

A Qualitative Study into the Lived-Experience of Indonesian College Students: Focusing on Online Students' Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on constructivism research paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), this current research aims to investigate the lived-experience of Indonesian college students focusing on online students' engagement. Though students' engagement has attracted many scholars around the world, it is still limited empirical evidence contextualized in Indonesian tertiary-level classrooms. A qualitative narrative study (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) was employed investigating two undergraduate students' learning engagement situated in one of online classroom at one of private universities in the eastern part of java, Indonesia. As for the data-collecting procedure, we employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on semi-structured interview. The findings suggest that the participants are disengaged, lack of teacher-students interaction, non-optimal, and less practice. Conclusions were then drawn as well as discussing implications and recommendations

Keywords: *EFL undergraduate students; online students' engagement; narrative approach*

INTRODUCTION

Students' engagement in learning is essentially critical, particularly in online learning environment, since it has been repeatedly proven as a large predictor contributing to the students' academic achievement (Bond et al., 2020; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). Research on learners' engagement covers a wide range of issues contextualized in both conventional face-to-face classroom (Boekaerts, 2016; Handelsman et al., 2005; P. E. Kahn, 2014; Mutwarasibo, 2014; Yu et al., 2019) and online learning environment (Ayouni et al., 2021; Bailey et al., 2021; Chen, 2017; Chiu, 2022; Dixson, 2015; Galikyan & Admiraal, 2019; Jung & Lee, 2018; Omar et al., 2012; Richardson & Newby, 2006; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). Overall, those studies reported the pivotal role of students' engagement in their academic success.

Student engagement has operationally defined as "Student's psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, mastering the knowledge, skills or crafts that the academic work is intended to promote" (Newmann, 1992, p. 12). In the same vein, Wehlage et al. (1989, p. 17) defined engagement as "the psychological investment required to comprehend and master knowledge and skills explicitly taught in schools". Meanwhile, Kuh, (2009) defined students' engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683). Another scholar defined students' engagement as "broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience" including "active learning, participation in challenging academic activities, formative communication with academic

staff, involvement in enriching educational experiences, and feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities” (Coates, 2007, p. 122).

In a time of online learning during pandemic Covid-19, students' engagement has become one of the crucial issues. There has been a large number of studies (Soffer & Cohen, 2019; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Yu et al., 2019) claiming that it has significantly correlated to the students' academic achievement. Meanwhile, some scholars focused on investigating the role of students' emotions in the learning process (D'Errico et al., 2016; Hasnine et al., 2021). Another study explored the effect of teachers' role on students' engagement by using LMS (Xu et al., 2020). More recently, a systematic review article (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022) investigating the three dimensions of students' engagement (affective, behavioral and cognitive) in online learning claimed the necessity for (1) the modification of college students, (2) professional training, (3) adequate internet connectivity, (4) quality online learning in higher education, and (5) students' well-being. Another systematic review (Ogunyemi et al., 2022) found the ten indicators to enhance students' engagement in MOOC learning environments. Those indicators are (1) students' personality assessment, (2) assessing students' interaction with learning resources, (3) measurement of interaction with the learning materials, (4) providing innovative feedback from lectures, (5) soliciting intermittent open feedback from learners, (6) deployment of short- to medium-length courses, (7) assessing students' involvement in forum discussions, (8) stimulating students' involvement by spread interactive elements, (9) timely detection of learners' engagement to forestall boredom, procrastination, and attention loss during learning, and (10) performance assessment.

