

# Tracing Students Learning Engagement in Virtual EFL Classroom

<sup>1</sup>Susilowati, <sup>2</sup>Yunita Puspitasari

<sup>1</sup>*susisusilowati04@gmail.com* , <sup>2</sup>*yunitapuspitasari20@gmail.com*

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris STKIP PGRI Jombang

*ABSTRACT-* The global covid-19 pandemic has changed all aspects of life, including education. In Indonesia, school from home has been carried out since March 2020. This study aimed to investigate the learning engagement in the EFL classroom that occurs during virtual classes in pandemic Covid-19 employing the theory from Fredricks et al., 2004 and Reeve et al., 2011. The aspects of learning engagement are agentic engagement, behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement. The participant of this study included 34 students from English education department at STKIP PGRI Jombang in the fourth semester. A qualitative case study was employed in this study. The instruments of the study are observation, field notes and interviews. The data analysis reveals that: (1) Several aspects of learning engagement in 2019-A class of English education department occurred and another aspect did not occur, (2) The aspects that occurred in teaching learning activity in English education 2019-A are behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and agentic engagement. In fact, emotional engagement does not occur and positive emotion was missing during teaching learning activity in this class. The aspect finds as major contributors to the students learning engagement are behavioral and cognitive.

**Keyword** - EFL Classroom, Learning engagement, Teaching learning activity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The global covid-19 pandemic has changed all aspects of life, including education. In Indonesia, school from home has been carried out since March 2020. This has had a large impact on the learning process which was initially carried out face-to-face and during the Covid-19 pandemic learning was carried out online. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2020), as many as 1,186,127,211 learners were affected across the globe, or about 67.7% of the total enrolled learners from 144 country-wide closures, and nations had to change their learning systems due to COVID-19. Aspects of the teaching-learning process are also affected by distance learning, one of them is

interaction. Interaction between teachers and students has changed from direct classes into virtual classes.

Learning engagement is very important in teaching and learning activities. Irvin et al., (2007) stated that Engagement in the learning process is very important because it leads to the process of practice and interaction between subjects in the classroom. Learning engagement is the student's contribution during the teaching and learning process. Students participate actively in the learning process, inquisitive and motivated. During the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching and learning activities were carried out through online classes or usually called School from Home. There is a difference in learning engagement between face-to-face and online classes. Student engagement in class may be diminishing due to online learning because the teacher cannot control the learning process directly.

Learning engagement in the English class is an important factor in influencing the smoothness of the teaching and learning process. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language. English is the first foreign language studied as a compulsory subject from junior high school to college. Even so, at the early childhood education level, English has been introduced. A fundamental process in learning English is improving students' engagement (Yang, 2011). If the students actively follow the class, complete their assignment on time, interest, participate actively in the discussion it can say that they are engaged.

Many studies found that the learning engagement occurred positively and existed in another setting. However, studies about learning engagement under the covid-19 pandemic era are limited numbers. Moreover, in the scope of EFL classroom. With employing the theory from Fredricks et al., 2004 and Reeve et al., 2011 that mention aspects of learning engagement, the present study aims to investigate whether all the aspects by Fredricks et al., 2004 and Reeve et al., 2011 also occurred in the setting of Indonesian EFL classroom, particularly in the covid-19 pandemic era.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Brown (2007) defines learning as showing or assisting others in learning how to do something, giving guidance, guiding in the study of something, providing information, or causing to know or understand something. While teaching is about guiding and encouraging learning, it is also about creating the conditions for learning. Heinich (1999) said that

Learning is the process of a person's interaction with information and their environment to improve knowledge, skills, or attitudes and that in the learning process, it is important to pick, organize, and deliver information in an acceptable environment and through the interaction of learners with their environment.

Students-centered approaches need learning engagement in the teaching learning process. According to Krause and Coates (2008) engagement is the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes. Stovall (2003) stated that engagement is a combination of students' time on task and their willingness to participate in activities. Chen, et al., (2008) said engagement is the degree to which learners are engaged with their educational activities and that engagement is positively linked to a host of desired outcomes, including high grades, student satisfaction, and perseverance.

