

## **EXPLORING HOW STUDENTS VIEW THEIR ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN AN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

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**Abstract:** Online learning has experienced a surge in popularity, particularly among higher education institutions. It reduces a substantial number of obstacles associated with university attendance. Furthermore, it may incur fewer financial expenses and be unrestricted by issue time or location. Nevertheless, the majority of students must make preparations in order to adjust to the learning process. They remain oblivious to the repercussions of online education that demand self-regulated learning. This research examines students' perspectives concerning their academic engagement in the online learning setting. Twelve students enrolled in a private higher education institution willingly contributed to the research as respondents. The information was gathered via a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews which were subjected to qualitative data analysis. Four dimensions of academic engagement were identified through the research: behavior online engagement, cognitive online engagement, affective online engagement, and social online engagement. The students' perspectives featured in this article can serve as a basis for developing interactive online learning environments in higher education by emphasizing the students' backgrounds and characteristics.

**Keywords:** Academic Engagement; Online Learning; Online Learning environment.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Online learning has become increasingly prevalent in higher education, offering flexibility and accessibility to a wide range of students. However, the effectiveness of online education depends largely on students' engagement with the learning process. Academic engagement is a multifaceted concept that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of learning, all of which play a crucial role in determining students' success and satisfaction with their educational experience. Nevertheless, a casual reading of the extensive literature on student development in higher education can create confusion and perplexity (Astin, 1999).

Several variables have been identified as the reason behind education's ineffectiveness. It is not wise to assume that structural and/or administrative incompetence is the only cause of these circumstances. Teachers' engagement has been recognized as a means of providing effective education, among the numerous aspects that

influence education. According to Khaing & Myint (2020), academic engagement is an important issue in the enhancement of education sector in many countries. All of its characteristics and dimensions create a satisfactory atmosphere for teaching learning process. This study aims to concentrate on this issue as a way to solve the problem of failure in education. Academic engagement refers to a cognitive-emotional-behavioral state characterized by satisfaction, interest and motivation that allows students to participate in the academic context, learning and curricular activities (Martínez et al., 2023). Still in Martinez, at.al. that high levels of academic engagement in students improve the academic performance, successfully achieve their studies, face academic challenges and, consequently, decrease levels of school leaving. It can create students' motivation in attending the school activities for the involvement of students' engagement during the activities.

Today, research on academic engagement is a predictor of flourishing among students who were enrolled in the online distance learning program in a university (Montano, 2021). In online courses and programs, where communication and other interactions are often virtual and asynchronous, student perceptions of engagement become even more important. Students were encouraged to engage with specific aspects of online discussions and interactive tasks, particularly those that provided thought-provoking questions related to real-world situations and encouraged students to express a variety of opinions. It became clear that they found the aspect of expressing, exchanging and developing ideas appealing. personal perspective.

The previous study conducted by Setiyani, at.al. (2020) found that blended learning gives greater flexibility of being able to complete assignments any place and any time. Moreover, Khaing & Myint (Khaing & Myint, 2020) argued that academic self-efficacy, academic satisfaction, academic performance, motivation, and valuing were found to be the related internal factors which influence academic engagement. Montano (Montano, 2021) also believed that academic engagement was directly and indirectly linked to higher levels of flourishing among learners. It was also discovered that the fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness explain how engagement led to well-being. Whereas, Baloran, et.al. (2021) in their study claimed that students' high level of course satisfy and engage with online learning delivery. They have the same level of satisfaction on online learning delivery quality but have different online learning engagement levels as to year level. None of the earlier research addresses the topic of examining students' perceptions of their academic engagement in an online learning environment on higher education institutions context.

In the context of online learning, academic engagement takes on new dimensions and challenges. The lack of face-to-face interaction, the reliance on digital tools and platforms, and the need for self-regulated learning can impact how students perceive and experience their academic engagement. Understanding students' perspectives on their academic engagement in an online learning environment is essential for teachers and institutions to design effective and engaging online learning experiences.

