Investigating Students' Engagement in EFL Learning: Does it Improve Student Achievement?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine whether there is a correlation between students' engagement and students' achievement, to investigate students' engagement level in EFL classroom and to identify the factors affecting their engagement in the classes. Mix method was employed in this study. Seventh grade students in MTS Nurul Hidayah were involved as the respondents of this research. The data of this research were obtained from test, questionnaire and interview. Then, the data obtained were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results of this study revealed that the result of the Sig (2-tailed) value is $0.004 < 0.05$, which means the Alternative Hypothesis (Ha) is accepted. It indicates that there is a correlation between students' engagement and students' achievement. Furthermore, the data from questionnaire showed that there are three engagement levels including emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement. The last, the data from interview also showed that there are two factors affecting students' engagement in EFL learning such as contextual and personal factors. Thus, by measuring the level of student engagement, teachers will be able to effectively design learning activities that will encourage students' active participation in the learning process.

Keywords: Engagement; EFL Learning; Young Learner.

INTRODUCTION

English is widely used and found in everyday life such as in the economic, health, tourism, and education sectors. As claimed by O'Neil (2018) that English has achieved the status of being a universally comprehensible international lingua franca. According to Zein (2016), by having adequate English skills, the future generation will be more competitive in a global society. This indicates that English language skill is crucial in today's globalized world. Having professional English proficiency can offer many job opportunities. This is because many multinational firms and global organizations seek employees who speak proficient English. Therefore, having a working knowledge of English can help our careers. Thus, the introduction of English from an early age is one of the biggest forms of investment in a country (Johnstone, 2009).

For language educators and practitioners, how to effectively teach English to young learners has long been a crucial concern issue. Unfortunately, creating an enjoyable learning is a challenge for teacher in teaching English for young learners. It might due to the special characteristics possessed by young learners. Thus, teaching English to young learners is obviously different from that to adults

since learning a language for children is easily when the language is meaningful, interesting and functional (Musthafa, 2008). This means that young learners should be taught in an interesting way. Therefore, students' engagement need to be taken into account for creating a fascinating and enjoyable situation.

Language engagement significantly impacts English as a Young Learner (EYL) in learning English. Several researches emphasize the importance of engagement in various aspects of language learning. Moreover, there is a Studie showed that high-interest and challenging reading materials, interactive learning environments, and quality instruction are crucial for student engagement in reading activities (Poudel, 2022). Furthermore, Zhou et al., (2022) found that online English learning requires interesting and interactive course designs to fulfil learners' psychological needs, enhancing engagement and learning outcomes. Thus, it can be concluded that one of important factor that determines the success and quality of learning is student engagement (Maison et al., 2021).

Additionally, Shah & Barkas (2018) define that student engagement is an evaluation of a student's level engage with the teacher and friends in class toward activities. Furthermore, Delfino (2019) claims that behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement are the three characteristics of student engagement. According to Fredricks et al., (2004), behavioural engagement includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities. This means when a student is engaged in the classroom, they should display positive behaviours that demonstrate involvement in learning, such as effort, attention, and concentration, whereas disruptive behaviours are supposed to be absent.

While, emotional engagement refers to students' affective reactions. This type of engagement is often referred to as intrinsic motivation, which means a student is motivated by interest and pleasure gained in the learning process (Kahu, 2013). Last, cognitive engagement is widely defined as psychological engagement (Sinatra et al., 2015). Finn & Zimmer (2012) claim that cognitive engagement incorporates the idea of a student's level of psychological investment in learning. It is reciprocally related to self-regulation (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012) and self-efficacy towards a task (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

According to Lam et al., (2012), factors that influence student engagement can be divided into two groups, namely, contextual factors and personal factors. Contextual factors cover two subcategories such as instructional context and social relatedness. Instructional context includes six components such as: (1) challenge, (2) real-life significance, (3) curiosity, (4) autonomy, (5) recognition, and (6) evaluation (Lam et al., 2012). Moreover, regarding social relatedness, there are five components: (1) teacher support, (2) parent support, (3) peer support, (4) aggression to peers, and (5) aggression from peers. While, personal factors that may influence student engagement directly are students' motivational beliefs, namely, self-efficacy, goal orientation, and attribution (Lam et al., 2012). Self-efficacy refers to the level at which an individual believes their capability for learning and performing actions lies (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

By exploring those factors described above, the teachers are expected to be able to tailor their teaching approaches to foster higher levels of engagement and ultimately improve students' learning experiences in EFL classrooms. It is supported by Siwa and Busthomi (2023) showed that engagement in EFL classes can be influenced by various factors such as teaching strategies, individual motivation, student-teacher relationships, English proficiency, and even the availability of teaching facilities.