There are 4 aspects of learning engagement (Fredrick et al., 2004; Reeve et al., 2011). The aspects are: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and agentic engagement. Behavioral engagement is students' constructive attitudes, such as upholding the rules and adhering to classroom standards, as well as the lack of negative activities, such as leaving school and getting in trouble. (Finn, 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Finn & Rock, 1997). Emotional engagement is students' affective responses in the classroom, such as interest, boredom, pleasure, depression, and fear, are referred to as emotional engagement. (Connell et al., 1991; Skinner et al., 1993). Finn defines identification as belonging (a feeling of being important to the school) and value (an appreciation of success in school-related outcomes) (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997). The emotion that students feel during the teaching-learning process is very diverse such as enjoyed the class, interested in the class and feel pleasure in the class.

According to Connell and Wellborn's (1991), cognitive engagement includes flexibility in problem-solving, preference for hard work, and positive coping in the face of failure. Similarly, Wehlage et al. (1992) define cognitive engagement as "the psychological investment required to comprehend and master knowledge and skills explicitly taught in schools". So, cognitive engagement is students' conduct to support their understanding of the material that has been delivered during the teaching-learning process. Reeve et al., (2011) stated that agentic engagement as students' constructive contribution into the flow of the instruction they receive such as students might offer input, express a preference, offer a

suggestion or contribution, ask a question, communicate what they are thinking and needing, recommend a goal or objective to be pursued, and communicate their level of interest. The agentic engagement aspect comes from the students themselves.

### **III. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research used a qualitative approach. In this study, the researcher explores deeply students' engagement in the teaching-learning activities. The researcher used a case study design to conduct this study. The present study explores a class at Speaking class of English department as the unit of investigation. In this study researcher is a non-participant observer. The researcher joins and observes the teaching-learning activity and do not involve in their activity.

This study was conducted at STKIP PGRI Jombang in the speaking class of English Department 2019-A during the teaching learning activities. The researcher did observation and interview to the students of 2019-A class of English education department. The researcher used field notes and interview guide to get in-depth information about learning engagement that occurred in this class during virtual classes.

### **IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The data from the observations and interview reveal that overall the learning engagement of the students 2019-A class of English department was low. The students of 2019-A engaged in the aspects of behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and agentic engagement (in the red area of figure 4.1). Behavioral engagement that occurred in this class only several indicators namely listen carefully refers to B1, the students work hard when starting something new in class refers to B4 and pay attention in class refers to B5. Cognitive engagement that occurred in the 2019-A class also only several indicators namely the students try to relate what they are learning to what they are already known refers to C1, the students try to connect what they are learning with their own experiences refers to C2 and the students also change the way they learn if they are working on difficult understand refers to C8. The last, agentic engagement occurred only aspect 1 namely students ask question during the class refers to A1. Surprisingly, the emotional engagement did not occur and positive

emotion was missing during teaching-learning activities in this class as the condition in figure 4.1

