FACTORS AFFECTING BLIND STUDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING ENGLISH

Galuh Nurul Indah Asri, Firdaus Adrianto
English Plus Id Malang
galuhnurul27@gmail.com
Indonesia

ABSTRACT
Universitas Brawijaya (UB) with the assistance of Pusat Studi dan Layanan Disabilitas (PSLD) have implemented an inclusive education environment, as the need for equal education chance for different abilities Indonesians. There is an assumption that engagement from a combination of language learning or learning language’s cognitive, social, and affective aspects can affect the learning process and academic achievement of a special need student. To reach the research objective, interview sessions and classroom observations session were aimed at measuring the students’ language learning engagement based on three-domains; cognitive, affective and social, in students’ perspective and ongoing activities. This research shows fluctuate results based on the interviews and observations data of two blind students. The main engaged factors found are positive teaching approaches and attitudes, also both students’ learning autonomy.

Keywords: language learning engagement domains, blind students, student engagement

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND
As one of the foreign languages in Indonesia, English is not only utilized for non-disabled English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student but also for EFL students with disabilities. In reality, disabled EFL students, especially blind students, may not fully satisfied with the facilities and teaching methods given. Although it is still inconvenienced in conducting the English language learning for blind EFL learners, some communities have been trying to decrease the learning language difficulties. However, the government and educators should create more invitations for better English education for them.

Universitas Brawijaya (UB) assists with Pusat Studi dan Layanan Disabilitas (PSLD) has declared for having an inclusive education environment, as the need of the equal chance of education for different abilities Indonesians based on Regulation of the Ministry of Republic of Indonesia Number 70 of 2009 [1] Article 4 Paragraph 1 National Education . It implies that inclusive schools and universities in Indonesia are supporting the Indonesian government to provide the best educational experience and enhance the quality of disabled students.

In the present research, there are two blind students of the fifth-semester student of the fifth English Language Education Program and the first-semester student of Indonesian Language and Literature Program who naturally may have some different difficulties in the way of learning English as a foreign language. Aside from the barriers encountered by the blind students of FIB UB have [2] Lintangsari, Alies Poetri. Emaliana, I., (2019) put the assumption that engagement can affect the learning process and academic achievement. In making the learning language engagement measurable, some questions of engagement domain; cognitive, affective, and social are made and asked in order to establish differences in its degree and qualities of each student in learning language, especially English [2], [3]

Although broader research of engagements has investigated blind students from secondary school to higher education, only some that reveal the learning language engagement of blind students with complex roles of educators, students themselves, and surroundings; peers and co-learning assistant, which can develop proportional inclusive learning experiences. The explanation above leads the researcher to discover learning engagements of blind students of FIB UB and probable factors from three main domains: cognitive, affective, and social in inclusive class. Due to different majors at FIB UB, each blind student is predicted to encounter different barriers and learning language factors while joining English classes, using the three engagement domains: cognitive, affective, and social. The findings are expected to contribute the better English language teaching and learning in inclusive class.

2. METHODS
   a. Research Design
      As characterized by an interpretative paradigm, this research utilizes qualitative research design which highlights subjective experiences; where every person builds up an individual, personal view of the world based on his or her specific interactions with the external world (including the people who are part of this world). This research will use audio recordings interviews of the two blind students of FIB UB in uncovering the learning language possible factors while learning English. Since case studies are more than just a methodological choice, the researcher uses Snapshot study as a qualitative research type, in which examine one case in one particular period, the analysis is supported by the temporal juxtaposition of some events (George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2004; Thomas 2011, p. 517 cited in [4]Starman, 2013, p.30-33). By using the Snapshot studies as one of the case studies, the data collected will be more up to date.

   b. Setting and Participants
      This research involved two blind students of the Faculty of Cultural who are taking English Class as the compulsory subjects. Here is the characteristics of participants:

      Table 1. Students’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of Blindness</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>English Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Adventurous Total Blind</td>
<td>5th Semester of The English Language Education Program</td>
<td>Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Introduction Research method (IRM) class, Curriculum of English Instruction (CEI) class, and Language Teaching Methodology (LTM) class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Congenital Total Blind</td>
<td>1st Semester of The Indonesian Language and Literature Program</td>
<td>General English class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   c. Data Collection and Data Analysis
      In this research, the researcher have been collecting the data by conducting deep semi-structured interview sessions, a General English class observation, and a General English examination observation under the theory of language engagement that consist of 3 aspects: (1) Cognitive Engagement, (2) Affective Engagement, (3) Social Engagement; and (4) Facilitators or Impediments by [3]. The researcher will analyze the data from each data source; transcript interview and observation result to find key findings. Data triangulation method is used to know the final result of comparing and contrasting the key findings across the data.

3. RESULTS
   The results of this research were taken based on the semi-structured interview, General English class observation, and General English final examination result of Student A and Student B. In exploring their ongoing experiences and situation while learning English, the researcher employs the extraction of the three learning language engagement dimensions; cognitive, affective, and social in each instruments’ questions. The elaboration of further research’s findings is elaborated in the table below.
Table 5. Table of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Cognitive Domain</th>
<th>Affective Domain</th>
<th>Social Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>S. A Interview</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Well Engaged</td>
<td>Well Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>S. B Interview</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>S. B Classroom Observation</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Not Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>S. B Examination Observation</td>
<td>Well Engaged</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*S. A: Student A  
S. B: Student B  
Well-Engaged: all sub-dimensions are the facilitators  
Good: > facilitators, < impediments  
Fair: facilitators = impediments  
Low: < facilitators, > impediments  
Not Engaged: all sub-dimensions are the impediments

1. Cognitive Engagement

Learning processes in the student’s cognitive domain include skills of processing information, constructing understanding, applying knowledge, solving problems, and conducting self-research. This research measures the blind students’ cognitive engagement through its sub-dimensions in interview session such as (1) student alertness on language learning; (2) Student attention on the language; (3) Student critical/analytical thinking on language learning; (4) Students autonomous/directed learning.

1.1 Semi-Structured Interview Result

Student A had low alertness and focus because of the student A’s moody characteristic and disinterest toward pedagogy activities and courses. At the same time, average attainment was obtained by student B supported with his stable emotion. In having different learning habits, Student A preferred only to study and reflect several courses, while Student B was more into only recalling course’ memories before going to bed. Moreover, Student A claimed that sometimes English is hard to be interpreted compared to Indonesian, while Student B has chosen never to compare English to any other language.

1.2 English Class Observation Result

This research measures the blind student’s cognitive engagement through its sub-dimension in classroom observation session; (1) Student’s alertness on the language learning, (2) Student’s attention on the language learning, (3) Student’s visibility level, (4) Teaching approach, (5) Non-Physical Classroom Management.

Student B had low alertness and advertency level in learning English because the afternoon course, unwell health condition, and mood. The class was started on Monday, November 18, 2019, from 14.30 to 16.10. Thus made he tended to have minimal communication or activity. Based on the ongoing teaching and learning activities at that time, the lecturer utilized Student-Centered and Grammar Translation approaches to discuss Present and Past Tenses tasks. Precisely, the lecturer had intense verbal interaction and formed the class into three groups, while student B alone was paired with his closest friend as subststitution of the absence of his group.

1.3 English Final Examination Result

This research measures the blind student’s cognitive engagement through its sub-dimension in examination observation session; (1) Student’s alertness on the language learning, (2) Student’s attention on the language learning, (3) Student’s visibility level, (4) Teaching approach, (5) Non-Physical Classroom Management.