Based on the description above, good learning outcomes is often linked with academic engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). As indicated by Hughes & Pace (2003) that high levels of academic engagement were associated with academic outcomes. This means that to achieve good educational outcomes, students need to possess a certain level of engagement to their academic settings. Thus, it can be concluded that one of the efforts to avoid students' low academic achievement is by measuring students' engagement in learning. By measuring the level of student engagement, teachers will be able to effectively design learning activities that will encourage students' active participation in the learning process (Speight et al., 2018). Considering the

importance of students engagement in teaching English, this study aims to investigate students' engagement level in EFL classroom and to identify the factors affecting their engagement in the classes.

RESEARCH METHODS

Explanatory sequential mixed method design was used in order to identify level of students' engagement in EFL classroom and to investigate the factors affecting their engagement in the classes. The design is considered appropriate since it can provide quantitative data and qualitative data based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017). This study was conducted at MTS Nurul Hidayah Batujajar. The participants of this study were seventh grade students aged twelve years old. As stated by Nikmah (2013) that young learners as children who are in elementary school with an age range of 6-12. Thus, it can be concluded that the respondents of this study are categorized as young learners.

The data were obtained through test, questionnaires and interview. Test was used to find out the correlation between student engagement and student achievement. It consists of 30 multiple-choice questions. Then, the data from test was analysed by using SPSS version 25 program.

Furthermore, close ended questionnaire was used in this study to gain the data regarding students engagement level. The questionnaire consists of 12 statements. In this study, the distribution of questionnaires were administered on 3rd December, 2023. The data of the students engagement level was analyzed to get the mean score of each item. Then, the mean score was categorized based on Koyan's (2012) theory. It can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. The Mean Criteria for Student Engagement Questionnaire

No	Score range	Categorization
1	0.00-1.00	Very Weak
2	1.00-2.00	Weak
3	2.00-3.00	Sufficient
4	3.00-4.00	Strong
5	4.00-5.00	Very Strong

While, the data from interview was analysed qualitatively. Analysing data in a qualitative study involves coding, categorizing, synthesizing, and interpreting the data, and finally making the conclusion based on the data the researcher obtains from various sources into coherent description of what he or she has observed or discovered (Franken et al., 1993). Therefore, the data obtained from the instrument were analysed, categorized and reported descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers present the results obtained through questionnaire and interview. To make the discussion more accessible, the researcher categorized the present study's results into three categories: correlation between students' engagement and student achievement, students engagements level and Factors affecting students engagement in EFL learning.

1. **Correlation between Students' Engagement and Student Achievement**

The data was described based on the sequence of variables, with a description of the research results from variable (X) students' engagement and variable (y) Student Achievement. In this section

the researchers present the results for both variables. The score of both variables can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Students Engagement and Test Scores

No	Name	Scores	
		Students Engagement	**Test**
1	Student 1	77	83
2	Student 2	83	87
3	Student 3	78	83
4	Student 4	53	77
5	Student 5	76	93
6	Student 6	67	90
7	Student 7	71	70
8	Student 8	84	83
9	Student 9	77	87
10	Student 10	64	70
11	Student 11	80	90
12	Student 12	67	57
13	Student 13	71	70
14	Student 14	67	67
15	Student 15	76	73
16	Student 16	73	67
17	Student 17	69	67
18	Student 18	75	67
19	Student 19	71	80
20	Student 20	72	77
21	Student 21	73	67
22	Student 22	71	77
23	Student 23	82	83
24	Student 24	80	70
25	Student 25	66	47
26	Student 26	90	90
27	Student 27	79	63
28	Student 28	79	77
29	Student 29	67	70
30	Student 30	77	80
31	Student 31	71	57
32	Student 32	68	80
33	Student 33	76	67
34	Student 34	78	83
35	Student 35	78	93
36	Student 36	89	87
	Total Score	**2675**	**2729**
	Mean	**74,31**	**75,81**

From the table above, the test results showed that the total score of students' engagement was 2675 and the total score of students' tests was 2729. Moreover, the mean score of students'

engagement was 74.31 and the mean of test score was 75,81. Then, the researchers used SPSS and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Formula to find out descriptive statistics, test of normality, the level of the correlation, and test the hypothesis.

a. Descriptive Statistics
The result of descriptive statistics by SPSS can be seen in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Motivation	36	53	90	2675	74.31	7.262
Vocabulary	36	47	93	2729	75.81	10.996
Valid N (listwise)	36					

From the table above, it was revealed that the minimum score of students' engagement was 53 and the minimum score of students' tests is 47. Moreover, the maximum score of students' engagement is 90 and the maximum score of students' tests was 93. Furthermore, the mean score of students' engagement was 74,31 and the mean score of students' tests was 75,81. While, standard deviation of students' engagement was 7,262 and standard deviation of students' test is 10,996.

