



Fostering student engagement during teaching practicum: pre-service EFL teachers' strategies

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ABSTRACT

The lack of student engagement greatly influences the implementation of the learning process. This is very important because it refers to the pre-service teacher's ability to manage the class so that it runs effectively and involves all students. This study explores the strategies pre-service teachers use to increase student engagement. This research was designed with a case study approach. Four pre-service EFL teachers were selected as participants in the research. In collecting data, the researcher used semi-structured interview techniques and observations through video recordings of teaching carried out by each participant. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that there were six strategies used to increase student engagement during teaching practicum, including measuring student engagement, establishing good communication between pre-service teachers and students, balancing structure and student autonomy through cooperative learning methods, promoting digital media as an innovation in the learning process, providing evaluation questions, and increasing the engagement of students with exciting activities. This study concludes with pedagogical implications for how pre-service teachers can use strategies to increase student engagement in English learning during teaching practicum.

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Introduction

Recently, research on student engagement has decreased quite significantly (Gao et al., 2022; Giang et al., 2024; Hasdina et al., 2024; Thornberg et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). Improving education quality will become a big challenge. This is because education is a combination of process and product, so the quality of the process must be measured and paid attention to (Yang, 2011). The low success of the learning process in the classroom generally causes a low quality of education (Nofiyanti & Ali, 2022). Teachers should try various ways to create learning success, including encouraging student engagement during learning.

According to Bond and Bodenlier (2019), student engagement is generally influenced by contextual variations such as the learning environment and strategies implemented by teachers. Education is a learning process where students actively develop their potential to have the necessary skills (Kalamsi, 2017). This explains that students should participate actively in teaching and learning activities to become independent and face real life. However, education in Indonesia has not been able to realize its goals optimally. One of the obstacles is the lack of effective learning, which is caused by a lack of student engagement in the learning process. This can be seen from facts such as many students who do not attend lessons because they skip class, prefer to play online games, prefer to sleep because lessons are not engaging, do not do the assignments given by the teacher, tend to be passive, and so on. Based on these things, teachers should pay more attention to the activities provided during teaching and learning.

In the teaching practicum program in the English education department, student engagement is the main thing that pre-service teachers need to pay attention to. Nemtchinova (2018) said that teaching practicum is a means for pre-service teachers to connect theory and practice with academic knowledge. The success of the educational program that pre-service teachers has obtained is demonstrated by the successful implementation of teaching practicum (Köksal & Genç, 2019). This is both a new thing and a challenge for pre-service teachers because most do not have direct experience teaching in the classroom.

To achieve the expected learning goals, there must be engagement between teachers and students. Student activity in class can stimulate students' desire to develop their talents. Bell (2006) state that with active learning, students can build their understanding of knowledge and attitudes through activities during learning. Students are not only passive but also active and try to solve problems together with other students. Furthermore, based on my initiative interviews with supervisor teachers, pre-service teachers still experience obstacles when increasing student engagement due to lack of experience teaching students, lack of ability to manage students in class, lack of confidence in teaching, and not being able to make a connection between theory and practice while teaching students. These obstacles mean that pre-service teachers cannot carry out learning that makes their students involved.

The role of pre-service teachers in increasing student engagement is not just about how students can be active in learning in the classroom. Gebhard (2009) said that pre-service EFL teachers must understand how to create learning based on their observations regarding student characteristics, students' level of learning readiness, and how to encourage student engagement from various behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of students at school (Reschly et al., 2012). Pre-service EFL teachers are expected to pay more attention to the aspects of student engagement. Likewise, the implementation of learning activities still requires the development of effective strategies to increase student engagement. Therefore, strategic planning in handling classroom management is one of the skills that pre-service teachers must master.

Based on the aforementioned elaborations, pre-service teachers struggle to develop strategies to enhance student engagement during classroom learning. Therefore, more in-depth investigation is needed to examine this issue. This research explores how pre-service EFL teachers implement strategies to enhance student engagement during their teaching

practicum. The study findings contribute to the practical implications for how pre-service teachers construct their identity of professional development for prospective teachers.

