Levenes Test F value was 1.244 with a probability of 0.266. Since the probability is > 0.05, it can be concluded that the variances between males and females are homogeneous (equal). Therefore, the t-test difference analysis should use the assumption of equal variances assumed. It can be seen that under the equal variances assumed section, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is $0.988 > 0.05$. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference in the average scores between males and females is not significant.

Next is the academic discipline category. The average interpersonal trust score for participants in the STEM field was 116.46, while participants in the social sciences and humanities field had an average score of 113.32. It can be seen that the average interpersonal trust scores differ between STEM and social sciences-humanities participants. For this category, the Levenes Test F value was 1.125 with a probability of 0.290. Since the probability is > 0.05, it can be concluded that the variances between the two groups are homogeneous. Therefore, the t-test difference analysis should use the assumption of equal variances assumed. Under the equal variances assumed

section, the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.124 > 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference in average scores between STEM and social sciences-humanities participants is not significant.

The last independent t-test was conducted for the university status category. The average interpersonal trust score of participants from public universities was 116.46, while those from private universities had an average score of 113.97. It can be seen that the average interpersonal trust scores differ between public and private university students. The Levenes Test F value was 0.007 with a probability of 0.936. Since the probability is > 0.05, it can be concluded that the variances between the two groups are homogeneous. Therefore, the t-test difference analysis should use the assumption of equal variances assumed. Under the equal variances assumed section, the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.420 > 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference in average scores between public and private university students is not significant.

Table 4. Categorization of Interpersonal Trust Scores of Research Subjects

Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
n=0	n=5	n=72	**n=133**	n=47
0%	1.94%	28.01%	**51.75%**	18.28%

Table 4 displays the categorization of participants interpersonal trust scores into five levels: very low, low, medium, high, and very high. Based on Table 4, most students who participated as research subjects (51.75%) had a high level of interpersonal trust toward their groupmates in the context of collaborative group learning. This means that most students in this study already possess interpersonal trust with their groupmates when working together to complete tasks. They can rely on one another, trust each other emotionally, and believe that their groupmates are honest. These findings are supported by Sapiie et al. (2020), who stated that students demonstrate solidarity, mutual assistance, fair division of tasks, and actively listen to one anothers opinions during group discussions. Zhong-ba (2015) also found a positive relationship between psychological safety and interpersonal trust among students, indicating that students who feel more emotionally secure tend to trust their peers more. Importantly, the present results extend this evidence to a large and diverse Indonesian sample, showing that these trust dynamics are not confined to a single institution or context.

The finding that most students in this study have a high level of interpersonal trust will positively impact the implementation of collaborative group learning. Mursidi et al. (2023) state that students with high interpersonal trust tend to communicate more effectively and build better social relationships, which in turn supports the effectiveness of group learning. Other studies have shown that students in small groups with high trust are more productive and demonstrate stronger solidarity when completing joint projects (Tolstoukhova et al., 2023). High interpersonal trust plays a crucial role in enhancing the dynamics and effectiveness of collaborative learning, enabling students to interact more effectively, work together harmoniously, and achieve more optimal learning outcomes. Thus, our findings not only confirm but also contextualize existing theory: the high levels of reliability and emotional trust may reflect cultural norms that privilege group stability and shared responsibility.

Table 5. Categorization of Scores by Interpersonal Trust Aspects

Interpersonal Trust Aspect	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Reliability	Very Low	0	0%
	Low	7	2.7%
	Medium	52	20.2%
	High	**125**	**48.6%**
	Very High	73	28.4%
Emotional Trust	Very Low	0	0%
	Low	9	3.5%
	Medium	75	29.2%
	High	**129**	**50.2%**

Interpersonal Trust Aspect	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Very High	44	17.1%
Honesty	Very Low	1	0.4%
	Low	8	3.11%
	Medium	74	28.8%
	High	**119**	**46.3%**
	Very High	55	21.4%
TOTAL		257	100%

Table 5 presents another key finding, which concerns the categorization of participants scores according to the three aspects of interpersonal trust, reliability, honesty, and emotional trust. In the aspect of reliability, most participants were in the very high and high categories, indicating that group members generally feel they can rely on one another in collaborative group learning. This suggests that reliability is one of the dominant aspects of interpersonal trust, playing an important role in group learning. Similarly, in the emotional trust aspect, most participants were in the very high and high categories, indicating they feel safe sharing opinions and can rely on emotional support from their groupmates. In terms of honesty, although the distribution varied, most participants remained in the very high and high categories. Among the three aspects of interpersonal trust, reliability had the highest level of trust, followed by emotional trust, while honesty showed a more varied distribution. This indicates that, in the context of collaborative group learning, participants are more likely to feel they can rely on and receive emotional support from their peers than to be focused solely on ensuring absolute honesty among group members.

