

# Teachers' Experiences in Engaging Students Cognitively of English as a Foreign Language during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

This study aimed to analyze teachers' experiences in engaging students cognitively in English as a foreign language during the covid-19 pandemic. The participants of this study were experienced and less experienced teachers at private high schools in Medan. The technique of data collection was in-depth interviews. The results showed that both teachers had been familiar with using online media for learning such as zoom meetings although sometimes they had difficulties in engaging the students in the learning process when technical issues of the network occurred. Moreover, they could engage the students by 1) developing creative teaching, 2) designing problem-solving, 3) Aiming at reason, 4) enabling students' decision-making, and 5) enabling students to evaluate.

**Keywords:** experience, cognitively, foreign language, covid-19, teacher

## 1. Introduction

In relation to English as a foreign language (EFL), Broughton, Brumt, Flavell, Hill and Pincas (1978) mention two main kinds of motivation in foreign language learning namely instrumental and integrative. When people learn a foreign language instrumentally, they need it for functional purposes to be suitable to read books in the new language, to be suitable to communicate with other speakers of that language. The sightseer, the salesperson, the wisdom pupils are easily motivated to learn English instrumentally. When they learn it for integrative purposes, they are trying to identify much more nearly with a speech community that uses that language variety, they want to feel at home in it, and they try to understand the stations and the worldview of that community.

Furthermore, related to learning English as a foreign language at schools for instrumental purposes, van Thao et. al. (2022) also clarify about the interaction between teachers and students always occurs in the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Herman et. al., 2020). Then, describes that classroom interaction as the patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication and the types of social relationships which occur within classrooms (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992). Then, Herman et. al. (2022) defined that the quality of relationship interactions between teachers and students is fundamental to understanding how to make students engage in learning that can be changed by providing teachers knowledge about developmental processes relevant to classroom interactions and substantiated feedback/support about their interactive behaviors and cues (Pianta, Hamre and Allen, 2012).

Besides that, teachers make countless numbers of decisions such as how to facilitate interactions with and among students, and positive teacher-student interactions are a primary ingredient of quality early educational experiences that launch future school success (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Moreover, school teachers are claimed as another crucial factor associated with scholars 'learning engagement, especially the relationship between schoolteachers and scholars is veritably probative (Sengsouliya, Soukhavong, Silavong, Sengsouliya, and Littlepage, 2020).

In relation to teacher-student interactions, engagement in the teaching and learning process becomes one important factor and it could be described as involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, immersion, concentrated trouble, zeal, fidelity, and energy (Schaufeli, 2013). Moreover, it motivates scholars into acquiring and creates a positive literacy atmosphere (Groves, Sellars, Smith, & Barber, 2015). Then, a schoolteacher who knows how to give stimulants and/ or help break problems to scholars, it is easily seen that scholars tend to feel warm and engaged further with the schoolteacher and scholars ( Furrer, Skinner, & Pitzer, 2014). Moreover, Guvenc (2015) states that when scholars feel that their school teacher cares and unfeignedly expects them to learn they will be happy, pleased,

and have fun in literacy as well as other literacy conditioning without pressure. Schoolteachers' tutoring performances are like giving praise, furnishing freedom to learn, and grouping learners for tasks, scholars are more engaged in literacy (Veiga, Robu, Appleton, Festas, and Galvão, 2014).

Furthermore, pupil-schoolteacher interaction is pivotal as it appreciatively correlates with scholars' learning engagement, as it can be visible through emotional sphere (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White and Salovey, 2012). Also, Trowler (2010) agrees that schoolteacher behaviours can impact scholars' engagement towards literacy. Principally, engagement happens through interaction between the schoolteacher and scholars that both need to commit and put efforts to make an active classroom (Garrette, 2011).

Besides that, schoolteachers must ensure that their scholars are engaged in the literacy process to optimize each pupil's literacy and development and help with gradational advancement and minimize academy failure. Also, their conduct in the classroom is of significance, including how schoolteachers promote schoolteacher-pupil relations, their styles of educational delivery, and their support for pupil engagement (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). Then, this study would like to analyse the ways of engaging students cognitively in teaching English as a foreign language.

