

The Experience of Learning Engagement by Successful Pre-service Teacher during Teaching Internship Program

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Abstract

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Pre-Service teachers' (PST) learning engagement in online learning as the contributing factor in determining students' successful learning was less elaborated. It is important to explore the process of having meaningful learning engagement experiences. This study aims at elaborating on how learning engagement and meaning making, as experienced by two pre-service teachers, inspired them to successfully teach online in a variety of student contexts with the tools provided. The participants of this study were two pre-service teachers who participated in teaching internships as a mandatory program from their university. The type of this study was qualitative and was then analyzed by narrative analysis. Through multiple interviews and three months of Instagram stories, this study found two pre-service teachers employed learning engagement, especially cognitive engagement, in their distance learning process. The finding was elaborated into two themes; (1) cognitive engagement as a meaningful experience and (2) shared responsibility to achieve behavioral engagement.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers, learning engagement, teacher internship program

INTRODUCTION

In order to prepare teacher education, it has been a common practice for language teaching departments to conduct teacher internship programs. In the Philippines ([Tindowen, et.al, 2019](#)), the government made a significant reformation of the teacher education curriculum by deploying pre-service teachers to practice teaching in industries and companies. It helped the pre-service teachers to construct their soft skills and hard skill in a real context. Teaching practicum, in this case, remained to be one of the considerable ways to facilitate pre-service teachers' learning engagement as future teachers. However, limitations were found, and the results were similar in a decade. [Boyan \(1965\)](#) found that deploying pre-service teachers to the real teaching context would only bring less effectiveness. This was due to the lack of experienced supervisors, lack of time for inspectors to advise, lack of engagement between the training institution and the inspecting bodies, and imbalance in experience of the pre-service teachers who were deployed in a developed and in an under-developed institution. In other words, this kind of program would create less successful pre-service teachers. Similar issues were still found in [Carson and Fisher \(2006\)](#). They found that their students envisaged learning engagement as a pre-service teacher would only be successful if the pre-service teachers had been prepared for being skilful in using teaching strategies, developing learning materials, and being deployed in a unique learning environment. In some cases, it was not merely about the external factors having been mentioned. [Tsang \(2003\)](#) found that the main criticism about teaching internships could be adhered to by the pre-service teachers themselves. Some of them were clueless in meaning-making the internship program. Thus, by taking notes, self-recording, and self-journaling, the pre-service teachers should experience the transformation of learning engagement. Without having the ability to meaningfully make, pre-service teachers would solely think that the teaching internship was a never-ending problem. Never would they become successful pre-service teachers.

Further, meaning-making ability during a teaching internship is equally important to support successful pre-service teachers. [Kegan \(1982\)](#) defines the meaning-making ability as the way or concept in which individuals make meaning of themselves, as well as others, about their life experiences throughout their life span. A similar perspective comes from [Zittoun and Brinkmann \(2012\)](#), they contend that learning as meaning-making. When the pre-service teachers face dynamic situations in their teaching experiences, they are capable of actively engaging during the process and are able to reform their teaching views or strategies in the future based on the current experiences. These situations definitely involve students' identities and emotions.

To define successful pre-service teachers, current theories tend to frame successful pre-service as those who were able to perform metacognitive strategies that combined social, affective, and cognitive skills ([Oxford, 2011](#); [Griffiths, 2015](#)). However, in its development, apparently learning strategies was no longer the only contributing factor in determining students' effective learning. [Zhang \(2020\)](#) found that in traditional learning, students' learning engagement was more effective to construct students' learning identity. By then, it helped them to be successful learners. In the online learning context, [Sun et al., \(2018\)](#) found that learning engagement contributed effectively as long as it was supported with comprehensive feedback upon the given tasks.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the way pre-service teachers make meaning of themselves has a huge contribution to their teaching ([Ignelzi, 2000](#)). [Kegan \(1982\)](#) asserted that individuals construct their own sense of authenticity, not an event that happens to them. In other words, every person has different outcomes of meaning-making even though in the same