In the context of online learning environments, this study aims to investigate how students perceive their academic engagement in higher education institutions. By examining students' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to their academic engagement, this study aims to uncover insights that can inform the design and

implementation of online learning programs that better support student engagement and success.

This research is significant as it contributes to the growing body of literature on online learning by providing insights into students' perspectives on their academic engagement. The findings can inform teachers and institutions on how to improve the design and delivery of online courses to enhance students' engagement and success. Additionally, the findings can contribute to theoretical frameworks of academic engagement in online learning, providing a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon.

## **METHOD**

This study was conducted at a higher-education institutions in Jakarta. A total of 12 first-year EFL students of College English II (an intermediate level) participated in this study. This research employed a qualitative study, utilizing a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights into students' views and experiences. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who are currently enrolled in online courses at higher education institutions. Moreover, three students who were categorized as students with low, medium, or low achievement voluntarily participated in semi-structure interview. Qualitative data analysis was applied to identify students' views of their academic engagement. Triangulation was used to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, with multiple data sources and researchers involved in the analysis process. Based on a review of the literature we developed the research instruments. All scales in the questionnaire used a 5-point scale ranging from 1 for “strongly disagree” to 5 for “strongly agree.”

The class meets once a week for 100 minutes throughout a 14-week semester. The coursebook contains 10 courses that include daily routines, travel, language, culture, food, family, nature, and technology. Each unit requires one to two sessions of instruction. The class is obliged to complete their assignments online using e-Campus, an online learning platform created by internal staff to promote blended learning. Teachers use the e-Campus platform to post multimodal resources during and/or after each unit to give additional support for students' EFL learning. Students, on the other hand, are encouraged to participate in self-paced learning and submit assignments through the platform. Overall, the platform offers a comprehensive interactive experience for pupils.

An online questionnaire was mainly adapted from Sun & Zhang (2024) about the online student engagement questionnaire that has been cross-validated in several online learning situations. The revised questionnaire has 18 items, which are reduced to 16 items by removing the negative items and is designed to collect students' self-reports of online learning engagement across four dimensions: behavioral (4 items), cognitive (4 items), affective (4 items), and social (4 items). The questionnaire items were specifically created to reflect e-Campus's online learning environment. After the semester ended and the final grades were received, students were asked to complete an online learning engagement questionnaire voluntarily.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The study revealed behavior engagement, cognitive engagement, affective engagement, and social engagement as the four elements of academic engagement.

### Behavioral engagement

A questionnaire is conducted of the sub-dimensions under the behavioral online engagement separately, as shown in Table 1. The rank of Likert scale is used to collect the data.

**Table 1. Behavioral engagement**

A	Behavioral engagement	1	2	3	4	5
1	I take notes when doing tasks on e-Campus				2	10
2	I stay focused when completing tasks on e-Campus				3	9
3	I set aside a regular time to finish tasks on e-Campus				3	9
4	I complete tasks on e-Campus as soon as I can			1	2	9
	Total (%)			2.2	20.8	77

The result of behavioral engagement shown in Table 1 claimed that around 77% of students in each sub-dimension of behavioral engagement strongly agree, 20.8% agree, and 2.2% neutral.

Excerpt 1

R#1 I am always excited to take an active part in learning online. I engage in interaction with my friends and teachers by posing queries and providing responses. In addition, I do my tasks as accurately and on time as possible.

R#2 I have to learn actively and develop my ability to learn on my own because I occasionally struggle to comprehend the stuff offered by online learning. I discuss with others about the content that is provided online and I ask a lot of questions. When there was something that my friends and I did not grasp, my teacher also gave us the chance to ask questions after the online class schedule.

R#3 I never arrive late or finish earlier than the scheduled online learning period. I am always on time for the online learning schedule. Even though I occasionally get fatigued since online learning can be dull and uninteractive at times, I also constantly log on to show respect for my teachers and peers.

