Student Engagement in Small Group Discussion for English Language Learning at SMAN 1 Salimpaung

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Abstract

This study aims to find out the level of student engagement in small group discussions during English learning at SMAN 1 Salimpaung. The research design was conducted using descriptive research; 61 twelfth-grade students were selected using the cluster random sampling method. Questionnaires and observation checklists were used to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of 40 closed questions relating to students' engagement in small group discussions. The results showed that student engagement in small group discussions at SMAN 1 Salimpaung can be high, with an overall mean of 2.94. Specifically, the cognitive engagement dimension showed the highest level of engagement, indicating students' active engagement in critical thinking, analyzing information, developing an understanding of the material discussed, monitoring progress and self-evaluation during small group discussions. In addition, the behavioral engagement dimension also showed significant levels of engagement, with students exhibiting behaviors that reflected active participation and interaction. Although the emotional engagement dimension showed high levels of engagement overall, there was considerable variation in students' emotions within the small group discussions.

INTRODUCTION

English is an integral part of Indonesia's development and is an important tool in global communication, research, technology, economic activities, and education. Recognizing its essential role, the Indonesian government mandates English as a compulsory subject from primary school to university (Gunantar, 2016). As outlined

in the curriculum, the educational objectives emphasize the development of communication skills, intercultural competence, self-confidence, and critical and creative reasoning skills among students.

However, the success of English education needs to be improved, especially in student engagement. Student engagement, the active involvement of students in the learning process, is a crucial factor affecting academic performance (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015). Active student engagement is essential in English language learning to develop deeper understanding and proficiency (Fredricks et al., 2004). The current scenario in Indonesian classrooms, as identified in various studies, reveals issues involving both teachers and students. From the teacher's side, these problems include limited learning hours in class, limited authentic material sources, and having too many students in one class (Munawir & Hasbi, 2021).

Furthermore, from the student side, most students are less interested in learning English (Firdaus & Fatimah, 2021), and students think that learning English at school is boring. Learning focuses a lot on the teacher; the teacher explains the material in front of the class, and students are passive during learning. Students mostly sit and listen to the teacher.

One strategy that can be used to increase student engagement is small group discussion. Small group discussion is considered an effective strategy as it allows students to discuss and explore their ideas, encouraging them to take an active role in speaking during learning and outside the classroom (Arends, 2007). Several previous research studies have found that working in small groups achieves better results and more satisfaction in terms of learning experience, provides positive behavior, and also creates a good mood (Rahmah et al., 2020). For students, learning in a group is more enjoyable than learning individually. In accordance with the statement from Koppenborg & Klingsieck (2022), collaborating in groups can boost individual effort and performance while making a contribution to the whole group.

Based on observations in the preliminary study and interviews with several English teachers at SMAN 1 Salimpaung, this school is one of the high schools that uses small group discussion as one of the methods used in English learning in the classroom. Although small group discussion is considered to increase student engagement, the understanding of the extent to which students engage in the process of small group discussion, especially in the dimensions of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement, is still limited. This lack of clarity creates an in-depth need to explore the level of student engagement in small group discussions specifically at SMA Negeri 1 Salimpaung. The level of student engagement in small group discussions can be a key indicator to measure the effectiveness of English language learning. However, to date, no research has specifically addressed the dimension of student engagement in small group discussions in this school. Therefore, this study was conducted to provide a deeper understanding of how students engage in the

teaching-learning process through small group discussions, focusing on the dimensions of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. The information generated from this research is expected to provide a solid basis for developing more effective learning strategies and supporting school decision-making in improving the quality of English learning at SMA Negeri 1 Salimpaung.

RESEARCH METHOD

In conducting this research, the researcher used a descriptive research design. According to Creswell & Poth (2012), the purpose of the descriptive method is to find explanations and descriptions systematically and in detail about the object of research. The researcher used descriptive research because it aims to determine the level of student engagement in small group discussions during English learning at SMA 1 Salimpaung seen from 3 dimensions of engagement, namely behavioral, emotional, and emotional engagement. The sample in this study was 61 students of class XII who were selected using the cluster random sampling method. The instruments in this study were a questionnaire and an observation checklist. The questionnaire consisted of 40 closed questions relating to students' involvement in small group discussions. The observation checklist was used to support the data from the questionnaire.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Research Finding

The results of the analysis and findings obtained from this research involved data collection using questionnaires and observations. The questionnaire was used as the main instrument to find out the level of student engagement in small group discussions, and observation was used as supporting data to deepen the understanding of student engagement, which is seen from 3 dimensions of engagement, namely behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. It was found that student engagement was in the high category of the three dimensions of engagement with a mean of 2.94, and 79% of students were engaged in small group discussions during English language learning. These results are explained as follows:

1. Behavioral engagement

Based on the analysis of each indicator regarding student behavior engagement, it can be concluded that 79% of students have behavioral engagement, which is in the high category, with an average of 2.95. Furthermore, it is clear that attendance is the most dominant indicator, followed by showing enthusiasm as the second dominant indicator, then followed by several other indicators related to student behavioral engagement. Most students showed a very high level of attendance in the small group discussions, and most also showed high enthusiasm. Furthermore, some students initially paid less attention to the discussions but later

showed increased interest and enthusiasm during the learning sessions. Although some students did not prepare the materials in advance, they still actively participated in the discussion and provided answers to the questions asked. Students who initially disobeyed the rules improved their behavior after being reminded and returned to sit in their group discussions. From the explanation above, it is reflected that student behavioral engagement is high in the learning process through small group discussions, thus creating an interactive and dynamic learning atmosphere.