context. [Hapsari and Ena \(2019\)](#) revealed that two pre-service teachers were placed in the same school during their teaching internship program. Surprisingly, they have different outcomes even though teaching in the same classes. The first participant assumed that it was very difficult to handle students' attitudes in the classroom and almost gave up. The second participant believed that this teaching internship program triggered herself to be a creative teacher in the future. She challenged herself to create interesting activities to engage the students. In doing so, joining the teaching internship program is one of the efforts to prepare the readiness of the pre-service teacher before being a successful teacher in the future. In conclusion, the discussion about to what extent teaching internships would benefit students to be successful pre-service teachers remained debatable.

To this extent, it is necessary for teacher education practitioners to listen more to their pre-service teachers' reflections. It is important to explore the process of having meaningful learning engagement experiences during teaching internships that were undoubtedly worthy of further discussion. However, rarely did studies investigate how pre-service teachers engaged with their teaching internship experiences, and how their experiences be brought to their online teaching practices. Thus, this study aims at elaborating on how learning engagement and meaning-making as experienced by two pre-service teachers inspired them to successfully teach online in a variety of student contexts with the tools provided.

LEARNING ENGAGEMENT AS THE DETERMINER OF SUCCESSFUL LEARNING TEACHING INTERNSHIP

Teaching internship is defined not as it is the foremost influential component of pre-service teachers, but moreover as among the foremost basic, vital, and challenging involvement for the pre-service teacher within the field of teacher education ([Cohen et al., 2013](#)). This is a key component of teaching and offers them opportunities to improve their teaching strategies as they are expectedly to be a teacher ([Brown et al., 2021](#)). This program takes part to measure the readiness of the pre-service teachers before going to be a teacher. Participating in a teaching internship, it gives a positive impact on pre-service teachers' proficient identities, motivation, and competencies for teaching in the future ([Pennington and Richards, 2016](#)). The teaching internship is an occasion for pre-service teachers to transfer theory, knowledge, and skills gained in a teacher education program into practice ([Gebhard, 2009](#)). Also, this program contributes to pre-service teachers in understanding themselves and what teachers they want to be in the future ([Furlong, 2013](#)). Therefore, teaching internships can be the most influential component if the pre-service teachers are able to engage and make meaning during and after the program. The process of becoming a successful teacher includes "when one's past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension" ([Britzman, 2003, p. 31](#)) meaning the way pre-service teachers make meaning of their teaching experiences from the past, present, and it has an impact of their perspective regarding the teaching quality in the future. Thus, if all the above aspects meet the expectations, then it can be said that the teaching internship experience was successful.

LEARNING ENGAGEMENT

Learning engagement as constructed by many scholars tends to propose various taxonomies. [Frederick, et. al. \(2004\)](#) elaborated on three types of learning engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. [Frederick, et.al \(2004\)](#) synthesized previous conceptual definitions of the three components. Cognitive engagement belongs to two big issues, learning

investment and strategic learning. Physical learning investment referred to a preference for challenge and a strong desire to work more than required. To this extent, learning investment was close to learning motivation. Through having flexibility in problem-solving and positive coping in the face of failure, students could get through their learning practices. Behavioral engagement referred to following the adherence of classroom rules and norms. Involvement in accomplishing the given tasks and contributing to classroom discussion was also included in behavioral engagement. Further, emotional engagement referred to students' affective reactions. It covers interest, sadness, or anxiety.

In the perspective of teachers, when it deals with the online learning environment, [Kuh \(2003\)](#) elaborated on four components, such as level of academic challenges, student-faculty interaction, and efforts to contribute to class discussion and enrich educational experiences. In terms of academic challenges, a student was engaged when s/he invested fourthly to mental activities such as memorizing, analyzing, synthesis, judgment, and application. Thus, to gain this, [Robinson & Hullinger \(2008\)](#) found that teachers should also provide meaningful learning by using asynchronous networks or multichannel communication and creating learning communities for their students so that they would be more engaged. [Kuh \(2003\)](#) defined communicative engagement through student-faculty interaction. It means that when a student frequently contacts his/her faculty another. Some examples of this interaction were through feedback, discussion of grades or assignments, and collaborative projects. Students should make an effort to contribute to class discussion by willing and showing their effort to work with other students. The last one was the engagement in enriching educational experiences outside the class. It could be by involving the development of the person to learn to work effectively with other people. Teachers who gave a task that applied real-life situations and problem-solving skills could stimulate this. Thus, it could be concluded that learning engagement in an online environment covered more cognitive engagement and communication engagement.