Method

This research was designed with qualitative research, which aims to explore and analyze the data in deeper. Qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects. This research was conducted at a university in Pekalongan, Central Java Province, Indonesia. The research participants were four pre-service teachers of the English education study program. They consisted of male and female pre-service teachers aged 19-23. They were involved as participants because they had participated in the teaching practicum for 45 days at senior high school and had been declared to have passed it.

This research used the interview method. There are two factors in getting maximum interview results: naturalness and detail (Dornyei, 2007). Creswell (2012) also states that interviews are the most important source in qualitative research to obtain data regarding insight into a person's experiences and feelings in social life. The researcher used semi-structured interviews by asking open questions about the strategies used by pre-service teachers to enhance student engagement during teaching practicum. Besides, this research also uses observation to collect data. Observation is a collection method through group or individual participation and observation over a long period of time (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a technique for finding, analyzing, and presenting patterns (themes) in data. The researcher wrote down the data collected from interviews and observations. To analyze the research in more detail, the researcher read transcripts and watched videos of learning activities repeatedly to find themes.

Findings and discussion

Measuring student engagement during teaching practicum

Measuring student engagement can help pre-service teachers determine the level of student engagement in the classroom. The pre-service teachers can find students who are often involved in learning and students who are less involved during learning. This strategy is important because by knowing the level of student engagement, the pre-service teachers can know how to increase student engagement further. The pre-service teachers have experience measuring student engagement during the learning process. This is shown through the following data:

In fact, by checking responses, we can determine how much student engagement is in the learning process. After finishing explaining the material, I ask some questions that can interest students to answer. If they can answer the questions, it means the students are actively involved in learning (Pre-service teacher 1, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

One way is by asking questions such as trigger questions. When I explain the material and want to know whether the students understand and follow my learning, I ask trigger questions to determine how much the students understand and follow my learning (Pre-service teacher 2, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

In presenting the material, I often intersperse it with a question. For example, how is the material explained? is it understandable or not? From there, I see the answers from my students. How were today's

learning and the results of the group discussion. I also see how they discuss when I give group assignments (Pre-service teacher 4, Interview, April 1, 2024, Researcher's translation).

Based on the interview vignettes, asking questions related to learning material was a strategy they used to measure student engagement during learning. According to the pre-service teachers 1, 2, and 4, asking questions about the learning material can help us find out which students are following the learning that is taking place and can find out whether the students understand the material being presented. This can be seen from how the students respond when the pre-service teachers 1, 2, and 4 ask questions. The pre-service teachers can identify the students who are often or rarely involved during learning through student responses to these questions. The pre-service teachers can see the students who can answer questions well and the students who cannot answer the questions given. From here, they can find out which students are often involved during learning and who are less involved. Measuring student engagement lets pre-service teachers know what methods can be implemented to improve student learning outcomes.

This finding is in line with Appleton (2006), who stated that measuring students' cognitive and emotional abilities has a great influence on improving student learning outcomes. Pre-service teachers can find out how students understand the material that has been explained and how it is related to students' cognitive abilities. A pre-service teacher must be able to condition and organize his students to have high engagement during learning (Appleton, 2008). Student understanding greatly influences student learning outcomes. Students who understand learning well will find it easier to understand questions related to their understood material. Students who have a good understanding can answer questions well, too. This also follows the opinion of Eagle et al. (2010), who states that when students are involved, the context (facilitator) will provide feedback or support that can encourage student engagement.

Establishing good communication

In teaching practicum, the pre-service teachers have a short time to adapt to the school environment and must quickly adapt to new things related to teaching practicum. The relationship between the pre-service teachers and their students also needs attention. Therefore, the pre-service teacher strategies for building good relationships with their students need to support this.

I try to get to know my students by asking questions outside of learning, I approach it by asking questions outside of the learning context (Pre-service teacher 1, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

I do two-way communication. I approach my students by chatting and joking during and outside of learning (Pre-service teacher 4, Interview, April 1, 2024, Researcher's translation).

Informed by the interview excerpts, pre-service teachers 1 and 4 focus on building relationships by establishing direct communication with their students through chatting outside the learning context. They try to be close to their students. This communication is carried out both inside and outside learning. They take more approaches outside of learning. When the pre-service teachers have a good relationship with the students, it becomes easier for them to connect with their students. The relationship between the pre-service teachers and the students will be closer but still within limits.