Furthermore, students' engagement during the covid-19 pandemic has been extensively researched by many prominent scholars around the globe such as in Australia (Hannon & D'Netto, 2007; Muir et al., 2019), China (Huang, 2022; Luan et al., 2020; Zhang & McNamara, 2018), Columbia (Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021), Egypt (El-Sayad et al., 2021), Hong Kong (Hu & Hui, 2012), Latin American (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022), New Zealand (Nkomo et al., 2021), Pakistan (Abid et al., 2021), Taiwan (Lai et al., 2021), South Korea (Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021), Turkey (Özhan & Kocadere, 2020), United Kingdom (P. Kahn et al., 2017). In the same vein, this issue has been investigated in various disciplines such as Computer Science, graphic design (Hu & Hui, 2012), hospitality and business (Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021), Management (P. Kahn et al., 2017). However, there is limited empirical evidence contextualized in Indonesian tertiary-level classroom. To fill this void, this qualitative narrative research tried to explore the lived-experience of Indonesian college students that focusing on online students' engagement.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is thus to explore college students' online learning engagement in an Indonesian EFL tertiary-level classroom. The findings of this current study can bridge the gap in the existing literature in providing insights for university lecturers about the detailed descriptions of the learners' engagement situated in an online EFL classroom setting at the tertiary level in Indonesia. Hence, this current research is an endeavor to answer this following research question: “How do the two Indonesian EFL learners reflect on their experience about their online learning engagement?”

METHODS

The study was drawn upon a constructivism research paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Schwandt, 2007) investigating the participants' lived-experiences about their online learning engagement during the COVID-19-imposed course. We employed the qualitative narrative inquiry

(Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) to extract their experiences in such settings. We considered this inquiry as the most appropriate research design as it can explore the participant's learning experiences focusing on learning engagement during COVID-19 outbreak contextualized at one Indonesian tertiary-level EFL classroom in the eastern part of Java, Indonesia.

A total of two participants were voluntarily involved in this research. As for the participant recruitment, we followed the ethical procedures for recruiting the participant as proposed by Hammersley and Traianou (2012). Firstly, researchers need to respect the capacities and perspectives of each participant who involved in this study. Secondly, researcher must obtain the letter of consent from the people to participate in this study and those participants are able to withdraw from the investigation at any time. In this current study, researchers send messages via WhatsApp that contain requests for their willingness (letter of consent) to participate in this study. After obtaining their consent, a semi-structured interview can be implemented. The demographic data indicated two participants that consist of a male (50%) and a female (50%) aged between 19-21 years old. They were undergraduate students of English Education Program in the academic year of 2018-2019. To respect the participant privacy, we do not include the participants' identity in detail, as suggested by (Allen, 2017).

To collect any necessary data, a semi-structured interview (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) was employed in the current study. The interviews were conducted via voice notes feature in WhatsApp and, then, we recorded those series of interviews. Before the interview was recorded, we gained the permission to record the interviews, as suggested by Hammersley and Traianou (2012). This is due to the right of each participants are involved and might cause conflict. Recording or take a photograph without any permission is also illegal. This interview was implemented several times to obtain the credible data. A total 4 (four) interview guidelines delivered in depth for approximately 50-60 minutes as suggested by Barkhuizen et al. (2014). The interview guidelines were adopted from Thornberg et al. (2020) and Appleton et al. (2006) focusing on these following issues: affective engagement (liking online learning), behavioral engagement (effort and participation), and cognitive engagement (extrinsic motivation).

The data that has been collected through interviews were analyzed by using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We adopted the procedures of data analysis as recommended by Widodo (2014). He described those procedures as follows; (1) researcher listening to the recorded interviews repeatedly to discover the research needs, (2) transcribing the data by giving the data identity or codes to facilitate in classifying and identifying the data, (3) interpreting the data based on participants' perspective, and (4) provide feedback to the participants for checking the accuracy of the data (member checking) to build the credibility of data. In the same vein, Janesick (2015) added that peer debriefing includes reviewing and assessing transcripts to prevent missing a key point from participants' perspective, overemphasizing, and repeating one or more points. It is due to peer debriefing increase the trustworthiness of the credibility of the data itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Newmann, 1992). It has been emphasized by Lincoln & Guba (1985) which stated that peer debriefing is extremely crucial particularly during investigation process. It is due to first, debriefing tried to makes the researchers aware of participant values and perspectives. Second, researcher provides a risk-free to check the data suitability and ideas from the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This current study was designed to explore the experiences of undergraduate students during online learning, including students' perceived of online learning, their lessons, student-teacher interaction, and students' extrinsic motivation. The data of interviews in this current study from the first participant DFR#1 indicated students' engagement is still unstable due to students and teachers still adapting to the online learning system. Moreover, it is still a lot of miscommunication between students and teachers during online learning. In the same vain, BZ#2 also pointed students' engagement during a pandemic is not intensive due to there is one way interaction between students and teacher frequently. These statements has described in this following transcript:

"... It [students-teachers interaction] is still unstable... both of them are still in the adaptation on online learning system. So, there are [so many] miscommunications [between students' and teachers] and less effective in learning process..." (Interview DFR#1, via WhatsApp, 18 August 2022)

"...the interaction between me [student] and teacher during online learning not as intense as offline learning, it's because of frequent one-way communication between me and my teacher..." (Interview BZ#2, via WhatsApp, 19 August 2022)

Related to students' perceived toward the lessons, data from both participants #DFR1 and #BZ2 indicated that there are efforts of understanding the lessons and solving problems during online learning. It is proven by both participants are attempt to understand the material by themselves if teacher delivered unclear explanation. BZ#2 added that he explore the scientific articles and learning site to support him as a media to increase his understanding in learning. Meanwhile, DFR#1 describe occasionally teacher does not provide a clear explanation about the lessons therefore, to overcome on this situation she reads the material by herself and ask to lecturer as the final effort. Those are explained in the following interview:

"... I started looking for something I don't understand on internet... [Such as] learning site and scientific articles..." (Interview BZ#2, via WhatsApp, 19 August 2022)

"...sometimes teachers' explanation during online learning is unclear...so, [I] read [the materials] myself...[and] if I found it difficult, I ask to [my] lecturer" (Interview DFR#1, via WhatsApp, 18 August 2022)

The third items tried to portray students' extrinsic motivations in online learning during Covid-19 pandemic. The statements are described as the following interviews:

"My extrinsic motivation mostly from my classmates, it's more exciting if my friends are excited too...and also advice from (my) teacher as well..." (Interview DFR#1, via WhatsApp, 18 August 2022)

"...most of the encouragement comes from my parents...by thinking of what they gave to me makes me [want to] learn and do better" (Interview BZ#2, via WhatsApp, 19 August 2022)

Based on the result of the interviews of both participants DFR#1 and BZ#2, the data represented their extrinsic motivations come from different sources. #DFR1 gained her extrinsic motivation from her classmates. She claimed if her classmates are excited about learning, then she will be motivated to learn. She also added that teachers' pieces of advice also affect her to involve in

learning. Meanwhile, #BZ2 stated that he obtained most of his encouragement from his parents. This is due to considering what his parents gave to him, it encouraged him to learn and improve.

Even though both participants DFR#1 and BZ#2 obtained an encouragement to learn, they still found difficulties during online learning. Both are agreed that unpredictable schedule and lack of classroom management from their teachers become one of the factors that lead to the lack of student involvement in learning during pandemic. BZ#2 also added lack of student-teacher interaction, time management and less practice becoming obstacles that causes students' engagement are not optimal. DFR#1 clearly emphasize by restate the statement of the second participant, she mentioning lack of time management and less practice has significant influence on students' engagement during online learning. Those are explained in the following interview:

"...lack of student-teacher interaction, [teachers] suddenly change the learning schedule [school timetable] which makes me [student] unwilling to join the class, [and] give all of the practical assignment in the last meeting...[it] makes me overwhelming..." (Interview BZ#2, via WhatsApp, 19 August 2022)

"...the schedule [school timetable] is a bit complicated...[because] the lecturer [suddenly] asked to change their teaching schedule...during online learning, [lecturers] rarely give practical assignment..." (Interview DFR#1, via WhatsApp, 18 August 2022)

The last item tried to discover students' engagement in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The statements described in the following interviews:

"...(I) do the assignments given by the lecturer faster than the deadline and I [student] try to find out about the material that will be delivered at the next meeting ..." (Interview BZ#2, via WhatsApp, 19 August 2022)

"...increase the time [while learning materials] and patterns of study, read the materials and sharing with friends" (Interview DFR#1, via WhatsApp, 18 August 2022)

Based on the interview above, both of the participants DFR#1 and BZ#2 confessed an effort in learning. This situation indicates that there is students' involvement in the online learning process. BZ#2 claimed to complete the assignment before the deadline and learning the material that will be delivered by the teacher are his efforts to obtain a good academic outcome. Meanwhile, DFR#1 mentioned to increase the learning outcomes she maximizes learning patterns by reading the materials and discussing with her classmates.