2. Emotional engagement

Based on the analysis of each indicator regarding student emotional engagement, it can be found that student emotional engagement in small group discussions during English language learning is in the high category, with a mean of 2.77. This finding is reinforced by the overall observation results, which show that 65% of students are emotionally engaged in the learning process in small group discussions. Furthermore, it is clear that positive emotion is the most dominant indicator, followed by showing a sense of belonging as the second dominant indicator and then negative emotions. Almost all students showed positive reactions during the discussion, although some experienced negative emotional responses such as boredom and anxiety. Thus, a positive emotional atmosphere and a sense of belonging play an important role in creating significant student engagement during learning through small group discussions.

3. Cognitive engagement

Based on the analysis of each indicator regarding student cognitive engagement, it can be concluded that students' cognitive engagement in small group discussions during English language learning is in the high category, with a mean of 3.10. This conclusion is reinforced by the overall observation results, which show that 85% of students are cognitively engaged in the learning process in small group discussions. Furthermore, it was identified that monitoring progress became the most dominant indicator, followed by motivation to learn as the second dominant indicator and several other indicators related to cognitive engagement. Monitoring progress reflects students' awareness of their development, while motivation to learn shows their dedication and interest in learning. Overall, the findings illustrate that students' cognitive engagement in small group discussions reached a significant level.

Discussion

This study aims to find out the level of student engagement in small group discussions through three main dimensions: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. The findings showed that student engagement in small group discussions was in the high category of the three dimensions of engagement.

In the behavioral engagement dimension, the findings show that students have high engagement in small group discussions. Student presence is the most dominant indicator; the second dominant indicator is showing enthusiasm, followed by several other indicators related to student behavioral engagement. This behavioral engagement reflects the active participation of students, who are not only physically present but also actively involved in interactions during small group discussions. In addition, students pay attention, answer questions, work on and complete the assignments, and obey the rules during the discussion sessions. This is relevant to the statement of Wang et al., (2014) who said that behavioral engagement is a behavior that involves students actively in all learning activities that take place in the classroom.

In the emotional engagement dimension, it was found that students were highly involved in emotional engagement. Positive emotions were the most dominant indicator, followed by showing a sense of belonging as the second dominant indicator and then negative emotions. Almost all students showed positive reactions during the discussion, although some experienced negative emotional responses such as boredom and anxiety. However, the impact of these negative emotional responses could have been more beneficial to the overall continuity of the discussion activities. This is in line with the statement from Appleton et al., (2008), which states that students' emotional engagement includes positive and negative emotional responses to their learning experiences. In other words, students can show positive and negative emotional engagement in small group discussions.

Furthermore, in the cognitive engagement dimension, the findings show that students have the highest engagement in this dimension of engagement in small group discussions. Monitoring progress was the most dominant indicator, followed by motivation to learn, the second dominant indicator, and several other indicators. These results indicate that students actively engage in the thinking process, implying a deep understanding of the material in small group discussions. Not only that, but students also monitor progress, make plans, and assess their actions in small group discussions. This finding aligns with Reeve & Tseng (2011) statement that student engagement in cognitive activities includes deep thinking, planning, monitoring, and evaluation. In the context of small group discussions, these aspects are crucial to understanding the level of student engagement. Therefore, high mean scores in the cognitive engagement dimension reflect deep understanding and indicate students' engagement in critical thinking and self-management activities during the learning proces

In conclusion, the results showed that student engagement in small group discussions was high, across all three dimensions of engagement. Cognitive engagement is the dimension with the highest engagement, followed by behavioral and emotional engagement. The findings provide an in-depth understanding of how

students are actively engaged in learning in small group discussions. The results of this study are in line with the completed research conducted by Aflah et al., (2023), which states that high student engagement in the group learning process not only improves critical thinking skills but also encourages the exchange of ideas, joint problem-solving and builds a deeper understanding of the learning material. In addition, the results of this study are also in line with the findings of Rahmah et al., (2020), who showed that students positively perceive their engagement in small group discussions (SGD) in English language learning. This positive perception aligns with the high level of student engagement observed in this study, suggesting that the effective use of small group discussion creates a positive and supportive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to find out the level of student engagement in small group discussions seen from 3 dimensions of engagement: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Based on the results described in the previous chapter, student engagement in small group discussions at SMAN 1 Salimpaung from the three dimensions can be categorized as high, with a mean of 2.94. Starting from the cognitive engagement dimension, it shows that students have the highest level of cognitive engagement in small group discussions. This means that students are actively involved in the thinking process, analyzing information, developing their understanding of the material discussed, and evaluating their actions in the small group discussion. Furthermore, the behavioral engagement dimension also showed a significant level of engagement. Students exhibit behaviors that reflect active participation. Meanwhile, although the emotional engagement dimension shows a high level of engagement, there is considerable variation in students' emotional states in small group discussion.

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