b. Test of Normality
The researchers used SPSS 25 version program to find out whether the data is normal or not. The result of normality test can be seen in table 4 as follows:

Table 4. The Result of Normality Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Motivation	.092	36	.200[*]	.969	36	.411
Vocabulary	.118	36	.200[*]	.958	36	.181

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The researcher uses the Kolmogorov-Smirnov to test the normality of the data because the number of the data is more than 30. Shapiro-Wilk is using when the number of the data 30. From the table above, significant of students' learning motivation is 0,200 and significant of vocabulary test is 0,200. Normality test result shows that significant of students' learning motivation is higher than the level of significant (0,200 > 0,05) and significant of vocabulary test is 0,200. It is higher than the level of significant. It means that students' learning engagement and students test are in normal distribution.

c. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
After testing the normality, the researchers tried to find out the correlation between students' engagement and students' achievement. The result of the correlation between students' engagement and students' achievement can be seen in Table 5 as follows:

Table 5. The Correlation between Students' Engagement and Students' Achievement

Correlations

		Motivation	Vocabulary
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.473**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	36	36
Vocabulary	Pearson Correlation	.473**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	36	36

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the table above, it was revealed that the Sig.(2-tailed) is 0,004. The number of significant is lower than 0,05. This indicates that Null Hypothesis (H_o) is rejected, while Alternative Hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a correlation between students' engagement and students' achievement. It is in line with the statement of Hughes & Pace (2003) that high levels of academic engagement were associated with academic outcomes. It is also supported by Tran et al., (2020) that engaging students in active learning can be used as a means to enhance learning outcomes. Thus, it can be concluded that students need to possess a certain level of engagement to their academic settings in order to achieve good educational outcomes.

2. Student Engagement Levels

This study was aimed at identifying student engagement level in EFL Learning. Based on the data from questionnaire, there are three level of student engagement were categorized into emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement as presented in Table 2.

Table 6. The result of Student Engagement Questionnaire

No	Statement	Student Engagement Level	Mean	Total Mean	Category
1	I'm excited about learning English	EG	3.86	3.95	Strong
2	I look forward to having English lessons every fortnight	EG	4.33		
3	I like learning new things in English classes	EG	3.31		
4	I'm interested in the work I get to do in English classes	EG	4.3		
5	I make an effort to behave well in English Class	BE	4.00	3.78	Strong
6	I pay attention to the teacher in English Class	BE	4.17		
7	I participate actively in classroom activities; for example I sometimes raise my hand to ask questions or to answer questions	BE	2.61		
8	I find it easy to concentrate on what I am doing in class	BE	4.36		
9	I feel like I am making progress in English	CE	4.5	4.125	Very Strong
10	There is just the right amount of challenge for me in English class	CE	4.1		
11	I try to make comparisons between English	CE	3.6		

	and other languages I know in class				
12	I get to know about English and English culture, and try to compare it to my own	CE	4.3		
	TOTAL			**3.95**	**Strong**

The data above revealed that the total mean score for students' engagement in Learning English in MTS Nurul Hidayah was 3.98. This means that the students' engagement was strong. This indicates that students with high student engagement always try to be active and diligent in teaching and learning activities both inside and outside the classroom (Soffer & Cohen, 2019). In other words, the students can develop their English ability if they actively participate in the teaching-learning activity. Thus, teacher can promote students' engagement by creating an appropriate learning activity.

In addition, the data from questionnaires also revealed that the students' engagement were categorized into three level such as emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement. For emotional engagement level, the mean score reached 3.95. This indicates that the seventh grades students in MTS Nurul Hidayah had strong learners' emotion about learning (Marks, 2000). Thus, it can be concluded that when the students are interested in learning, they feel more emotionally engaged with the course. As supported by Dixson (2015) that students who are emotionally engaged in learning will feel interested in learning and increase the desire to learn. In other words, students who are engaged in learning are more likely to achieve better grade and performance on standardized tests (Putri et.al., 2021). It is in line with Sinatra et al., (2015) who found that emotional engagement was positively related to students' achievement.