Level 1: 2. Discussion

The aim of this current study is to investigate the lived-experience of Indonesian college students focusing on online students' engagement. Item 1 is set to uncover how student-teacher interaction occurred in online learning environment. The data illustrated that student-teacher interaction is still unstable and non-optimal due to one-way communication that frequently causes miscommunication among them. Moreover, both students and teachers are still adapting to the sudden transition from the conventional face-to-face classroom to the virtual learning environment leading to the unstable interaction. However, Kuh and Hu (2001) emphasized the intensity of student-teacher interaction highly influence students' effort to accomplish their desire to achieve learning goals. If this situation occur, it will lead the students difficult to comprehend the learning materials that can significantly

affect their learning performance, which supports the earlier studies (Ayouni et al., 2021; Moore, 2002).

As aforementioned, item 2 tries to expose how the students perceived their online learning processes. The interview analysis showcased that there is a considerable effort in comprehending materials by exploring the scientific articles and learning sites. Several studies (Axelson & Flick, 2010; Coates, 2006; Kuh, 2009b) found similar empirical evidences claiming that the students' effort has a significant effect on their knowledge retention that will significantly effect on their learning performance.

Students' engagement along with motivation is the most critical aspect, particularly in online students' engagement. This is due to it has a positive impact on academic success, as also revealed by Özhan and Kocadere (2020). The data illustrated that extrinsic motivations are originated from the surroundings including their classmates, teachers, and parents. Moreover, Harter (2009) discovered that classroom competition makes the participant so excited and motivated to learn. Other previous studies (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Kubanyiova, 2006) reported that teachers' role in engaging students in learning depends on how teachers communicate and act in the classroom. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers maintain the students' learning motivation (Jang et al., 2016) in order to achieve the learning achievement leading to their academic success.

Item 4 tried to unveil student difficulties in understanding the lessons during online learning. Participants in the current study reported several difficulties in understanding the materials in the online learning context, such as lack of student-teacher interaction and lack of practice. This situation indicates that the participants are disengaged in the online learning environment by showing lack of interest and overwhelming (Boekaerts, 2016; Fredricks et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2016). However, for Martin and Bolliger (2018) teacher-student interaction is extremely crucial in online learning environment since it will generate emotional support between students and teachers that can hugely impact their personal development (Grigorenko, 2019; Kuh & Hu, 2001).

In accordance with the data analysis results, this current study found that the participants indicated an effort to create productive learning activities (e.g., consistency in keeping on-time deadline submission, learning rehearsal strategy, class discussion strategy, increasing academic learning time) to achieve their learning goals. This finding is in line with several previous studies (Coates, 2006; Kuh, 2009a) reported the desire to learn by accomplishing the assignment before the deadline, studying the material for the next meeting, increasing the time of learning and discussing with classmates. Moreover, he added that how students' perseverance in their learning is extremely influenced by their learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

As aforementioned, this current study tried to answer the research question about how the two Indonesian EFL learners reflect on their experience with their online learning engagement. To answer this research question, we employed a narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) to explore the participants' lived-experiences. After conducting a series of semi-structured interview and adopting interview data analysis framework as proposed by Widodo (2014), the findings showcase that the students' engagement during online learning is still non-optimal. Moreover, student-teacher interaction is still unstable due to one-way communication frequently causing miscommunication among them. This situation shows the participants are disengaged in their learning by showing a lack of interest and overwhelming. To

respond to this situation, the institution must promote learning engagement due to it has a good impact on students' academic achievement. Furthermore, the data also indicates the considerable effort in comprehending materials and extrinsic motivations that shows a positive impact on academic success. However, the participants voluntarily involved in this study were still limited and only from a private university in the eastern part of Java, Indonesia, did not cover a wide area. Future researchers should investigate this issue with a large number of participants and covering a wide area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study has not received any funding. Also, the authors would like to express our gratitude to the editor(s) and anonymous reviewer(s) for their constructive inputs on this manuscript.

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