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Journal of Arabic and English Language

Vol. 4, no.2, 2021

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Reviewers Acknowledgement

The editors of Alsuna: Journal of Arabic and English Language gratefully acknowledge and appreciate the effort and generosity of our reviewers. The following people have contributed their time and expertise to provide constructive evaluation and feedback on reviewing our manuscripts.

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Distance Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: Students' Engagement in English Foreign Language Class

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aims to explore students' behaviour, emotional, and cognitive engagement in EFL class during Covid-19 pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach - A qualitative approach with class observation, interview, and questionnaire was undertaken to examine the students' engagement. Teachers and student of two public junior senior high schools in Jakarta, Indonesia involved voluntarily to this study. 5 teachers' (1 man and 4 women) classes were observed and they were interviewed. 467 (187 male and 280 female) students were administered the questionnaire and 9 of them were interviewed.

Findings - The result suggested that the students were disengaged behaviourally, emotionally, and cognitively in English class during distance learning. It occurred due to some factors such as uninteresting learning activities, unstable signal, and lack of students' understanding. The study provides practical implications for English language teachers. They need to construct the interesting and various learning activities and effective strategies to gain their students' engagement.

Originality/value - Abundance of literatures investigated teaching and learning practices during Covid-19. However, a few studies examined students' engagement in distance learning. Thus, this study concerned on students' engagement in EFL class for junior high school level.

Paper type – Research paper

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Keywords:

Distance Learning

Engagement

Behavioural

Emotional

Cognitive

Article Information:

Submitted: 21 October, 2021

Accepted: 01 November, 2021

Approved: 08 December, 2021

How to Cite

Agustina, Noni, Ratnawati Susanto, Sri Lestari, Chelsea, Yona, Selindah, and Diana. 2021. "Distance Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: Students' Engagement in English Foreign Language Class". *Alsuna: Journal of Arabic and English Language* 4 (2). <https://doi.org/10.31538/alsuna.v4i2.1758>.

Introduction

Covid-19 virus spread initially in Wuhan, China in 2019. It infected people around the world rapidly, including Indonesia. It affects many aspects including education. Many countries close the schools and campuses to eliminate the virus transmission (Carrillo and Flores 2020; Palau et al. 2021; Yates et al. 2020; Xie, Gulinna, and Rice 2021). (Hussein et al. 2020) found that 190 countries close their educational institution. Similarly, UNESCO reported that 1.5 billion students around the world do not go to their schools and campuses (Osman 2020; Kruszewska, Nazaruk, and Szewczyk 2020).

There is massive disruption to education system (Hussein et al. 2020; Nikmah and Azimah 2020). Institution and teachers or educator must respond the unexpected change from the face-to-face to distance learning (Carrillo and Flores 2020; Metscher, Tramantano, and Wong 2020; Osman 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020; Kruszewska, Nazaruk, and Szewczyk 2020; Dong, Cao, and Li 2020; Moser, Wei, and Brenner 2021; Palau et al. 2021; Xie, Gulinna, and Rice 2021; Allen, Rowan, and Singh 2020). The change insists the institution and teachers employ the virtual setting (Hussein et al. 2020). Moreover, it is not easy for the teachers to apply it during the pandemic (Kruszewska, Nazaruk, and Szewczyk 2020; Falcone and Hall 2020; Kalloo, Mitchell, and Kamalodeen 2020; Styck et al. 2020; Ewing and Cooper 2021).

Abundance of literatures investigated teaching and learning practices during Covid-19 (Carrillo and Flores 2020), digital environment and practices such as breakout group, interactive whiteboard, interactive agenda and community-building activities during Covid-19 in New York (Metscher, Tramantano, and Wong 2020), senior high school students' digital learning experiences during Covid-19 in New Zealand (Yates et al. 2020), survey of Poland teachers facing the obstacles in distance learning during pandemic situation (Kruszewska, Nazaruk, and Szewczyk 2020), survey of Chinese parents' belief and attitude towards distance

learning (Dong, Cao, and Li 2020), survey to explore practice changes and teachers' perceptions (from primary to senior high school teachers) of language learning (Moser, Wei, and Brenner 2021), learning and teaching of primary to junior high schools level during pandemic (Palau et al. 2021).

Muslimah (2018) found that students who are engaged will develop their learning outcome. Yundayani et al.(2021) revealed that Covid-19 impacts the students' engagement. However, A few studies examined students' engagement in distance learning in EFL class during Covid-19. In similar vein, (Ewing and Cooper 2021) suggested that it has not been explored. Concerning this matter, it is crucial to enrich the existing literature to delve junior high students' engagement in EFL class during Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesian context.

