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Chapter 31

**A RESEARCH ON PROMOTING STUDENTS'
ENGAGEMENT THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF
INQUIRY**

“Attendance needs to be intensified considering online platforms have many limitations that disallow instructors and students to interact in real time.”

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Abstract

One of the challenges for online instructors is to get students involved in the online learning process seriously, always sending assignments on time and exchanging ideas through discussion forums. This paper is a sketch of the online learning activities from TEFL courses that the author undertook during the Covid-19 pandemic. Students' engagement represents valid indicator that shows the learning process in such a way that the students actively interact. Several strategies are identified to encourage students' engagement: strengthening the teaching presence through the clarity of the rules, promoting a strong instructor presence, and building a social presence.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic period, online learning, students' engagement, TEFL,.

Introduction

The implementation of online learning has been carried out simultaneously in almost all schools throughout the world. The use of this technology platform is used as a foundation after government authorities

in almost all countries issued physical distancing policies in the context of preventing Covid transmission 19. Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makariem has stressed that the online learning approach or learning from home is a form of resistance against invisible enemies. We are in a state of war ("Our Country Is at War: Education Minister Nadiem Makarim Calls on Students to Join Fight against COVID-19," 2020). In short, this pandemic condition has encouraged the rise of e-learning (Li & Lalani, 2020) as one of the cornerstones for organizing Education in emergency situations. Organizing Education with online platforms or technology is indeed not easy. In addition to the constraints of technology facility support, not all schools have the same level of readiness both from the aspect of teacher and student digital literacy levels as well as the ability to design or process learning content that is relevant to the needs for learning. However, utilizing technology with a variety of varieties is a necessity in this pandemic situation.

This paper is reflection of the author's experience in teaching TEFL classes that used to be initially run in a blended learning format and turned into full online due to government policies on physical distancing. From the results of this reflection on the online teaching and learning process, the author highlights students engagement as an indicator to measure the success of online platform nernasis learning. Trowler (2010) defines students' engagement as a form of interaction between students and instructors that has the potential to encourage, enhance and produce the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and even reputation of the institution. The engagement indicator can be seen from the quality and quantity of the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and instructors. Time is clearly measurable data to see how strong the interaction is. The more time they spend in learning, the greater the teacher and student interact. In addition, the effort instructors and students spend during the interaction reflects the quality of engagement itself. Sharing scientific views with the support of facts and theories reinforces the quality of engagement.

Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) assert that there are three types of engagement models, namely behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. Attendance and involvement, and

would demonstrate the absence of disruptive or negative behavior are examples of behavioral engagement. Meanwhile, emotional engagement is associated with experience affective reactions such as interest, enjoyment, or a sense of belonging. Finally, cognitive engagement is related to efforts to learn more to deepen the topics discussed. In this case, students continue to be encouraged to search for information and explore references to get answers to the topics discussed.

Under normal conditions, if the minimum prerequisites such as technology support (internet connection, availability of supporting electronic devices), support from the institution's authorities are met, promoting students' engagement through an online platform can be achieved by optimizing three presences: teaching presences, social presences and cognitive presences (Garrison, DR, Anderson, T., & Archer, 2020). Anderson (2018) has said that the concept of community of inquiry has proven to be effective in encouraging the quality of online learning across all digital media-based platforms such as blogs, immersive reality systems, synchronous technologies, wikis and MOOCs.

This paper is a sketch of the author about how student engagement can be carried out through the community of inquiry approach. Some online teaching strategies are discussed to give readers the clarity and direct experience that the quality of online learning is not inferior to the quality of face-to-face learning in class.

The Context

The data of this paper were taken from the online learning activities in the TEFL class that the author had taught since February 2020. About forty-five students have taken TEFL classes at English Letters Study Program, Universitas Ma Chung (Indonesia). In general, the students had a relatively good English proficiency, namely, between low to high intermediate. Most of these students came from middle and upper economic class. Moreover, nearly all of them had electronic equipment such as laptops and androids to support their learning activities. Before the pandemic, TEFL classes were conducted via the blended learning method. All students took part in face-to-face activities in class and conducted teaching practices at schools meanwhile completing all tasks via online

platform. During the pandemic, all teaching and learning activities are carried out in full online.

