

Investigating Students' Engagement in ESP Online Course during Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine students' engagement levels and factors in attending ESP online courses during the Covid-19 pandemic. In performing data and data analysis, a qualitative research design was employed with the interpretation of descriptive statistics. This research distributed a questionnaire to 59 students in the nursing department. The research findings showed that four dimensions of students' engagements got a means score in the level of "Agree"; skills engagement with 4.18, participation/interaction engagement with 3.99, emotional engagement with 3.88, and performance engagement with 3.86. For factors influencing students' engagement, all factors consisting of direct and indirect factors got a means score of "Strongly Agree" as 4.38. The findings showed that the students were engaged in an ESP online course. Both direct and indirect factors influence students' engagement including learning resources, teaching competency, knowledge base, learning style, teaching context, social network, and technology.

Keywords: *Students' engagement levels, Students' engagement factors, Online learning, ESP*

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic is an extraordinary condition that changes all aspects of life around the world including the education field. Education at all levels is required to make a sudden and drastic transformation to adapt to the circumstances in which face-to-face learning is diverted into distance learning. In distance learning - also known as online learning-, information technology (ICT) facilities are needed to bridge the communication between teachers and students such as accessing teaching materials using the internet, participating in virtual discussions, collecting tasks, and getting feedback electronically. With these internet facilities, learning can be done anytime and anywhere both globally and locally, and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of learning (Anshari, Alas, Hj Mohd Yunus, Pg Hj Sabtu, & Sheikh Abdul Hamid, 2016; Tarisayi & Munyaradzi, 2021).

In contrast to face-to-face methods, online learning has several characteristics as well as certain challenges in which the students cannot directly interact with their teachers and classmates in real-time. Online learning requires media at the time they intend to interact

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with each other through virtual meetings. This can affect students' learning styles, learning interests, learning outcomes, and even learning achievements (Li, Wang, Stone, & Turki, 2021). In addition, online learning also requires internet access where not all students can easily access depending on the area they are living in. This also occurs in some developing countries (Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021). Gaur in (Mtshali, Maistry, & Govender, 2020) reveals that there is a considerable gap in e-learning between developed and developing countries where research on e-learning is more widely conducted in developed countries than in developing countries.

Many studies have revealed the advantages of online learning/distance learning compared to other teaching methods such as flexibility in learning and opportunities to use diverse technological resources in the learning process and unlimited learning opportunities compared to classroom learning (Lidiawati & Helsa, 2021; Shih, Chen, Chen, & Wey, 2013). However, due to the change in the teaching system from face-to-face to online learning is done in a very short time due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there are many difficulties found by both the students and teachers in applying online learning (Pradhana & Putri, 2021; Simanihuruk, Mora Yulina; Silalahi, Dumaris E.; Sihombing, 2021). Online learning also provides an impact on deficiencies in various aspects including students' engagement in learning.

Students' engagement is the level of attention, effort, satisfaction, participation, interest, and desire, and commitment shown by students at the time of learning or being taught to achieve learning goals. It relates to students' motivation and affective reactions to school belonging (Purnomo & Pahlevi, 2021). Students' engagement can also be in the form of student efforts to learn, analyze, practice, solve problems and obtain feedback (Chiu, 2021; Yates, Brindley-Richards, & Thistoll, 2014). Students who engage in good learning usually take classes well and enjoy learning seen in long-term learning achievement, as well as learning satisfaction (Chiu, 2021; Karabıyık, 2019; Silvola, Näykki, Kaveri, & Muukkonen, 2021).

Some studies related to students' engagement show that students' engagement is an important element in learning. According to Handelsman in the SCEQ (Students Course Engagement Questionnaire) (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005), there are four dimensions of student engagement, namely Skill Engagement, Emotional Engagement, Participation/ Interaction Engagement, and Performance Engagement. These four dimensions represent a form of students' engagement in learning.

The first dimension of skill engagement is in the form of taking notes during learning to understand the teaching materials, and related to learning strategies in general that a student uses to achieve intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, while the second dimension is emotional engagement which is the application of learning materials in real life, or earnestness in learning materials. The third dimension or participation/interaction engagement is student participation and interaction with teachers and other students in the classroom such as asking teachers questions about what is not yet understood and helping other students if they do not understand something in learning. Meanwhile, the last dimension of performance engagement is related to the level of performance of students in the classroom such as feeling confident in learning materials, getting good grades, and doing exams well (Handelsman et al., 2005).