This was also found from the results of observations via video recordings of teaching from the pre-service teacher 4 at minutes 03.16 - 04.15. In the video, she can communicate by joking about the subject matter she is explaining. Communication carried out during learning can lighten the atmosphere in the classroom. The pre-service teacher 4 also often interacts with his students when teaching. She explained and tried to get his students to focus on the material being presented.

The video link: https://youtu.be/Yvka_wjykUc?si=NIQBsrTyofA1Ox5 and the following figure portray the communication carried out by the pre-service teacher 4 when explaining the learning material.

Figure 1

Communication with Students



Based on the video link and Figure 1, it can be seen that pre-service teacher 4 is approaching students to communicate. The communication carried out is in the form of jokes. The pre-service teacher 4 is asking students about questions in the student's book about preferred drinks. The students joked and mentioned various drinks they liked. Having jokes like that will make the learning feel relaxed, and the pre-service teacher 4 can get closer to his students. The relationships between pre-service teachers 4 and their students will become closer. This can directly trigger increased student engagement during learning. Small things such as conversations about things of interest and other topics carried out by pre-service teachers with students can create warmer relationships, thus having a positive impact on student engagement in learning

This finding aligns with the statement of Cook et al. (2018) that small things like greeting students in a friendly manner when they enter the classroom can improve the atmosphere between students and teachers. The relationship between pre-service teachers and their students greatly develops students' psychological and social involvement when participating in learning (Dunleavy & Milton, 2009). The more interactions are created, the more comfortable students will feel. In these findings, it is known that pre-service teachers communicate by asking students about their hobbies, where the context of their conversation is outside of learning. Students feel enthusiastic when talking about topics they like. Students are very interactive and want to interact with others inside and outside the classroom and school (Willms et al., 2009). This is because pre-service teachers are teachers

who temporarily replace their original teachers, so in a short time, they must create an atmosphere and learning environment that supports students in being more involved.

Balancing structure and student autonomy through cooperative learning methods

Student autonomy refers to how students are responsible for the learning that will be carried out. The students are free to determine what and how to study. Meanwhile, the structure provided by the service teacher refers to providing clear methods to achieve students' educational goals. In this case, the pre-service teachers apply cooperative learning methods to balance structure and student autonomy. This can be seen in the data below:

The methods I use are probably mostly group methods. There, I divided into several large groups and gave assignments to be analyzed together. That way, students will participate in discussions and have their assignments (Pre-service teacher 2, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

I often apply the jigsaw method. There, students are asked to discuss material, then after discussing, for example, one group consists of 5 people, then 2 people explain the material, and the other 3 people spread out to listen to material from other groups (Pre-service teacher 4, Interview, April 1, 2024, Researcher's translation).

Based on the interview vignette, pre-service teacher 2 often uses group methods. He divided them into several large groups and then gave each group a task that had to be analyzed. This method shows that the students are involved in the discussions, and of course, this can increase student engagement through discussions. The students not only listen to the material but try to complete the assignments given by the pre-service teacher 2.

Meanwhile, the pre-service teacher 4 chose to apply the jigsaw method. This jigsaw method is very good for getting all students involved in learning. With the jigsaw method, the pre-service teacher divides the students into several groups, and each student in the group has a task. This is very good to implement. Students will automatically be involved because each has an important role in the group, and this depends on the results they get.

This can be seen in the teaching video link by the pre-service teacher 2 in minutes 01.53 - 03.23, where the pre-service teacher divides students into several large groups and gives a task to each group to be analyzed together with each group member as it can be seen in the following video: <https://youtu.be/MpRULhHskT4?si=DSsLwWrPntI68tmf>.