If only students could manage those learning engagements, through meaningful tasks, they could be successful learners. According to [Naiman \(1978\)](#), good language learners are characterized by high motivation, a positive attitude toward speakers of a target language, a proactive approach and willingness to use the target language in communication, and competence of using cognitive strategies. Additionally, [Griffiths \(2015\)](#) emphasized that learning strategies become the main determinant of successful language learners. There are a lot of theories about learning strategies, however, for online learning, limited research was conducted. [Dewar & Whittington \(2000\)](#) adapted Myres' concept of learning strategies MBTI. They endorsed those online learning strategies as more accommodative strategies. Unlike previous studies on learning strategies that worked rigidly for all types of learners, [Dewar & Whittington \(2000\)](#) gave opportunities to types of online learners. For extrovert learners, they would use interactive communication strategies through feedback and discussion sessions. Differently, for introverted students, they tend to store their emotions. Thus, the absence of interaction during feedback sessions did not always mean that they would not be successful. For students who acted as thinkers, they would be more of a looker person. They valued ideas and principles. As for participants, they valued more harmony. Thus, during the discussion, they tend to avoid debate.

RESEARCH METHOD

Following [Barkhuizen & Wette \(2008\)](#) and [Clandinin \(2004\)](#) narrative framing, this study applied the stages of narrative inquiry. The participants of this research were two pre-service teachers, Ananda and Ayu (pseudonyms). This research was conducted in 2021 during their

teaching internship. They were in two different schools, and they had a month internship as pre-service teachers. We collected the data through twice in-depth interviews and through observation on Instagram stories that were related to their teaching practicum experiences. We considered the Instagram stories as relevant narrative data because the photos were voiced as stories. Both participants saved their stories in a highlight so that it can be reopened anytime in the future. Each interview was taken for thirty minutes. The interview questions were related to teaching internship and the pre-service learning engagement during their teaching internship. The questions were developed by referring to [Britzman \(2003\)](#) and [Frederick, et.al \(2004\)](#). The data were analyzed by using [Barkhuizen & Wette \(2008\)](#) and [Clandinin \(2004\)](#) narrative analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

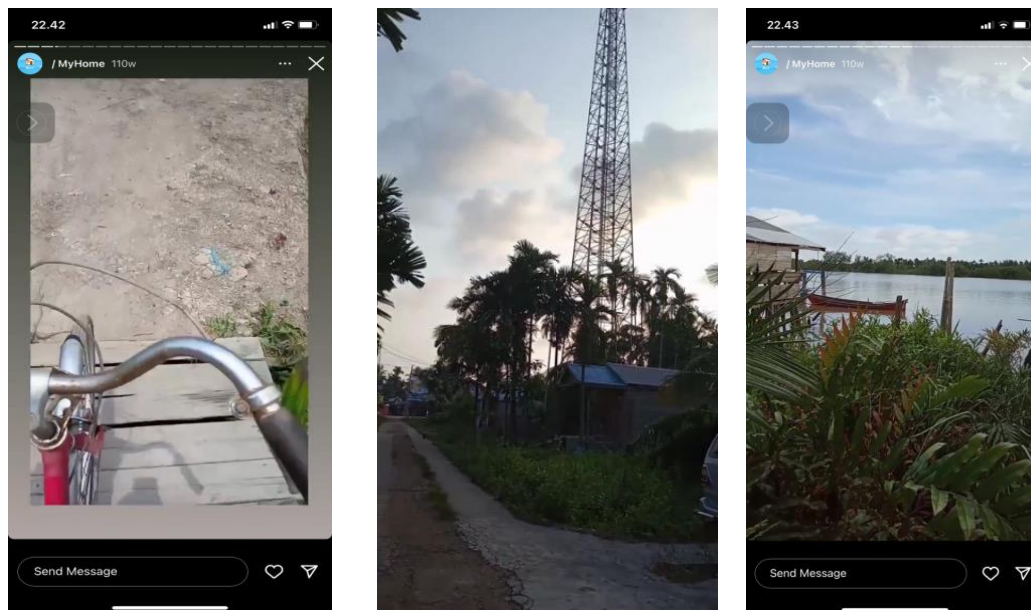
The reported data, drawn from multiple interviews and Instagram stories observations were thematically analyzed. The findings of the study show that both pre-service teachers employed learning engagement, especially cognitive engagement to their distance learning process. This finding was elaborated into two themes; cognitive engagement as meaningful experience, shared responsibility to achieve behavioral engagement.