The author used Canvas as a learning management system in TEFL classes. All students accessed the materials such as videos, texts, and infographics, and they were required to complete all assignments in nine modules: completing multiple choice questions and joining the discussions. The author gave different weights for the assessment. For example, the students had point 10 if they succeeded in answering all the questions in multiple choice questions correctly. Instead, they would be granted a score of 100 if they were able to meet all criteria of the discussion perfectly: posting their answers and giving their comment to their friends' posts.

The author made use of some data available during the online learning such as discussion forums, multiple choice questions, and chat in Whatsapp groups. To deepen the meaning of students' engagement as the focus of this paper, the authors carried out the following steps for data analysis procedures: managing and collecting data, identifying frameworks of data, sorting the data into frameworks, analyzing data descriptively and identifying the results of analysis thematically .

Students' Engagement Through Community Of Inquiry Approach

Strengthening the teaching presence through the Clarity of the Rules

The teaching presence should start with how clearly the instructor set up how learning should take place. In this case, it is important that the instructor had to establish a clear set of rules for all students at the beginning of the online lecture. This rule represented a sort of description that explains what students had to do and what they should not do. For example, they had to complete nine online modules. To do so, they had to learn the materials via video, text or infographic, work on multiple choice questions, and join the discussions on each module. Students had to know that each assignment had a clear schedule. If they failed to do the task on time, they consequently did not get scores from the assignments.

Regarding students' engagement, the writer made a specific strategy for the discussion task. Discussion was a forum where every student interacted with one another, exchanged ideas, and provided

feedback and evaluation of ideas of other friends. In this case, the author gave several roles to students during the discussion. Some of them became facilitators and wrappers; meanwhile, the other became the contributors. The facilitators were people whose responsibilities were to comment on other people's ideas, evaluate the opinions of others, and ask for confirmation of the explanations of others. The facilitators were responsible for checking all posts from all students. The contributors were the students who had the obligation to answer questions from the discussion. In addition to posting answers, they were also required to comment on the opinions of their friends at least three times. Last was the wrappers. The wrappers were people whose job was to provide a summary of all opinions or discussion results of all members/students involved on the discussion. In short, the rules explaining the roles of facilitators, contributors, and wrappers have proven to be effective in promoting students' engagement in the way that they actively interacted during the online course.

Giving confidence to students to take over the role of the teacher is relatively effective (Filius et al., 2018). This trust makes students see themselves positively, increasing their self-confidence, and encouraging them to actively interact during discussions (Arend, 2019; Dixson, 2010; M, 2019; Noroozi & Hatami, 2019). For example, the author ran an online TEFL class with the same module to students in 2019. During this 2019 TEFL class, the author controlled the discussion fully. Instead of the TEFL 2020 class, the author entrusted the students to take over the role of the instructor. They were given the task as facilitators, wrappers and contributors. The average posting per student between the 2019 TEFL class and the 2020 TEFL class is very much different.

Table. Average Post Student Table in the discussion forum of the 2019 TEFL class and the TEFL 2020 class

TEFL Classes	Modul 1	Modul 2	Modul 3	Modul 4	Modul 5	Modul 6	Modul 7	Modul 8	Modul 9
2019	3	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	5
2020	5	6	7	4	5	5	6	7	8

Promoting Strong Instructor Presence Building a social presence

Presence indicates the existence of the instructors and at the same time shows their attention or concern for students (Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, 2020). One of the challenges of online teaching is the fact that face-to-face interaction between instructors and students was very limited. This condition potentially resulted in demotivating the students to learn, and even making them feel ignored if the instructor failed to show strong aura of presence on the online learning. The author has identified three ways in order to strengthen the nuances of the instructor's presence: setting up office hours, giving timely feedback and being present to respond students' inquiries within 24-48 hours.

Setting up office hours was to give both instructors and students the opportunity to do joint learning activities. For example, during office hours, instructors and students had face-to-face interactions via teleconferencing. Some free platforms were available to do teleconferencing such as Google Meet, Zoom, Hangout and MS Team. The teleconference media created real time communication so that both instructors and students met, talked, and shared experiences. Whether the teleconference worked out was very dependent on how well the instructor and students took advantage of this moment. Good preparation had to be set up prior to such online meetings. They had to be able to sort which programs became the priority. For example, they discussed or reviewed certain material which most students found difficult to understand. The instructor's presence during the teleconference reinforced his presence in

online learning that he was there to help and teach students. The presence of this instructor produces a good rapport in the minds of students.