Figure 2

Cooperative Learning Method



Based on the video link and Figure 2, the pre-service teacher 2 gives assignments to each group. Then, each group was asked to analyze the task and do it together with members of other groups. The pre-service teacher 2 needs to control the discussion activities carried out by their students and return their focus when the classroom atmosphere is no longer conducive. With this method, the students will be involved in their discussions. This increases student engagement because students will do each of their assignments. The method provided by pre-service teachers is closely related to how students participate in learning. If the learning method is interesting, students will be more involved during learning. On the other hand, if the method provided by the pre-service teacher is monotonous, students will also be less involved during learning. Therefore, appropriate learning methods greatly influence how the students are engaged during the learning process.

This aligns with the opinion of Skinner and Belmont (1993) that three behaviors that can influence student behavioral engagement are involvement, structure, and autonomy support. Understanding student character is something that needs to be mastered by pre-service. Motivating teachers provide knowledge and are true collaborators with their students (Reeve, 2016). This means that every pre-service teacher must be able to understand the characteristics of students so that it can be a guide for pre-service teachers in implementing learning methods.

Consequently, the relationship between autonomy concerns how students respond to what they will learn, and structure concerns the provision of clear methods. Providing clear learning methods is important to supporting student engagement during the learning process (Jang et al., 2010). Based on the findings, pre-service teachers try to increase student engagement through cooperative methods. This method requires students to be involved in the learning process, where learning focuses more on problem-solving. Each student is responsible for solving problems so that all students will get involved in the following learning.

Promoting digital media as an innovation in teaching process

Digital media is one of the learning media that can increase student engagement. The role of digital media is very important in life. As technology develops, the learning that will be delivered to students becomes more varied. The pre-service teachers can utilize the facilities of the school where they are teaching practicum to be able to apply modern learning media. This can be seen from the following data:

The media that I used is a projector to show PPT to introduce understanding and so on. Then, I also broadcast videos via YouTube (Pre-service teacher 2, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

Sometimes, I use a projector to show videos or games because the students can see together (Pre-service teacher 3, Interview, March 24, 2024, Researcher's translation).

As for media, I often use technological media in my learning such as laptops and LCD projectors because they are still relevant in today's digital world. Usually, I show video presentations, learning videos from YouTube, and interactive games to provide a more enjoyable learning experience for students. This media can also be accessed at any time, both at home and at school (Pre-service teacher 4, Interview, April 1, 2024, Researcher's translation).

Based on the interview data, pre-service teachers 2, 3, and 4 often use technology as learning media in the learning process. The technology that is often used is LCD projectors.

Usually, this LCD projector is used to display PPT and videos from YouTube, presentation videos, learning videos, etc. Compared to writing lessons, the students are happier when pre-service teachers use digital learning media. Based on what the pre-service teacher 2 conveyed, the LCD projector was used to introduce the learning material that would be presented to students. Using an LCD projector, the students can watch together so that all students can see what the pre-service teacher is showing. This is by what was conveyed by the pre-service teacher 3.

Apart from that, based on the results of observations through teaching video recordings carried out by pre-service teacher 3, it was found that pre-service teacher 3 used digital media, namely an LCD projector, to display learning videos. This is found at minutes 7.44-9.10. The link video: https://youtu.be/58MRPRW_Dq4?si=QHLTLY4H7RqcTYA and the following figure illustrate the learning process carried out by the pre-service teacher 3 in using digital learning media:

Figure 3

The Use of Digital Learning Media



It can be seen from Figure 3 that pre-service teacher 3 uses a projector to show learning videos about procedure text, where the learning videos are displayed with animations that attract the students. Using this media, the students can also see and analyze what they are watching. Even when the video was finished being shown, students were asked to watch it again to re-understand the content contained in the video shown on the projector screen.

This is also in line with Hayes (2000) opinion that new forms of digital media are increasingly attracting children to video games, social media, and alternative ways of learning. Beeland (2002) said that technology can provide significant potential to meet the needs of students with diverse learning styles and increase student engagement during learning. Teachers need to report technology increases factors of student engagement, including cognitive, affective, behavioral, academic, and social (Miftachudin & Zulfikar, 2024).

Additionally, the use of digital media not only improves behavior but also improves learning outcomes because students remember the lessons given more easily (Greener, 2022). Learning using this technology attracts students' attention and curiosity (Prayudha & Pradana, 2023). By implementing varied media, pre-service 53 teachers can minimize

monotonous media to reduce student boredom. Using digital technology in learning promotes student engagement (Muir, 2020).