The story of Ananda: *"I challenged myself because I could"*

Ananda was a 6th semester pre-service teacher with three years private teaching experience. She is originally from Sumatera, and she has been familiar with Islamic boarding house culture since she was in junior high school. This familiarity has shaped her to be a student who is self-determined, and she is not easily given up. Ananda got an excellent record in her learning engagement during the micro-teaching program. She performed well in the subject and during her teaching practicum, she showed that she was a dedicated pre-service teacher.

Ananda lived in a sub-rural area in which she needed to put extra efforts to get internet access. She said that when her lecturer informed in Google Classroom that there would be a virtual meeting via Zoom or any guest lecturing the required face-to-face interaction, Ananda should cycle for 15km in order to find the best internet signal. It was in a small hut near an internet provider tower, and it was close to a marsh.

Ananda said that she could not ride a motorbike, and even if she could, it would be very dangerous because the road was very narrow, and it was a clay ground. Thus, when it was raining, people around would choose to walk instead of riding or cycling. She always documented her track in her Instagram story as one of them was presented below:



1. an old bicycle to show strong attempt to get internet connection
2. an internet tower to show that the place of deployment was sub-rural
3. the background of the place where Ananda used to teach her students via WhatsApp

Figure 1. Cognitive Engagement Representation in the Visual Diary in Insta Story

The caption in the story said that *"The tower was closer", said Ananda happily*. This Insta story was updated whenever she had a virtual face-to-face meeting. In this case, she made a fourth effort to work on the task given by her lecturer. When I asked her why you did all of this, she said that:

"I have been in my sixth semester. I have already been close to my sarjana degree. Moreover, I have my parents who still work hard for me to pay the tuition. We all know that the tuition on my campus was not cheap. Thus, I said to myself that I could do this."

Ananda in this case was driven by both internal and external motivation [Frederick et al, \(2004\)](#) of which she was aware that regardless of the condition, she must be flexible and keep the learning desire to achieve her final goal as an English language education bachelor graduate. Ananda also employed sensing strategies due to her focus on the big picture rather than giving up. Due to this condition, she had a strong emphasis on how teachers affected her learning engagement.

"In the first month of online learning, I had a lowering of motivation. It was because of the lecturers' way of creating the instructions, communicating to us, and setting the deadlines. I said to myself that, as long as I passed the lesson then it was just enough."

However, she then mentioned that there were two lecturers who brought her motivation back. To at least enjoy the tasks, not because it was for grades, but she said that the way the lecturers communicate was such an oasis. If we reflect upon the definition of communication engagement, [Dewar & Whittington \(2000\)](#) and [Kuh \(2003\)](#) kept submitting the evidence of

their research that feedback and collaborative work were the issue that should be clear in online learning. This is in order to engage the students so that they would not be away from the teacher. These two lecturers, in Ananda's sight, were strict but they were committed to what they had shared. This communication style was necessary during distant learning. Further, Ananda had a strong statement:

"I don't like lecturers who set deadlines or announce information all of a sudden. A lecturer gave tasks but after we worked on the task, we did not get any feedback. I valued lecturers who walked their talks".