State of The Arts and Distinguish

Myriads of studies concerned on the impact of Covid-19 in teaching and learning (Yundayani et al. 2021). Yundayani et al.(2021) investigated students' cognitive engagement in English language class for higher education context. There is still a scarcity of students' engagement comprising cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement in distance learning in EFL class during Covid-19 pandemic. To fill this gap, this study aims to explore those engagements in EFL class for junior high school level.

This study examines cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. Oga-baldwin (2019) identified the behavioral engagement is easily seen or observed in learning process. It can be recognized from the students' body language and responses such as looking at the teachers, writing the teachers' explanation, and raising their hands to respond teachers or friends' questions. Emotional engagement can be sensed by the teachers during the learning process such as when their students are enthusiastic or not to learn, enjoy the class, feel bored to listen the teacher or happy. Cognitive engagement is not easy to be measured directly

because it requires students' effort to accomplish their work such as the language use in the class and their comprehension to the language. Besides Oga-baldwin (2019), the other scholars had similar thought about those engagements. Xu et al. (2020), Mckellar et al. (2019) and Olivier et al. (2021) explicated that behavioral engagement can be measured from the students' involvement or actions in the learning activities. Their involvements are paying attention to the teachers, asking and answering the questions and accomplishing the tasks. Olivier et al.(2021) and Mckellar et al. (2019) conceptualized the emotional engagement as the internal state such as students' happiness, enjoyment, or curiosity. They also found that cognitive engagement is not easily seen since it needs process to identify students' mastery.

Method

A qualitative approach was undertaken to explore students' engagement in teaching and learning activities in EFL class during Covid-19 situation. The engagements focus on cognitive, behavioural, and emotional aspects.

This study employed a convenience sampling method to determine the participants. The participants were 5 teachers (1 man and 4 women) from school A and school B involved to this study. Their ages ranged from 31 to 49 years old with different teaching experiences. They have been teaching from 6 to 27 years. Four of them graduated from English language education study program and one was from English literature. Students from school A and B also participated voluntarily to this study. Their ages ranged from 13-14 years old and were at seventh and eighth grade. 467 students (187 male and 280 female) of those schools filled in the questionnaire and 9 of them were interviewed. The participants' names were pseudonyms for keeping their confidential by coding T (for teacher) and S (for student).

The class observations virtually were conducted to portray the students' engagement comprehensively for several meetings. The questionnaire was administered to the students

via WhatsApp. Not only class observation and questionnaire but also teachers and students' interview were undertaken to triangulate the data in order to establish the data credibility and consistency (Creswell 2012). The questions of interview and questionnaire used Indonesian language in order to explore the participants' answers deeply.

The informed consents embedded in the questionnaire were given to the participants via WhatsApp due to Covid-19 pandemic situation. The class of five teachers were observed approximately 30-45 minutes via Google Meet. 467 students responded the questionnaire sent via WhatsApp. 9 students interviewed via cell phone approximately took around 25 minutes and 5 teachers' interview for 40 minutes for each of them. The class observation and students and teachers' interview were transcribed. All of those data were analyzed qualitatively.

The transcriptions of class observation and students and teachers' responses of interview and students' responses of questionnaire were categorized into behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. After categorized, those were coded thematically.

Findings and Discussion

As figure 1 showed, the questionnaire responded by the students suggested that students had behavioural engagement during distance learning in English class with the average 93%. They reported that they do what the teachers ask (96%), follow the teacher's instruction (97%), try to answer the teacher's question (97%), do not chat with others during the lesson (84%), and focused (91%). Some of them were contradicted to teachers and students' responses of interview and class observation. From the interview, all teachers responded that not all students did what the teachers ask. Some students submitted the assignments. T2 stated that only 16 of 35 students sent their assignment. Similar to her, T3

explained that only 60% of students submitted their assignment. The other teachers reported the same condition. The interview excerpts were as follows:

T1: Not all students do the assignments.

T2: Only 16 or 18 students submit the assignment.

T3: 30% of the students do the assignments.

T4: Only some students do the assignment given.

The class observation also showed that only some students (around 2-4 students) responded what teachers asked. From the interview, some students did not accomplish the assignment since they had problem to understand the material. It could be seen from response of S1. He told that "I sometimes did the assignment. Sometimes I did not do it because I did not understand the material". It strengthened the result found by Gao, Jiang, and Tang (2020) that distance learning was less effective since the students had low assignment completion. They also had low self-regulation (Dong, Cao, and Li 2020) and low awareness to learn autonomously as well lack of parents' guidance during distance learning.