Providing evaluation questions

Providing evaluation questions for students can also be used to increase student engagement. This evaluation question determines student understanding by focusing on the learning objectives. This can be seen from the following interview vignettes:

Evaluation questions are used to measure student understanding, so when I finish explaining the material, I ask questions, or when I am about to close the class, I ask more questions to determine whether the students understand. This question is also used to evaluate whether students understand the lesson during learning. This question is essential to evaluate students (Pre-service teacher 1, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

This benefits the students. I can find out how much the students understand and also evaluate myself as a pre-service teacher. Is the method used appropriately because students have different understanding abilities? Evaluation questions can be used for student evaluations and also evaluations for pre-service teachers (Pre-service teacher 2, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

Because I know my students' understanding has reached. Sometimes, the students' capacities are not the same in one class. The evaluation that I do takes the form of asking questions. If there are students who cannot answer, then I will ask the student personally. This question is for evaluation of everything that has been learned in class (Pre-service teacher 3, Interview, March 24, 2024, Researcher's translation).

In my opinion, it is essential because it measures students' understanding, whether they understand or not, and as feedback from the material that has been taught. For example, from enrichment, quizzes like that (Pre-service teacher 4, Interview, April 1, 2024, Researcher's translation).

Based on the interview excerpts, it can be seen that evaluation questions can be used to determine student understanding. This question is asked when the pre-service teacher has provided and explained the lesson material to students. As stated by pre-service teacher 1, she gave evaluation questions when she finished explaining the material or was about to close the lesson. From there, the pre-service teacher 1 can determine whether the students understand the lesson.

With evaluation questions, there will also be feedback between teachers and students. If the student feels that the question cannot be answered, the teacher will provide feedback by providing further explanations to understand the student better. Apart from that, evaluation questions enable students to think more critically about the learning material presented. This has an impact on how engaged students are during the learning process. Students who pay serious attention to the pre-service teacher's explanation can answer each evaluation question well. Of course, this encourages students to be more involved during learning. If students want to be able to answer evaluation questions, students must pay close attention during the learning process. This makes students more involved so that they can answer the evaluation questions given by the pre-service teacher.

Based on the teaching video conducted by pre-service teacher 3, it was found that pre-service teacher 3 gave evaluation questions to his students, which were carried out while reviewing the material they had studied previously. This can be found at minutes 4.25-7.23, shown in the link video: https://youtu.be/58MRPRW_Dq4?si=QHLTLYL4H7RqcTYA and the following figure:

Figure 4*Providing Evaluation Questions*

In the video recording, it can be seen that the pre-service teacher 3 asked questions to the students regarding last week's learning material. Several students were seen answering questions given by the pre-service teacher 3. By going around, the pre-service teacher 3 asked them questions randomly so that the pre-service teacher 3 could find out the student's understanding of the learning material that had been taught. Several students felt confused when answering the questions given by the pre-service teacher 3. However, the students could answer the evaluation questions after being given the keywords. With evaluation questions, students will be involved in learning to answer questions given by the pre-service teacher.

Giving evaluation questions aims to determine student understanding. Students have their capacities, so their abilities are also different. Harari and Covington (1981) said that as the students' progress start from elementary to secondary levels, their self-esteem depends on their ability to compete. Therefore, by knowing students' understanding, pre-service teachers are expected to be able to determine an approach that suits their students' abilities. This finding is supported by Walsh and Sattes (2016), who stated that quality questions can allow students to think at an appropriate cognitive level and state clearly and concisely. Pre-service teachers tend to ask evaluation questions at the end of the lesson. This is so that pre-service teachers know how students are involved during learning. Students actively involved in learning can easily answer evaluation questions compared to students who ignore learning. Smart and Marshall (2013), who state that questions from the teacher are a sub-component that has the potential to make classroom learning effective. Pre-service teachers can also elaborate on the questions that have been given so that students become more involved in answering the questions given.