In this case, Ananda did a recall about her previous experiences in micro-teaching. Although the memory sounds like a lack of impressions, yet Ananda did not use her lecturer's attitude as a reference. Instead, she performed strong commitment through the adherence to the classroom rules that she and her students have made. This is in line to [Frederick et al., \(2004\)](#). Thus, through the whole online learning that she had experienced, Ananda found that learning engagement indeed supported her successful learning. However, it was such a shared responsibility for both students and teachers. This finding was what she remembered to be and not to be done during her teaching internship next month.

The story of Ayu: Entering the 'new normal'

Our second participant, Ayu, was a 6th semester pre-service teacher with excellent academic performance. She is originally from Cirebon city, West Java. In the early pandemic of COVID-19, she still stayed in Yogyakarta even though all learning activities were conducted online. Ayu did not face any difficulties with the internet connection due to her boarding house providing Wi-Fi. However, when she was coming back to her hometown, having private Wi-Fi at home was not that common at that time and she needed to use her own internet data from her phone to access learning materials and attend virtual learnings. In other words, she invested more money to buy internet packages to accommodate her needs. She was now under preparation to attend an English teaching internship program for high school students. Ayu would have fully online teaching with high school students in Yogyakarta. Multiple interviews were conducted by using WhatsApp voice notes because they wanted to have a Zoom meeting due to it taking a lot of effort and their internet access could not support Zoom meeting smoothly. Ayu had excellent academic performance. During her learning experiences at college, she learned lessons regarding how to be a good teacher in the future. She learned about classroom management, created lesson plans, and developed interactive materials for the students. In early 2020, the pandemic COVID-19 changed everything. She was required to join full virtual learning and stayed in her boarding house without meeting some friends, lecturers, and family. At that time, she was preparing for the English Teaching Internship Program (ETIP), Community Service Program, and doing the final thesis simultaneously. She needed some time to really understand what was happening, and what she should do, feeling worried, no support, panicked, uncertain, and isolated. Everything happens rapidly without any preparations. Moreover, being far from home made her feel under pressure and cannot imagine how life keeps continuing. She was very emotional and decided to go home immediately while joining virtual learning.

Moving with Agility: How do I cope with this?

It is undeniable that this kind of pandemic never happened previously, and nobody is experiencing or even predicting it will happen. It became challenging because the situation forced her to rethink everything, especially how to maintain her learning strategies and how she coped with this. She recalled:

"There was a time the lecturer informed us that we were going to have an online conference using zoom meeting and was required to turn on the camera. A short time later, the lecturer changed the rules to turn off the camera if the internet connection was unstable. It was maybe he realized that the internet connection for some students was not that good to joining the online conference with the camera is open."

From the excerpt above, she understands that Internet access was the fundamental tool to conduct virtual learning. She stayed in the boarding house where the Wi-Fi was available so that she could join the lesson with the camera open. When she was coming back to her hometown, having private Wi-Fi at home was not that common at that time and she needed to use her own internet data from her phone to access learning materials and attend virtual learnings. Additionally, Internet access was not an issue because the location of her home is at the center of the city, so the connection was stable. To this extent, Ayu performed cognitive engagement [Frederick et al., \(2004\)](#); [Sun et al., \(2018\)](#) by investing her financial support to get internet access.

The one problem she faced was that virtual learning made her daily schedule unmanageable. It was challenging to differentiate the time for doing assignments and final thesis, taking virtual classes, and having spare time for herself. Learning hours feel longer than usual. Ironically, sometimes she woke up late because staying up at night doing the assignments, missed some virtual classes in the morning, and overslept during virtual meetings.