In addition, the data also showed that total mean score for behavioural engagement level was 3.78 which means that it is included in strong engagement. This indicates that the students were highly engaged in the classroom; for example, by raising their hand to ask questions or to answer questions. It is in line with Musthafa (2008) who argues that physical responses are very good ways to respond language that have been understood by the children. Thus, student engagement behaviour is necessary for students because this behaviour can make students pay attention to the teacher (Dwivedi et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the mean score of cognitive engagement reached 4.125 which refered to very strong engagement. This revealed that the students were able to drive an idea, judge the value of information and apply the kowledge they obtained from the course (Inder, 2021). This means that students who are engaged cognitively, they are self-regulated, thoughtful, strategic, and willing to go beyond the minimal requirements and expend the necessary cognitive effort to understand complicated ideas or master challenging skills (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

3. Factors affecting Students Engagement in EFL Learning

The data from interview revealed that there are two factors affecting student engagement in EFL such as contextual and personal factors. Each factor is discussed below
    a. Contextual factor

Contextual factors cover two subcategories such as instructional context and social relatedness. Regarding instructional context, the data from interviewed revealed that there are two factors affecting student engagement in EFL Learning such as curiosity and evaluation (Lam et al., 2012). It can be seen in the following excerpt:
        My reason to learn English is to get a good marks   (S1)
        I am looking forward to learn new things in English class   (S3)
The data above indicates that evaluation is the crucial aspect in teaching and learning process. It is in line with the statement of Newmann (1991) that tasks which provide opportunities for fun, collaboration, and evaluation enhanced student engagement in learning.

While, concerning social relatedness that affects student engagement, the data revealed that there are three factors such as teacher support, parent support, and peer support. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

        My English Teacher is a great source of inspiration in learning   (S1)
        My parents encourage me to practice English as much as possible   (S1)

My parents try to help me to learn vocabulary (S2)
My friends help me a lot in improving my English (S3)

The data from interview above indicates that teaching and learning process requires supports from many parties such as teacher, parents and peer. As supported by Dwiana & Singh (2011) that children play with their peers, parents, and teachers every day, and learning occurs simultaneously in this process. This findings show that the teacher plays a crucial factor in students achievement. As stated by Pianta et al., (2012), the more teachers care about students personally, the more students would like to learn. Furthermore, the role of parents is also equally important. It is supported by Bempechat and Shernoff (2012) who claimed that parents' behaviours and beliefs related to academic achievement could profoundly influence children's perceptions of their intellectual abilities and the value of learning and education. In addition, Peers, as another major part of students' social relationships, have also been shown to influence academic engagement (Juvonen et al., 2012).

b. Personal factor
According to Lim et al., (2012), personal factors that may influence student engagement directly are students' motivational beliefs, namely, goal orientation, and attribution. The data from interview regarding personal factors can be seen in the following excerpt:

Learning English important because it will allow me to meet and communicate with many people around the world. (S1)
Being able to speak English is my goal (S2)
Learning English is important because I will need it for my career (S2)
Learning English is useful for me to get a good job (S3)

The data above indicates that students who have goals have a correlation with students achievement. It is in line with Lim et al., (2012) that compared to students with performance goals, students with learning goals are more persistent after failure. Therefore, teachers need to provide tasks that offer choice, relate to students' learning goals, and offer opportunities for the recognition of achievement.

Moreover, the data from interview also revealed students' motivational beliefs as stated by S2 and S3. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

I Iike my English class so much (S2)
I really enjoy learning English (S3)

The data above showed that motivation is crucial factor in learning English. As supported by Sari & Sudirman (2019) that motivation is one factor that is very influential in achieving the target language, without motivation, a person has no desire to learn the target language. Moreover, Smith (2012) as cited in Raharjo & Pertiwi (2020) stated that motivation plays an important role in determining the success of a learning process.

CONCLUSIONS

This study tries to determine whether there is a correlation between students' engagement and students' achievement, to investigate students' engagement level in EFL classroom and to identify the factors affecting their engagement in the classes. The findings showed a significant correlation between students' engagement and their academic achievement in EFL classrooms. This finding underscores the importance of fostering student engagement to enhance academic outcomes. It suggests that higher levels of engagement can lead to improved performance in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Furthermore, the research identified three distinct levels of student engagement: emotional, behavioural, and cognitive. Emotional engagement involves students' feelings and attitudes towards learning, behavioural engagement pertains to participation and involvement in learning activities, and cognitive engagement reflects the investment in understanding and mastering the content. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of engagement and its crucial role in the learning process. Understanding these different dimensions can help educators tailor their strategies to address specific areas of engagement.

Finally, the study uncovered two main factors affecting students' engagement: contextual and personal factors. Contextual factors include the classroom environment, teaching methods, and peer interactions, while personal factors encompass individual motivation, interests, and personal circumstances. Recognizing these factors allows teachers to create more effective and engaging learning experiences. By addressing both contextual and personal factors, educators can design activities and environments that foster higher engagement, thereby enhancing students' learning outcomes. This study emphasizes the need for a holistic approach in teaching that considers both the external and internal factors influencing student engagement. However, there are some weaknesses in this research. First, this research was conducted on a small scale, so the findings cannot be generalized to other places. Thus, it is suggested that for future research should take this into account to research on a bigger scale. Second, since the results of the current study did not involve the teacher's perspective, thus, it needs to be clarified in future research.

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