## 2. Method

This study applied descriptive qualitative design which described an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Cresswell, 2007; Herman, van Thao and Purba, 2021).

The participants of this study were experienced and less experienced teachers at senior high schools in Medan, Indonesia regarding their teaching process during the covid-19 pandemic. Experienced teachers are those with many years of teaching behind them at least four to five years and less experienced teachers are who have just commenced teaching and still have very little experience less than four years (Gatbonton, 1999).

This study used the in-depth interview as the technique of data collection regarding their teaching process of English as a foreign language. Then, it refers to an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006).

## 3. Results and Discussions

The data were taken from interviewing both teachers in English teaching during the pandemic, datum 1 was the interview transcript from an experienced teacher and another teacher's transcript was described in datum 2. The transcripts could be described in the following:

Data 1:

I : Can you tell about your experience why you use zoom meeting in teaching during the pandemic?

R : *Yes, we are still pandemic of corona virus therefore we used zoom. So we learn online, miss, so we choose to use zoom because there is interaction too, right? But if in Google Classroom, we just give the material to the students and then sometimes review, but in this case, we can meet face to face even though we are online, miss*

I : Yes, then according to you, how is your ability in using zoom compared to other applications?

R : *Hmm, I can use it because before using it we were given training too and the school had some trainintraining online media, then I often learn it too from YouTube or the internet before using it*

I : Oh I see. In your opinion what the advantage of zoom which is compared to Google Classroom or Google Meet?

R : *The advantage is I can meet face to face with our students by using zoom but in Google Classroom, I sometimes don't know if they are doing their assignments or they don't see what I teach, while from zooming in, even though we don't meet, I can see their faces whether they really join my class or not*

I : Oh I see. According to you how about the engagement between teacher and students in learning?

R : *Well, I think we will get more engagement when we meet face-to-face, right? However, in zoom meetings is out of my control that sometimes they want to turn off the video, right? then they are suddenly called or they have a business, and sometimes they go to the bathroom. However, when if in the class, we can see how seriously they are taking lessons but if they are in their own homes I can't monitor it.*

I : Oh I see. Then, according to you, what the meaning of the engagement between and teacher and students in the learning process is?

R : *I think, the engagement means there is a reciprocal relationship that we must have feedback, right? There must be a response and we also know whether they get the explanation, then how far they understand it by asking for their responses.*

I : Oh, I see. According to you, how the students' engagement in zoom meeting is?

R : *I think it's better to face to face than zoom*

I : Why do you say so?

R : *The reason is that we meet face to face, miss. We can see that, hmm, we can read someone's character. We see it right away, right, miss. But if we're online, we can only see it from the screen we don't know around them miss. Even sometimes they laugh like that, maybe they're joking around with their friends or siblings, and some are even bothered at the time soon miss. There's even sometimes accompanied by a friend next door, right. But if we meet face to face we can immediately see that, miss, how is the real character, how is it actually when he is studying.*

I : Oh I see. Which one is more difficult to build an engagement in face to face or online?

R : *I think it's more difficult to build it online*

I : Then what about Miss's efforts to increase student and teacher engagement on zoom?

R : *Yes. The effort is to choose a learning topic that makes them interested, miss, especially in English games such as called competition games, quizzes, questions and answers like that.*

I : Oh I see.

R : The point is that they have more responses, right?

I : Oh I see.. How do the students respond when they learn English when they zoomed in?

R : *Yes, for example, in the classroom, even though they reply, we know who is active, right, miss. Then we know how they are, their behavior, their manners, their behavior. We can see that when we meet face to face, but while zooming in, we can't judge how their behavior is, we can only judge hmm..from the scores. But if their behavior still can't be judged then, and sometimes they are lazy to turn on the microphone, right?*

I : But if in face-to-face, do almost all of them want to respond or what, miss?

R : *Yes.. even though sometimes the answer is one of them, they always reciprocate, right. But if you zoom in, there will be signal interference, so sometimes we don't know that he suddenly disappears, miss.*

I : Oh I see. So how do you feel when you teach face-to-face or in zoom meetings?

R : *It's better and enjoy teaching face-to-face than in zoom meeting*

I : Then how about the student's ability, miss face to face?