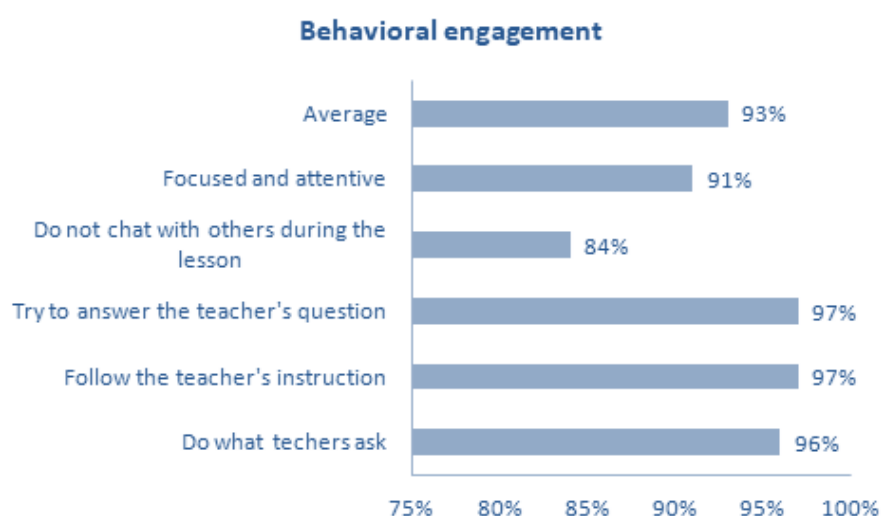


Figure 1: Students' behavioural engagement during distance learning

When teachers asked whether the students were focused and attentive, T1 explicated that she was not sure because their students did not want to activate their video. It was similar to Ewing & Cooper's finding (2021) that the students preferred to off their video and as a consequence the teachers were difficult to control them. T1 and T3 told that their students were not focused which it could be seen from the students' scores were dissatisfying.

T1: I try to ask my students to activate their camera so I can see their face but they don't listen to me. So I do not know they are focused or not.

T2: They are not focused. It can be seen from the score they got. They cannot answer my questions.

T3: The students cannot answer my questions. It indicates that they are not focused.

Students responded that they had difficulty to be focused due to some problems such as the material mastery, learning activities, signal, and disruptive activity. S1 responded that it's uneasy for him to be focused because he did not understand the material. S2 was sometimes focused but sometimes was not because she felt bored that the learning activities were monotonous. Moreover, S3 told that the signal problem made unclear voice affecting her concentration. S9 responded that he sometimes had breakfast during learning and it made him loss of concentration. Their responses were showed in the following interview excerpts.

S1: I cannot be focused because the material is hard to understand.

S2: I feel bored because the learning activities are tedious.

S6: The unstable signal makes the voice is unclear so it makes me hard to be focused.

S9: I sometimes have breakfast during learning that makes me loss of concentration.

The findings supported work undertaken by Hussein et al. (2020) that the students were distracted and difficult to concentrate. Yates et al. (2020) discovered that they might be distracted since they had family obligation such as take care of their siblings or help their family at home or they watched film. Similarly Dong, Cao, and Li (2020) found that students were not interested and focused during distance learning since the content was unattractive and boring. The content did not provide various activities motivating the students to learn more enthusiastically. In similar vein, Ewing and Cooper (2021) identified that the students were disengaged since they were bored. They would be engaged if they had gamified class activities (Huang et al., 2018 as cited in Zainuddin et al. 2019). Not only the content but also the internet connection contributed the students' learning difficulty. The unstable internet network (Azhari and Fajri 2021) or insufficient high-speed Internet (Bokayev et al. 2020) was

one of distance learning's obstacles. It resulted in the lack connection between students and teachers (Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020).