Due to the importance of students' engagement during the learning process, it is also necessary to identify the factors that influence engagement. Several factors have been reported to influence students' engagement such as the teaching environment and interaction between various elements in the classroom environment including students, teachers, and content (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). According to Barua, two factors affect students' engagement namely direct and indirect factors. Direct factors are related to how the preparation, selection, and suitability of learning materials, the teacher's ability to convey, the basic knowledge possessed by students, and the learning style of each student while indirect factors are in the form of teaching context related to educational

institutions/institutions, social networks owned by students, and technological facilities used in delivering lectures such as the use of LMS, or other teaching platforms (Barua, Zhou, Gururajan, & Chan, 2019).

Thus, research on students' engagement is important to be conducted. Previous studies have discussed students' engagement levels and factors related to face-to-face learning and hybrid learning (Günüç & Kuzu, 2014; Hu & Ching, 2012). Some studies discussed students' engagement in online learning but without including factors affecting and vice versa (Bergdahl & Nouri, 2020; Dixon, 2015; Errico & Cerniglia, 2016; Oraif & Elyas, 2021; Sari, 2020; Tusino, Faridi, Saleh, & Fitriati, 2020), students' engagement in assessment (Bae & Kokka, 2016), general students' engagement (Handelsman et al., 2005; Singh & Srivastava, 2014), technology-related students' engagement (Havens, 2014; Henrie, Halverson, & Graham, 2015; Öncü, Şengel, & Delialioğlu, 2008), and students' engagement in higher education (Mandernach, 2015). Those are related to measuring and assessing students' engagement in learning. In short, measuring students' engagement is crucial but knowing the factors affecting the engagement is also crucial. Therefore, this research is aimed to investigate both the levels of students' engagement and the factors influencing them in online learning. The research questions are as follows: 'what is the level of students' engagement in ESP online course' and 'what factors influence students' engagement during online learning?'

METHOD

This research used the qualitative design of descriptive statistics to interpret the data related to the level of students' engagement and students' engagement factors. The sample of the research is the nursing students in STIKES Surya Global attending English for Nursing: Elementary. The total of the respondents was 59 students. The researcher adopted the questionnaires of some references (Barua et al., 2019; Handelsman et al., 2005). There were 21 items of the students' engagement and 7 items of factors influencing students' engagement on a five-point Likert scale.

Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher involved 30 respondents in a pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the instruments. The respondents had similar characteristics to those of the study sample. The researcher obtained an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of (0.945) and (0.821) which means that all items in the questionnaire have high reliability. For the level of students' engagement, there are four dimensions including Skill Engagement, Emotional Engagement, Participation/Interaction Engagement, and Performance Engagement. The data were analyzed by using means score and standard deviation (SD). The results then were interpreted through some levels including level "strongly disagree" (1.00-1.80), "disagree" (1.81-2.60), "neutral/moderate" (2.61-3.40), "agree" (3.41-4.20), and "strongly agree" (4.21-5.00).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first questionnaire is the level of students' engagement while the second is factors influencing students' engagement. The following table shows the result of the analysis.

Table 1. Skills Engagement

No. Items	Statements	N	M	SD
1	Making sure to study on a regular basis	59	4.32	0.571
2	Putting forth to effort	59	4.34	0.822
3	Doing all the homework problems	59	4.81	0.393
4	Staying up on readings	59	4.15	0.715
5	Looking over class notes between classes to make sure I understand the material	59	3.90	0.845
6	Being organized	59	3.69	0.771
7	Taking good notes in class	59	3.86	0.955
8	Listening carefully in class	59	4.39	0.670
Total			4.18	3.997

Table 1 shows that the students responded positively. From 8 items related to skills engagement, all received a means score of more than 3.5 points. The 3rd item of 'Doing all the homework problems' got the highest means of 4.81 points. Meanwhile, some other items also got means at the level of "strongly agree" including items 1, 2, and 8 'Making sure to study on a regular basis', 'Putting forth to effort', and 'Listening carefully in class'. Item 6 in the form of 'Being organized' got the lowest means related to skills engagement but it was still at the agree level. It means that of the 59 respondents, many students still expressed approval of this statement. Related to the next dimension, namely emotional engagement, it can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. Emotional Engagement

No. Items	Statements	N	M	SD
1.	Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	59	3.75	0.863
2.	Applying course material to my life	59	3.85	0.906
3.	Finding ways to make the course interesting to me	59	3.86	0.798
4.	Thinking about the course between class meetings	59	3.88	0.853
5.	Really desiring to learn the material	59	4.08	0.857
Total			3.88	3.097

From Table 2, it can be seen that the 5 items of statements related to emotional engagement got a means score at the level of "agree". The 13th item of 'Really desiring to learn the material' had the highest means score of 4.08 while the 9th item of 'Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life' got the lowest means score on this criterion which is 3.75. Meanwhile, the participation/interaction engagement dimension can be seen in the table below.