R : *Yes, it's better to face to face miss*

I : Oh I see.. why is that, miss?

R : *Because the interaction already exists, miss and they are also confident.*

I : Oh I see.

R : *Moreover, meeting his friends too miss*

I : Oh I see. Ok miss, thank you for your time

R : Yes miss. You're welcome

According to the transcript interview in datum 1, the respondent joined some training in using online media and learning from YouTube or the internet before using zoom meetings. However, she had difficulties controlling and monitoring the students when they turned off the video in the zoom meeting. Then there was signal interference so some students suddenly disappeared when they zoomed in. Moreover, she could not see her students' characters since she only saw them from the screen and did not know their situation. Moreover, she still did efforts to keep students engaged by choosing a learning topic that made them interested such as English games like competition games, quizzes, questions, and answers.

Data 2:

I : Can you your experience why you use zoom meetings in teaching during the pandemic?

R : *In the beginning, we only used Google Classroom, then we weren't familiar with zoom. So it's been a bit like 2 months of a pandemic or 3 months of a pandemic, and we were asked to use zoom meetings by the headmaster. So it was a good time because it's a pity that the students didn't meet face to face, but at that time learning was still being given. There were two ways through zoom to have face-to-face, we explained the PPT, then getting a presentation plus would be easier. They also had the book, and those who didn't have the book could see it from the presentation plus shown on zoom. That's it, and we used Google Classroom to put the PPT, the assessment was put into the Google Form*

I : How is your ability in using Zoom?

R : *I think, I am already mastered to use it because it is easy to use and more stable.*

I : Can you tell me how the engagement between teacher and student when teaching on Zoom is?

R : *Well, the engagement had an effect on the learning process during the pandemic by using zoom. But we're just trying to keep them attend to the class.*

I : Oh I see. According to you, what is engagement in learning?

R : *Well, I think it is students' interest in learning*

I : Why do you say so?

R : *Because it's true for example, if they are not interested in learning, they also had many reasons such as the unstable network but we had to make them want to learn by asking them to turn on the cameras at the beginning of the lesson.*

I : Oh, why do you say so?

R : *To be honest, when zooming in, the only way we could know that we were there was by turning on the camera, right? if for example, they didn't turn on their camera, it's automatic that they weren't there. So they had to turn on the camera. Then they lacked responses during the pandemic, a lot of them also didn't want to answer greetings for many reasons such as the microphones were not connected or something else*

I : Oh I see, then what do you do?

R : *So, at the beginning of the lesson, I had to make sure to provide interesting material for learning by using presentation plus*

I : What are the advantages of presentation plus?

R : *All exercises can be done in the presentation plus with the pictures and it's lively. So they are interested in learning it and taking part in the lesson*

I : Then how about the students' reaction?

R : *They also participated because there was an interactive game. Then it was provided by the questions in the book and I could turn it into a quiz like that. So on zoom, there's something we could share and they could see it so they felt like there's a competition.*

I : Oh I see.. what do you mean by competition?

R : *Yes, I asked them who knew the answer of the question so they tried to answer it in two trial times and when it was over and the answer came out.. so that's how to make them happy*

I : Oh I see. Is there another material besides presentation plus?

R : *Yes, I made a PowerPoint with a clear explanation and didn't give the children formulas because they get bored with it.*

I : So how did they know about grammar?

R : *So I gave an example to the students, it's like reading and then I discussed about grammar and vocabulary related to the text.*

I : Oh I see.. What do you think about zoom platform compared to other ones?

R : *Well, I think it's more stable by using zoom because I'd used Google meet and sometimes the students showed up, sometimes they didn't.. I guessed the network wasn't stable.*

I : Oh I see

R : *Google meet was being used by the education office, but we still used zoom because it's more stable when zoomed in.*

I : Oh I see.. how about your ability in using zoom compared to other applications?

R : *Well, because from the beginning the exploration was zoomed in so I understand more about using Zoom, but recently I used Google Meet because it was from the Ministry of Education and Culture, so we just started using Google Meet*

I : Oh I see.. According to you, how is the engagement between teachers and students online using Zoom and face-to-face?

R : *I think, the engagement is better in face to face*

I : Why do you say so?