This study also compared interpersonal trust scores based on participants demographics. The results of the independent t-test for gender (male and female), academic discipline (SOSHUM and SAINTEK), and university type (public and private) showed no significant differences in these categories. These findings are supported by Wang (2017), who stated that students interpersonal trust is not significantly influenced by gender, but is more closely related to personality and levels of loneliness. Similarly, Chen (2022) found no significant differences in students interpersonal trust based on gender, field of study, or other social backgrounds. These studies support the conclusion that demographic variables, such as gender, academic discipline, and university type, do not significantly influence students interpersonal trust. In the Indonesian context, these findings imply that interpersonal trust may be a broadly shared student attribute rather than one segmented by demographic subgroups, reinforcing the idea that trust is rooted more in social and cultural norms than in individual characteristics.

Indonesias collectivist culture influences the level of interpersonal trust within groups. This may explain the high level of interpersonal trust among participants in this study. In collectivist cultures, individuals rely more on others and are group-oriented (Hofstede in Shadiqi et al., 2022). Research has shown that collectivist culture fosters prosocial behavior (providing assistance and emotional support) (Guo et al., 2018). Individuals who engage in prosocial behavior typically already have interpersonal trust with others in their environment (Guo et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, trust in others is one of the core elements of social exchange theory (Afrianty et al., 2015). Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains that interactions between individuals occur based on subjective assessments of potential benefits and costs (Afrianty & Putriwahyuni, 2020). Social exchange occurs in reciprocal interactions in which both parties depend on each other. In the context of social exchange, reciprocal interactions include not only relationships between individuals but also between individuals and groups or between groups (Afrianty et al., 2015). This exchange is based on the principle of mutual giving and receiving while considering benefits and costs. Trust becomes an essential element in this interaction, which occurs voluntarily and without coercion (Blau in Afrianty et al., 2015). In collaborative learning, when group members engage in reciprocal interactions, giving and receiving emotional support, trust will form and strengthen over time.

Practically, the results guide educators and curriculum developers in designing learning environments that explicitly nurture interpersonal trust. Lecturers can implement structured group work with clear task distribution, establish group norms that emphasize reliability and honesty, and facilitate reflective discussions that build emotional trust. Training programs on communication skills, conflict resolution, and peer evaluation may further strengthen

students readiness to collaborate effectively. At the institutional level, universities can embed trust-building strategies into teaching guidelines and student development programs, ensuring that collaborative group learning not only supports academic achievement but also prepares students with transferable teamwork skills needed in professional settings.

Ultimately, the most important point is that interpersonal trust in collaborative group learning predicts learning satisfaction and motivation. Interpersonal trust within a learning group not only impacts task completion but also the quality of the students learning experience. When students feel trusted and can trust other group members, they tend to be more motivated, more confident to speak up, and feel valued in the learning process (Tseng et al., 2015). This correlates with higher learning satisfaction and can even reduce academic stress. Therefore, interpersonal trust can be an important indicator of the quality of group-based learning (Kanaris & Mujtaba, 2023). Our results lend support to this relationship by demonstrating high levels of trust in a diverse student sample, suggesting that collaborative group learning in Indonesia already has a strong foundation for positive psychosocial outcomes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that university students in Indonesia generally demonstrated a high level of interpersonal trust in collaborative group learning. Among the three aspects of trust, reliability emerged as the most dominant, indicating that most participants could depend on and entrust tasks to other group members. Furthermore, demographic variables such as gender, academic discipline, and type of university did not show significant differences in trust levels. These findings highlight the importance of reliability as the core dimension of interpersonal trust that underpins the effectiveness of group learning.

Future research should expand beyond descriptive analysis by employing more comprehensive and complex methods to explore interpersonal trust. It is recommended to investigate its relationship with other relevant variables, such as communication patterns, leadership, or group performance, to gain a deeper understanding of how trust develops and functions in academic settings. In addition, comparative studies between online and offline learning contexts are strongly encouraged, given the widespread use of digital learning environments. Such research would provide educators and curriculum developers with valuable insights for designing group learning activities that foster trust and improve learning outcomes.

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