Table 3. Participation/Interaction Engagement

No. Items	Statements	N	M	SD
1.	Being active in class	59	3.93	0.807
2.	Asking questions when I don't understand the instructor	59	3.73	0.887
3.	Having fun in class	59	4.29	0.744
4.	Calling the lecturer privately to review assignments or test or to ask questions	59	4.03	1.098
5.	Helping fellow students	59	4.00	1.034
Total			3.99	3.176

Related to participation/interaction engagement in Table 3, the 16th item of 'Having fun in class' received the highest means score of 4.29 which was included in the "strongly agree" level. This means that students enjoyed the process of learning English. Another item getting a means score with the level of "agree" with the lowest means score was the 15th point which is 'Asking questions when I don't understand the instructor'.

Because learning was conducted online, the students asked questions either through conference/Google meet, or by texting through WhatsApp groups. Performance engagement in learning English online can be seen as follows.

Table 4. Performance Engagement

No. Items	Statements	N	M	SD
1.	Getting a good grade	59	3.80	0.943
2.	Doing well on the tests	59	3.64	0.866
3.	Being confident that I can learn and do well in the class	59	4.15	0.715
Total			3.86	1.984

In the performance engagement dimension, it can be seen in Table 4 that all three items of the statement got a means score in the range of 3.41-4.20 with category level "agree". The 21st item of 'Being confident that I can learn and do well in the class' gets the highest means score of 4.15 which means that almost all students felt confident in following English learning through online learning.

The second question, 'What factors influence students' engagement in ESP online course?' is divided to direct factors and indirect factors which can be seen in the following table.

Table 5. Factors Influencing Students' Engagement

No. Items	Statements	N	M	SD
1	Learning resources (preparation, selection, usefulness, and relevance)	59	4.39	0.588
2	Teaching competency	59	4.66	0.545
3	Knowledge Base/Prior Knowledge	59	4.07	0.907
4	Learning style	59	4.15	0.805
5	Teaching context (Facilities provided by institution)	59	4.61	0.558
6	Social network/Peer interaction	59	4.32	0.860
7	Technology (Internet networking, & data)	59	4.46	0.934
Total		59	4.38	3.072

Based on Table 5 above, it can be seen that each factor affected students' engagement in English learning. The factor that scored highest was teaching competency as part of direct factors, followed by teaching context (facilities provided by institution) and technology (internet networking & data) as part of indirect factors with a means score of 4.66, 4.61, and 4.46, respectively. Other factors also got a means score with a level of "strongly agree" such as social network/peer interaction (4.32) and Learning Resources (preparation, selection, usefulness, and relevance) with a means score (4.39). Two other factors got a means score at the "agree" level, namely learning style (4.15) and Knowledge Base (4.07). While there is a difference of level, the total means a score of 4.38 is in the range of the "strongly agree" level.

Regarding the result of the study, all four dimensions of students' engagement got total means score in the level "agree". The most dominant engagement is skills engagement, followed by participation/interaction engagement, emotional engagement, and performance engagement. It means that the students as respondents agree that they were engaged in skills, emotional, participation/interaction, and performance in ESP online course they attended. Measurements of students' engagement in learning as conducted in this study are in line with many other studies. The information on students' engagement levels can help the teachers improve EFL practice which shows the levels of students' intellectual efforts, skills, performance, participation, and also emotional elements of online learning (Dixson, 2015; Oraif & Elyas, 2021). Students' engagement in online learning itself represents the application of technology in learning (Havens, 2014; Henrie et al., 2015).

Meanwhile, related to the students' engagement factors including direct factors and indirect factors, based on the results of the questionnaire, it can be seen that the respondents strongly agree that both direct factors as learning resources (preparation, selection, usefulness, and relevance); teaching competency (including teachers' autonomy, performance, etc); knowledge base (prior knowledge); and learning style and indirect factors as teaching context (facilities provided by institution); social network (peer interaction); and technology (internet networking & data) influencing their engagement in attending ESP online course. The result supported previous findings of factors influencing students' engagement both direct factors (Dincer, Yesilyurt, & Takkac, 2012; Fathi & Zarei, 2021; Hu & Ching, 2012; Mello, 2016; Öncü et al., 2008; Zhao, Lin, Sun, Zheng, & Yin, 2018) and indirect

factors (Chiu, 2021; Günüş & Kuzu, 2014; Mello, 2016; Sari, 2020; Siddiqui, Miah, & Ahmad, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the data, the conclusions can be said as in the following: (1) the students agree that they are engaged in ESP online course in all four dimensions including skills engagement, emotional engagement, participation/interaction engagement, and performance engagement. The most dominant engagement is skills engagement, 2) the students also strongly agree that their engagement in ESP online courses is influenced by direct factors and indirect factors. Teaching competency, teaching context, and technology are the dominant factors influencing students' engagement.

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