While office hours via teleconference produced the results of communication between instructors and students happening in real time, office hours also enabled all parties to interact asynchronously. For example, the instructor examined all student thinking / performance in a discussion forum. By paying attention to student posts one by one, instructors could assess and measure the learning progress of each student. The instructor was able to check which students had already reached the expected level of competence and which students needed more assistance. For the students who were still struggling with the materials, the instructor needed to give more explanations or offer guided questions. This teaching technique was very helpful encouraging the students to escalate their understanding.

Setting office hours did not mean giving more excuse for the instructors to avoid their responsibilities outside office hours. A good instructor was always ready to give responses and questions from students even it was not office hours. Beyond office hours, the instructors still had to pay attention to students. Although their attention was a slightly bit more different to some degree than those in the office hours, the instructors could reach their students and helped them with the teaching materials they found hard to understand.

The second way to strengthen strong instructor presence is to provide timely feedback. Time is an important indicator that affects student motivation. The longer the instructor gives feedback, the stronger the student becomes nervous to wait for the instructor's answer. Students tend to have negative perceptions of instructor performance who has a habit of being late to provide feedback. In fact, they assume the instructor is no longer present for them or the instructor does not care about them. The negative perceptions of these students further influence their perspective and belief in the instructor's capacity.

Conversely, when the instructor manages to establish a habit that is by providing timely feedback, students have a positive belief and perspective on the instructor's performance. Indirectly, the instructor's rapid performance is a role model for students. They will imitate the

attitude of the instructor. Students have confidence that their instructors are there for them. This situation encourages increasing their motivation to learn. They use the instructor's feedback to improve their work or performance in a timely manner (Dixson, 2010).

Building a Social Presence

The need for establishing a favourable social relationship is essential for every human being. They have the urge to relate (interaction) with other people. The need to socialize with other people also applies to those who are studying online. Interaction between members of the online learning community is only possible if the online learning environment becomes a comfortable and safe place to learn. Each member knows other members well, and they feel free to express their opinions without feeling afraid of receiving intimidation. Otherwise, If the need for social relations is not met, it is difficult for instructors to deliver material or teach students smoothly. Building ethical and personalized communication and establishing frequent and favourable communication with all the students outside of official learning activities are the strategies the online instructors can do in order to strengthen social presence (Anderson, 2018).

Building ethical and personalized communication is an absolute requirement for instructors to build social relationships with the members of the online community. In this case, establishing a tradition or polite communication habits during the online learning is an absolute requirement. Habits to deliver polite communication acts as a fence to protect all members of the online learning community so that they feel comfortable to learn. The instructor needs to keep reminding the ethics of communicating online to all members of the online learning community. One example is to encourage the students to avoid excessive criticism of the work/opinion of members.

Meanwhile, personalized communication models reflect messages from communicators to build close social relations. It is very good for instructors to design an introductory session before starting online lessons. The instructor initiates the introduction by sharing his experiences or even talking about his personal life. Sharing pictures and videos during this introductory session makes students understand the personality side of the

instructor well. The instructor's introductory initiation is an example for students so that they have a role model to start introducing themselves.

Mentioning the names of students who take online classes is a very strategic thing that instructors do to build strong social relationships. This approach is so personalized that members feel they have received the attention of the instructor. Always mention the name of the student when starting a conversation in various online learning activities, for example, responding to the ideas / opinions concerned in the discussion forum.

Establishing frequent and favorable communication with all the students outside of official learning activities is another important requirement for creating a conducive online learning community environment. The initiative to start this conversation can be initiated by both the instructor and the students. To achieve this goal, instructors and students agree on the use of a variety of synchronous social media counterparts such as Whatsapp, Line, Telegram. Both parties use the available media to communicate. This may include some activities, starting from sending mere greetings to discussing learning issues from online material.

Conclusion

The instructor is always restless to find solutions and strategies in encouraging all students to study hard during the online teaching and learning process. To realize the three types of attendance namely, social, cognitive and teaching (instructor) is a must if the instructor wishes student engagement to occur. Attendance needs to be intensified considering the online platform has many limitations that allow instructors and students to interact in real time. When students experience that presence, they feel they are part of a learning community in a learning environment that is favorable, safe and supportive. Thus, presences encourage enthusiasm for learning, increase motivation and skills and thinking power to always go up one level higher over time.

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