(Interview transcript, Respondent # 01, # 02, and # 03, translated by the author)

### Cognitive engagement

A questionnaire is conducted of the sub-dimensions under the cognitive engagement separately, as shown in Table 2. The rank of Likert scale is used to collect the data.

**Table 2. Cognitive engagement**

B	Cognitive engagement	1	2	3	4	5
5	I try to search for further information when I make mistakes on e-Campus		1	1	2	8
6	I try to go through textbooks when I am not sure about my answers on e-Campus		2	1	2	7

7	I try to compare my own answers with the correct answers on e-Campus	1	2	9	
8	I try to understand my mistakes if I do something wrong on e-Campus	1	3	8	
	Total (%)	6.3	8.3	18.7	66.7

The result of cognitive engagement shown in Table 2 showed that for most students, around 66.7% of students in each sub-dimension of cognitive engagement strongly agree, 18.7% agree, 8.3% neutral, and 6.3% disagree.

### Excerpt 2

R#1 I made my study schedule so that I could review the content that was covered in the online course. One consequence of online learning is that there are more duties to complete; therefore, in order to prevent turning in assignments late, I need to become proficient in time management. I often end up talking more with friends while completing tasks.

R#2 To help me understand the content better, I read the material before taking the online course. I took notes during the online presentation to help me better grasp it. I occasionally videotaped the online process, particularly when my teacher gave a clarification or went over the lesson plan.

R#3 After enrolling in the online course, I assess my comprehension by responding to the questions or writing a summary of the content. Occasionally, I checked my comprehension of the materials with a friend. Whenever I thought there was a problem with the course materials, I rewatched the recorded online course.

(Interview transcript, Respondent # 01, # 02, and # 03, translated by the author)

### Affective engagement

A questionnaire is conducted of the sub-dimensions under the affective engagement separately, as shown in Table 3. The rank of Likert scale is used to collect the data.

**Table 3. Affective engagement**

C	Affective engagement	1	2	3	4	5
9	I enjoy doing homework on e-Campus				2	10
10	I look forward to doing homework on e-Campus			2	2	8
11	I feel comfortable doing homework on e-Campus			1	1	10
12	I am motivated to do homework on e-Campus			1	2	9
	Total (%)			10.5	14.5	77

The result of affective engagement shown in Table 3 is that for most students, around 77% of students each sub-dimension of affective engagement is strongly agree, 14,5% agree and 10,5% neutral.

### Excerpt 3

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R#1 I only access the e-Campus when I have homework to complete. There was never any interest in revisiting the material that was offered in e-Campus. I would rather focus intently in the online course. I occasionally felt too drowsy and too lethargic to participate actively in online learning because the environment was dull.

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R#2 I am more actively engaged in the online learning process when I work on collaborative assignments that my teacher offered us than when I work on the project alone. I was not interested in actively participating in the discussion session that was conducted through the e-Campus, though. I like to read silently and in a passive manner.

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R#3 Due to the lack of participatory activities, I was not interested in e-Campus. Even if the teacher gave us resources to study on our own, I still need a discussion space. Although I am aware that the teacher led a discussion, I did not think it went as far as it could have.

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(Interview transcript, Respondent # 01, # 02, and # 03, translated by the author)

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### Social engagement

A questionnaire is conducted of the sub-dimensions under the social engagement separately, as shown in Table 4. The rank of Likert scale is used to collect the data.

**Table 4. Social engagement**

D	Social engagement	1	2	3	4	5
13	I share learning tips to help my classmates to do homework well on e-Campus			2	6	4
14	I discuss my mistakes that I make on e-Campus with my classmates				2	10
15	I ask teachers if I do not understand the homework on e-Campus				4	8
16	I help my classmates if they do not understand the homework on e-Campus				6	6
	Total (%)			4	36	60

The result of social engagement shown in Table 4 is that for most students, around 60% of students strongly agree with each sub-dimension of social engagement, 36% agree, and 4% are neutral.