Despite this immediate virtual online shifting becoming challenging for most people, she attempted to adapt and replan her learning strategies. First, she changed her fixed mindset into a growth mindset. At some point, she had a feeling of cognitive overload, in which she received too much information at once and a lot of demand to do so. This feeling made her really want to give up. However, having a growth mindset made her see this situation as a learning challenge instead of considering it as a difficulty. Second, she challenged herself to make a checklist note for the daily schedule before sleeping. She asserted:

"It was very satisfying to tick the checklist after I am doing my activities in my notes. At some time, I really wanted to postpone doing my assignments. After I saw it was included in the daily schedule today, I did the assignment immediately. So I assumed that it was good for me to motivate myself. I really want to maintain my productivity."

Third, embrace flexibility and understand learning styles. She explained:

"On that day, I woke up late and just realized that I had a virtual meeting. So that I am just sitting in my bedroom then open my computer to join the meeting while I was sleepy but still trying to really focus and following the flow of discussions."

To challenge themselves, [Frederick et al., \(2004\)](#); [Kuh \(2003\)](#); and [Naiman \(1978\)](#) categorized this act as cognitive engagement since Ayu did strategies in order to cope up with the actual problem about self-management. Having virtual learning makes everything seem remote and not real. She could join the classes while going around like when she was on the train but required to join the virtual meeting. For this reason, she found out about her learning style. During the virtual meeting, she focused on really listening and participating in classroom discussions. After finishing the meeting, she will do all things, including the assignments at night and repeatedly doing them the next day.

My Journey as a Guidance to be a Good Teacher

The teaching Internship Program is the obligatory program for the pre-service teacher before finishing the final thesis. She had a chance to conduct an English Teaching Internship Program (ETIP) in the third-best public school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Before the pandemic, she did an offline observation at school for two weeks before doing the real ETIP. She observed the physical environment either at school or classroom, classroom management by the teacher, classroom routines, teacher behavior, instructional strategies are given, students' background, and their English level. This observation helped her a lot to create a plan for her teaching.

Unfortunately, the pandemic of COVID-19 came to Indonesia, and everything has changed. Not only the universities but also all schools were shifting into virtual learning. She wondered:

"The question that came into my mind was that 'how can I teach the students online while the observation I took Was it offline?' This school especially makes English their main concern because a lot of students here won English debate competitions both nationally and internationally. This made me stressed and I really had no ideas."

The good thing was the study program held a preparation meeting for pre-service teachers about teaching online before it was time for ETIP. Even though she knew that this kind of learning was far from ideal, she had no choice and decided to try to replan her teaching strategies using her learning experiences as the reference.

It is essential to think of strategies to engage the students and build the connection while the online learning tool is only Google Classroom, with no virtual and face-to-face meetings. Based on her experience, she positioned herself as a student and realized that there were a lot of distractions at home, easily get bored, and tended to postpone her assignments. As the solution, she created authentic materials in which the topic learning was based on the current issue and was relatable to the students. She recalled:

"After the deadline of the assignments, I made time to check the students' answers and intended to give feedback. It's unbelievable that all students submit their assignments on time. They have a willingness to do the assignment, it can be seen from how they built their arguments into the topic."

Furthermore, one of the students asked her to extend the deadline due to a lot of assignments from the other teachers with the same deadline. She understood the situation and saw the student had a willingness to do the assignment, so she extended the deadline.

Another thing was that the cooperating teacher always changed the instructions near the time for teaching. It made her overwhelmed, however, after remembering her growth mindset, she was willing to understand and revised some notes given by the teacher immediately. Equally, she found difficulties communicating with the teacher and the situations forced her to always be initiative in any case. For instance, she offered help to the cooperating teacher even though no response was given, gave the comments or feedback to the students in the Google Classroom even though not being asked, and many more. This transformation was a critical incident which means that the pre-service teacher was successful to do a reflection through their learning engagement This is in line with [Maharsi \(2019\)](#); [Theelen, et. al \(2020\)](#) and [Tsang \(2003\)](#) who emphasized that reflective practices through journaling and discussion would create successful pre-service teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Learning engagement in the case of pre-service teachers worked not only for their own successful learning, but it helped them to have a depiction of how successful teaching was. Through their cognitive investment, they did understand the whole process of online learning during the pandemic. If only they gave up in the first very beginning, they could not make a synthesis and might end up wailing the condition.

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