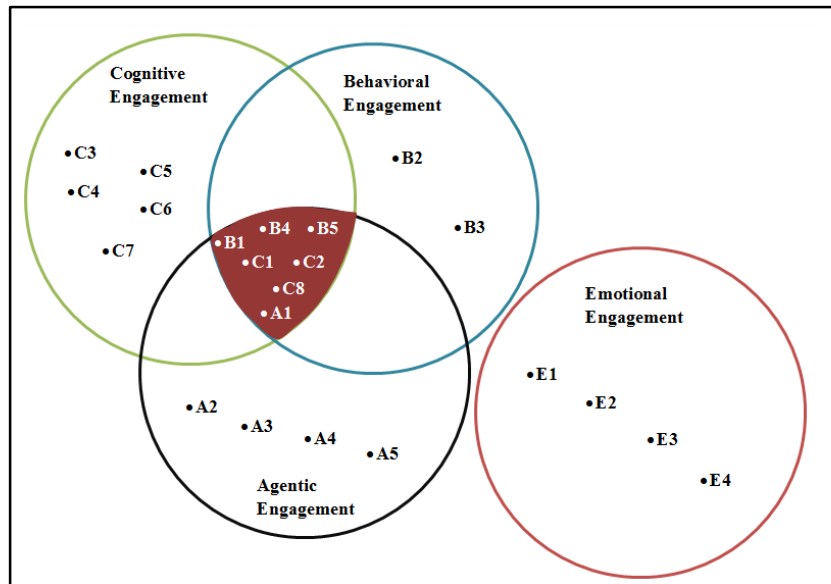


Fig. 4. 1 The aspects of learning engagement occurred in 2019-A class

The learning engagement in the 2019-A class was low. The aspects of learning engagement that occurred in this class only several aspects. This class is speaking class but the 2019-A used Google classroom application for their teaching learning activities. This application give impact to the learning engagement. The speaking course need more practice but this class used application that basically written. The students did force virtual learning because the pandemic covid-19. They forced learning virtual that they never did before. This reason influenced by readiness and adequate facilities and infrastructure. It is one line with Sulistyoyo et al. (2021) found that 83.6 % of 232 students participant said that internet connection was biggest barrier during virtual teaching learning activities and 29.8% said that they lack of tool to support their virtual learning. Learning engagement can be influenced by the conditions, facilities and infrastructure and readiness of the students and teachers.

The result of this research is the aspects of learning engagement that found in teaching learning process is behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and agentic engagement. Moreover, the students' did not engage in emotional engagement. The finding of the present study contradict with Marshall (2007) and Mulia (2020) but in one line with Shernoff et al. (2003). The findings of the present study can be used as additional knowledge that the learning engagement has the various degree and can be influenced by the research setting.

The result of the present study contrast with Marshall (2007) even though both of the studies used software or application but the course is different. The conditions of both of the studies are also different, this study conduct in the Pandemic Covid-19 era while Marshall (2007) conducted the research in normal conditions. Marshall (2007) found that the engagement theory was deemed relevant and useful in the WebCT site for the academic writing course. The engagement theory gives highly effective in an academic writing course at the University of Sydney, Australia. Students take an active role in the unit, interacting and collaborating and the lecturer in a safe environment. The students also collaborate on significant initiatives that are directly related to their respective fields.

The students of English education 2019-A class were highly engaged in cognitive engagement. When the students doing schoolwork they connect what they are learning with their own experiences and their own knowledge. It is one line with Shernoff et, al. (2003) found the participants increased engagement when the perceived challenge of the task and their own skills were high and balance, the instruction was relevant, and the learning environment was under their control. In the other hand, the researcher found that the students of English education 2019-A said that they listen carefully in class when the lecturer explains the material and they prefer to watch videos with evidence that they look for more explanations on YouTube in the form of videos when they feel they do not understand the material in class. This finding contrast with Shernoff et al. (2003). Shernoff et al. (2003) found that the participants were also engaged in individual and group work versus listening to the lecturer, watching a video, or taking exams.

The aspects that have a high contribution in teaching and learning activities in English education 2019-A are behavioral and cognitive engagement. This statement is different from the finding from Mulia (2020). Mulia (2020) found the students' behavior aspect has the highest as the greatest standard deviation obtained by the interaction aspect of students' engagement in online EFL learning. The cognitive aspect in Mulia (2020) has the lowest standard deviation among other aspects.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Several aspects of learning engagement in 2019-A class of English education department occurred and another aspect did not occur. The study reveals that the students are behaviorally, cognitively, and agenticly engaged. Behavioral engagement found 3 indicators namely they pay attention, work hard in class, and listen carefully. Cognitive engagement

also found 3 indicators namely the students try to relate what they are learning to what they are already known, the students try to connect what they are learning with their own experiences, the students also change the way they learn the material if they are working on is difficult to understand. Agentic engagement found only 1 indicator, it is the students ask a question during teaching learning activities. However, the students are not engaged in emotional engagement. The emotional engagement does not have existed to this class because the researcher does not found positive emotion during teaching learning activities.

This present study may have some limitations, such as the time of conducted the research, so, it is strongly advised that future researcher can take a long time to get detail and deeper information about learning engagement and make an experiment in the other place that conveys the aspects of learning engagement during teaching learning activity.

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