#### Excerpt 4

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R#1 I took an active part in the online course. In addition, I participate in group activities. But occasionally, not every friend in my group helped us complete the assignment. Some of them would rather take advantage of others. I did not like the circumstances, and I did not think my teacher was aware of them.

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R#2 To talk about the materials, I started a group discussion with my peers. We spoke about it as we worked on the task. In addition, I would rather have my teacher

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provide me study instructions. I would rather skip the content if there was no task or command to read it.

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R#3 To ensure that I understand the information and am completing the assignments, I prefer to study in a group. Completing the assignment alone was difficult since I needed to talk to a friend. But in addition, my teacher made it possible for me to talk to her both during and after the online class.

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(Interview transcript, Respondent # 01, # 02, and # 03, translated by the author)

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## Discussion

There is a wide range of students' participation in the many aspects of online learning engagement, and emotional engagement is especially high. When learning online, every student has different levels of behavioral and affective engagement (77%) and cognitive engagement (66.7%), with social engagement (60%) being the lowest. Most of the students in this study use e-campus to learn online. The information portrayed in social engagement could be more favorable due to the low rate of online social interaction. It is contrast from the study by Zhu, et.al (2023) who stated that behavioral engagement is the lowest engagement in online learning.

Examining the perspectives of students regarding their academic engagement with higher education establishments in an online learning setting can yield various advantageous outcomes. Online learning facilitates better course design (Ding et al., 2017). Teachers can create online courses that are more interesting, pertinent, and efficient by taking into account students' viewpoints on their academic involvement. Better learning results and higher levels of student satisfaction may result from this. Moreover, the student's motivation can be facilitated through the online learning situation through any techniques to raise student motivation. It also increases persistence and completion rates by giving a better understanding of what drives students to participate in online learning.

The online learning situation facilitated higher retention and success. Educational institutions can raise the retention and success rates of their online students by addressing the variables that affect their academic engagement. It is also crucial to facilitate the improvement of the student's learning methods. By knowing more about students' perspectives on academic engagement, educators can make improvements to their methods that will better assist students' learning in virtual settings.

Teachers can provide more individualized support and resources to better meet the requirements of their students by taking into account each student's unique preferences and challenges to personalized students' learning experiences. Moreover, by taking into account the variety of viewpoints held by students, educational institutions can create online learning environments that are more welcoming and accessible to all learners, irrespective of their circumstances or background. It reflects the greater equity and inclusion through the online learning situation.

The development of theoretical frameworks and practical guidelines for developing effective online learning environments can be aided by research on students' perspectives of academic involvement in online learning. In general, investigating the perspectives of students on their academic engagement with higher education establishments in virtual

learning environments might result in more captivating, efficient, and inclusive virtual learning environments for learners.

## CONCLUSION

Learning engagement is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors, each playing a crucial role in shaping students' academic experiences and outcomes. Understanding these factors is essential for educators and institutions aiming to enhance student engagement and foster a more effective learning environment. Effective teaching methods, timely feedback, and enthusiasm can significantly boost student engagement. Educators who use interactive and inclusive teaching practices can create a more engaging learning experience. The effective use of technology can enhance engagement by providing interactive and accessible learning experiences. Tools such as online collaboration platforms, multimedia resources, and learning management systems can support various learning styles and needs. Emotional engagement, including interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging, is critical for sustained engagement. Social interactions and a sense of community can enhance students' emotional connection to their learning environment. Promoting higher-order thinking, critical analysis, and self-regulated learning strategies can deepen cognitive engagement. Encouraging students to set goals, monitor their progress, and reflect on their learning can foster a more meaningful and sustained engagement.

Enhancing learning engagement requires a holistic approach that considers the interplay of various factors. By addressing instructor practices, course design, learning environments, technology use, personal factors, emotional and social connections, and cognitive strategies, educators and institutions can create more engaging and effective learning experiences. This comprehensive understanding of learning engagement can lead to improved student satisfaction, retention, and academic success.

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