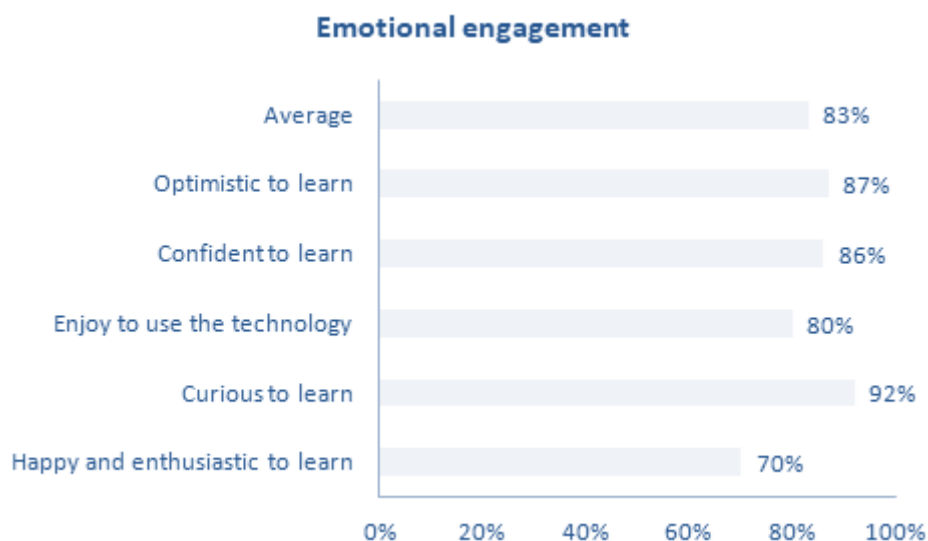


Figure 2: Students' emotional engagement during distance learning

Students' responses of questionnaire (figure 2) pointed out that students had emotional engagement with the average 83%. The students were optimistic to learn (87%), confident to learn (86%), enjoyed to use the technology (80%), curious to learn (92%), and happy to learn (70%). They were contrary to the teachers' responses of the interview and class observation. T1 revealed that students were lack of enthusiasm in learning. They were ignorance. In addition T2 urged that only one or three students had curiosity to learn.

T1: I think that majority of the students are not enthusiastic. They do not respond and tend to be ignorance.

T2: Only one or two students are curious to learn.

The observations of T4 and T5' classes suggested that students did not have curiosity and enthusiastic. The students always kept silent when asked. They were also passive and not interested to learn. They did not participate voluntarily. Some of them responded if their teachers asked them. Those findings were in line with Dong, Cao, and Li's work (2020) that distance learning was lack of learning atmosphere and interaction.

The questionnaire (figure 3) presented that students engaged cognitively with the average 86%. The students responded that they tried to connect the new material with the previous knowledge (84%), asked for explanation if they did not understand the material (88%), did not give up when they did not understand the material (65%), strive to be focused when not interested in material (96%), and put extra effort when facing the difficulty (98%).

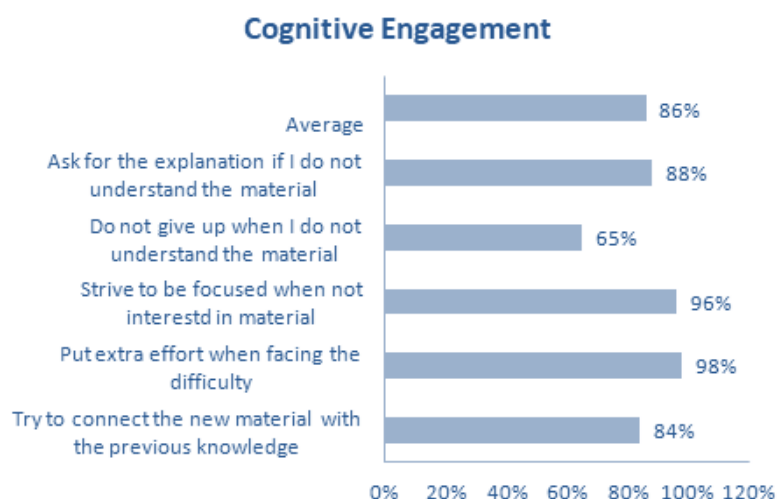


Figure 3: Students' cognitive engagement during distance learning

The teachers' responses of interview and class observation did not show the similar result to students' responses of questionnaire. The teachers reported that their students were not able to relate their previous knowledge to the new material they learn. Most of them did not ask for explanation if they did not understand the material because they preferred to keep silent during learning process. They also did not put extra effort if they had difficulties or problem. Those could be seen in the following interview except.

- T1: The students do not respond when I ask the new material and relate to their previous knowledge. I often explain and provide the example. The students do not put extra effort if they have difficulty. I think they do not care if they have problem. Only some of students ask me via WhatsApp.
- T2: The students do not care if they are not interested to study. Maybe they are bored. Majority of the students give up if they do not understand the material. Mostly they have remedial. They also do not ask me to explain if they do not understand. Only limited number of students asked me.
- T3: It is seldom to find the students who are able to relate their previous knowledge to the new material.

The observation of T1' s class also showed that only one student asked about the use of has and have to her teacher. The rest of them were silent. Moreover, none of the students were able to relate their previous knowledge to the new material they learnt.