Increasing student engagement with interesting activities

Learning activities are prevalent during the learning process. Most students respond positively when the pre-service teachers do relaxing activities in class. The activities carried out include playing games, singing together, or watching films but are still related to English. The pre-service teachers can use this learning activity to determine how students understand

the material provided and connect students with direct practice in real life. This can be seen from the following data:

Yes, namely by making games. The game is about learning. I gave direct to students to take part in the games so that they will be more active in learning (Pre-service teacher 1, Interview, March 12, 2024, Researcher's translation).

I provide activities such as singing together, but the songs are in English. I did that activity because I had 4 hours of very long lessons. This activity can train students' English pronunciation and, as much as possible, get students used to speaking English often, even if a little (Pre-service teacher 3, Interview, March 24, 2024, Researcher's translation).

An activity that I often do is watching films with my students, such as English films or icebreakers in English. Of course, students become happier and more active during learning (Pre-service teacher 4, Interview, April 1, 2024, Researcher's translation).

As can be seen from the interview data, the pre-service teachers carry out learning activities to make their students more involved during learning. This activity is a relaxing activity but is still linked to learning English. Implementing this activity makes students feel more enthusiastic about participating in learning. This activity also gets all students involved. Even though it seems relaxed, it is very effective for practicing students' English skills. Of course, this activity positively impacts the learning process, where all students are involved and actively participate in learning. Apart from that, the pre-service teachers can provide direct practice of the material that has been explained. This can determine how students understand the material they have captured and the actual practice of explaining it.

The results of this data showed that pre-service teachers can enhance student engagement through learning activities that are still linked to English language learning. The pre-service teachers keep students practicing English with relaxed learning activities and connecting students through practice. Interesting activities implemented during learning involve all students during the learning process. This can be found in the pre-service teacher 1 teaching video at minutes 6.08-13.03. Pre-service teacher 1 applies snowball throwing games in teaching material about elliptical construction. Learning activities through games make students more enthusiastic about learning. The video link: https://youtu.be/4_fpuCoaCeU?si=YSjwPoBqhulwdK1 and the following figure depict activities through games during learning:

Figure 5

Students' Engagement



The pre-service teachers apply learning with snowball throwing games. In these games, all the students must be involved. The pre-service teacher 1 prepares questions about the material they are studying and then forms them into a ball. Every student who gets the ball must be able to answer the questions given. All the students were enthusiastic because they tried to avoid being hit by the ball. Learning interspersed with games makes learning more exciting and less monotonous compared to learning that always uses textbooks. Students are also more involved during learning and feel comfortable in receiving learning.

This new finding is in line with Tan Ai Lin, et al. (2018), who stated that game-based learning and gamification must be used to provide opportunities for students to be fully involved in learning activities. Providing game-based activities can increase students' focus on the activities they are doing and reduce students' feelings of frustration in learning (Oliveira et al., 2023). With game activities, students will focus on being able to play games, and automatically, students will be fully involved in learning. Wiggins (2016) claims that game-based learning is used to improve student mastery in the context of teaching and learning. This is related to mastery of the material presented by the pre-service teacher. Learning with game activities linked to English makes students understand more about the material they are studying because they are directly involved in the game. Besides that, this can provide the view that learning English is fun.

Conclusion

The investigation of the strategies used by pre-service EFL teachers to increase student engagement during teaching practicum has shown that there are six strategies for increasing student engagement. The first strategy is measuring student engagement by checking to understand and asking questions about learning material. The second strategy is establishing good communication, where pre-service teachers try to establish direct communication with students through conversations, such as hobbies, favorite songs, etc. The third strategy is balancing structure and student autonomy through cooperative learning methods by applying the group and jigsaw methods. The next strategy is promoting digital media as an innovation in the learning process through digital learning media, such as LCD projectors, to display PPTs and learning videos. The fifth strategy is providing evaluation questions when the pre-service teachers finish explaining the material or when closing the lesson. The final strategy is to increase student engagement through interesting activities.

This research can be a reference for other pre-service teachers in their efforts to enhance student engagement during teaching practicum. This research also provides additional knowledge for pre-service teachers regarding ways to implement strategies to increase student engagement. This research is still limited to strategies for increasing student engagement. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers explore broader and more diverse topics such as student participation, class interaction, class and time arrangements, and others.

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