R : *Because how can there be engagement if the students themselves didn't want to turn on the cameras and microphones, and when asked they didn't respond, well, it couldn't have an engagement if that's what happened, right?*

I : Oh I see

R : *But if the network was really good, then they were also in a good mood, so they wanted to turn on the cameras and the microphones. Then there will be good interaction and engagement too.*

I : Oh, I see. So which one is more difficult to build engagement on zoom or face-to-face?

R : *I think it's more difficult when zoomed in*

I : Then, how do you increase students' motivation to stay excited about learning in zoom?

R : *Yes, sometimes we couldn't study too seriously, right.. we also add some jokes.*

I : Why do you say so?

R : *Because with these high school students, if we were too strict, they would run away, so sometimes I gave some jokes to them, greet them like that. The main thing was to make them feel comfortable with me, so if they were teenagers, I would be too*

I : Do you think anything else can be done?

R : *Often give motivation and materials from Whats Up too*

I : Oh I see, miss. Thank you for your time

R : Yes ma'am, you're welcome

According to the transcript interview in datum 2, the respondent was already mastered in using learning platforms such as zoom meeting because it was easy to use and more stable. However, she had difficulties in reaching and monitoring the students when they turned off the videos in zoom meetings. There were network reasons or something else so some students were not connected or did not show up in zoom meetings. Moreover, she still did an effort to keep on students engaged in the learning by explaining power points, giving the assessment, quizzes, and exercises, providing interesting material, providing interactive games, asking some questions, involving the students in activities, giving some jokes, providing learning enjoyment and motivating them.

According to data analysis, it found that respondent 1 engaged the students cognitively in English learning by providing learning interaction and enjoyment of learning by giving competition games, giving an explanation of the topics, the assignment and quizzes, reviewing the material, choosing interesting topics, asking the students some questions and understanding of the materials, and involving them in discussion and activities. Meanwhile, respondent 2 engaged the students cognitively in English learning by explaining the material using power points, giving the assessment and exercises, providing interesting material and interactive games, asking them some questions, involving them in discussion and activities, and providing the enjoyment of learning by giving some jokes and making them comfortable in learning and supporting them in learning.

This finding related to five ways of engaging which can be applied in teaching EFL, namely 1) developing creative teaching, 2) designing problem-solving, 3) Aiming at reason, 4) enabling students' decision-making, and 5) enabling students to evaluate (Kearsley and Shneiderman, 1998). Moreover, this finding also supported by Kangas, Siklander, Randolph and Ruokamo (2017) showed that teachers could engage their students cognitively by developing teaching methods, and getting students' interests in learning processes. Moreover, it indicated the effort that teachers exert in teaching, and thus it was closely related to their work performance, energy, involvement, and efficacy. Then, a schoolteacher who knows how to give stimulants and/ or help break problems to students, it is easily seen that they tend to feel warm and engaged further with the schoolteacher and students ( Furrer, Skinner, & Pitzer, 2014).

Furthermore, this finding is also related to Pedler and Hudson (2020) that proposed the ways of engaging students cognitively that can be applied in teaching EFL. They consist of making or providing the subject interesting active and collaborative learning, fun learning, enthusiasm, critical thinking, students' encouragement in asking questions, authentic activities, students' needs, relevant background knowledge, students' goals, interest and preferences, prompt feedback, and students' assessment

#### 4. Conclusion

According to the finding, it can be drawn a conclusion that both teachers had been familiar in using online media of learning such zoom meeting although sometimes they had difficulties in engaging the students in the learning process when technical issues of the network occurred. Besides that, they could engage the students cognitively in English learning by providing learning interaction and enjoyment of learning by giving competition games by giving some jokes and making them comfortable in learning and supporting them in learning, giving explanation of the topics, the assignment and quizzes, reviewing the material, choosing interesting topics, asking the students some questions and understanding of the materials, and involving them in discussion and activities, explaining the material by using power points, giving the assessment and exercises, providing interesting material and interactive game. Therefore, they applied the ways of engaging students in language learning such as 1) developing creative teaching, 2) designing problem-solving, 3) Aiming at reason, 4) enabling students' decision-making, and 5) enabling students to evaluate

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