Generally, students were disengaged during distance learning. Their behaviour, emotional, and cognitive engagement were limited. It corroborated Ewing and Cooper's finding (2021) that the engagement was essentially prioritized by the teachers but in fact the students were not engaged. On the other hand, Xu, Chen, and Chen (2020) found that students' behavioural and cognitive engagement were improved due to the teachers' facilitation but the emotional did not gain significantly.

The limited behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagements during distance learning were affected by many factors. Online or distance learning was less effective since it had low completion rate and less interaction between teacher and students or among students (Reich, 2015 in Gao, Jiang, and Tang 2020). Asking students to activate their camera and respond the teachers' questions were challenging and as consequence they had lack interaction. Unstable signals also contributed to students' engagement in English class. Students felt bored because of the uninteresting learning activities and caused them disengaged. Zainuddin et al. (2019) found that students with Socrative and Quizizz group had emotional engagement. They felt fun, enjoyable, interested, enthusiastic and curious. The engagement could be developed through teachers' intervention (Manwaring et al., 2017 as cited in Gao, Jiang, and Tang 2020).

Conclusion

This study explores the students' behaviour, emotional, and cognitive engagement in English class during distance learning in Covid-19 pandemic by employing qualitative approach. The finding showed that students were less engaged behaviourally, emotionally, and

cognitively during distance learning. It occurred due to some factors such as uninteresting learning activities, unstable signal, and lack of students' understanding.

The limitations of this study were found. Firstly, the study employs the small number of participants especially the number of teachers. Secondly, number of classroom observation is insufficient. Further research is required to investigate the students' engagement for various level such as primary school and senior high school level.

Implications of Findings

The study has some practical implications for English language teachers. They need to construct the interesting and various learning activities to gain their students' engagement. They also require providing the effective strategies to make their students' understanding that build students' learning engagement. Lin, Wang, and Yang (2018) suggested that to engage the students effectively is required to design instructional content and learning activities well.

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Appendix

The questions item of students' interview and questionnaire refer to Olivier et al. (2021).

A. Students' behavioural engagement (*Keterlibatan perilaku siswa*).

1. Do you do what the teacher asks during distance learning?
(*Apakah kamu mengerjakan tugas yang guru berikan selama belajar jarak jauh?*)
2. Do you follow the teacher's instruction during distance learning?
(*Apakah kamu mengikuti instruksi guru kamu selama belajar jarak jauh?*)
3. Do you answer what the teacher asks during distance learning?
(*Apakah kamu menjawab pertanyaan yang guru kamu berikan selama belajar jarak jauh?*)
4. Do you chat during the lesson?
(*Apakah kamu mengobrol selama pelajaran berlangsung ketika belajar jarak jauh?*)
5. Are you focused and attentive to listen to your teacher during distance learning?
(*Apakah kamu fokus atau memperhatikan guru kamu selama belajar jarak jauh?*)

B. Students' emotional engagement (*Keterlibatan emosional siswa*).

1. Do you feel happy and enthusiastic during the lesson?
(*Apakah kamu senang dan antusias ketika belajar jarak jauh bersama guru kamu?*)
2. Are you spiritless during the lesson?
(*Apakah kamu tidak bersemangat ketika belajar jarak jauh bersama guru kamu?*)
3. Are you curious during the lesson?
(*Apakah kamu memiliki rasa ingin tahu ketika belajar jarak jauh bersama guru kamu?*)
4. Do you enjoy learning using the technology during distance learning?
(*Apakah kamu menikmati belajar menggunakan platform atau teknologi belajar jarak jauh?*)
5. Are you confident during the lesson?
(*Apakah kamu percaya diri ketika belajar jarak jauh bersama guru kamu?*)
6. Are you optimistic during the lesson?
(*Apakah kamu optimis ketika belajar jarak jauh bersama guru kamu?*)

C. Students' cognitive engagement (*Keterlibatan kognitif siswa*).

1. Do you connect the new material with what you already know during the lesson?
(*Apakah kamu dapat menghubungkan materi baru dengan apa yang sudah kamu ketahui sebelumnya selama belajar jarak jauh?*)
2. Do you put extra effort when facing the difficulty?
(*Apakah kamu berusaha keras ketika menghadapi kesulitan dalam belajar belajar jarak jauh?*)
3. Do you strive to be focused when you are not interested in the material during distance learning?
(*Apakah kamu berusaha fokus ketika tidak tertarik belajar belajar jarak jauh?*)
4. Do you get up when you do not understand the material during distance learning?
(*Apakah kamu menyerah jika tidak memahami materi belajar jarak jauh?*)
5. Do you ask for explanations when you do not understand the material?
(*Apakah kamu bertanya jika kamu tidak memahami materi belajar jarak jauh?*)