Student B’s alertness was good, and his advertency level was fair due to morning examination scheduled on Tuesday, December 10, 2019, at 07.30, which brings positive mood, energy, and health issues. During the examination, Student B’s co-learning assistant was giving excellent and professional accompaniment to him, by not giving any intent favour but repeatedly and carefully read the passages and questions. They also already had a comfortable and reachable seat.
2. Affective Engagement

Learning processes in the student’s affective domain is aimed to seek the reality of blind students’ learning participation and expression, by involving feelings, emotions, and attitudes, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes. This research measures the blind students’ affective engagement through its sub-dimension in interview session such as (1) student willingness, (2) student purposeful engagement and (3) learning autonomy, which somehow can be affected by the role of educator at class.

2.1 Semi-Structured Interview Result

Student A and B preferred to be sitting in the front rows to gain best learning English experiences. Their self-confession showed Their purposeful engagement that they learn English to upgrade their English proficiency with different types of activities. Student A focused himself more to achieve better general English understanding by doing literature activities. At the same time, Student B was more interested to learn English by diligently working on his IT hobby.

2.2 English Class Observation Result

This research measures the blind student’s affective engagement through its sub-dimension in classroom observation session: (1) Student willingness’, (2) Clarity of procedure, (3) Intrinsic motivation, (4) Learning autonomy and assistive technology (AT).

Student B’s willingness to learn and classroom participation are low at that time. It happened as the caused of student B’s mediocrity self-mastery and fluency of English. This was confirmed by the fact that the student failed to do the previous homework at that time. This might also happen because the clarity of purpose and procedures of the homework was somehow decreasing while lecturer and other students were unconsciously speeding up the tempo of reading texts and answering the homework. In helping him reading the module, he preferred to bring a mobile phone. In fact, it did not help maximally seeing that the mobile phone was lagging for many times.

2.3 English Examination Result

This research measures the blind student’s affective engagement through its sub-dimension in examination observation session: (1) Student willingness, (2) Clarity of procedure, (3) Intrinsic motivation, (4) Learning autonomy and assistive technology (AT).

The student’s personality and self-perception, and task quality was low. Although co-learning assistant alone was professionally accompanying, giving unambiguous instruction and reading each question carefully, his self-doubt with negative self-perception about English mastery and skill could defeat it. Generally, the quality of the examination seemed to be adequately failed to arise the intrinsic motivation of student B in learning English. Thus because the examination was ever tested a week before the exam as a quiz, so that students or the blind student, might use their quiz memory rather than examine their truly English proficiency. He did the easier questions and missed the doubtful questions. He did not use any AT which neither facilitate nor impede him.

3. Social Engagement

Learning English as an object and vehicle processes in the student’s social domain focus on the students’ interpersonal social skills such as communication, teamwork, and management toward the surrounding situations. The social engagement consists of 2 sub-dimension in interview sessions such as (1) Maintaining interaction and (2) Ready to interact

3.1 Semi-Structured Interview Result

Student A interaction and support were positive. He frequently discussed and consulted his difficulty in courses with lecturers in the classroom. Meanwhile, the interaction with peers oftentimes occurred outside the class. On the other hand, Student B had weak interaction with the lecturer. He was more comfortable in discussing English grammar with peers.

3.2 English Observation Result

This research measures the blind student’s social engagement through its sub-dimension in classroom observation session: (1) Maintaining interaction and ready to interact, (2) Power differential, (3) Co-learning assistant of PSLD.

Student B had weak interaction either with the lecturer or peers. The student did not participate well enough by not attending the class on time and doing the grouped homework. Culture, gender, and religious boundaries did not prove either bringing a positive or negative effect toward his power differential.

3.3 English Examination Result

This research measures the blind student’s social engagement through its sub-dimension in examination observation session; (1) Maintaining interaction and ready to interact, (2) Power differential, (3) Co-learning assistant of PSLD.

Student B had good participation during the exam by attending the examination schedule on time and requesting to repeat the questions to the co-learning assistant. Culture, gender, and religious boundaries did not prove either bringing a positive or negative effect toward his power differential. However, he tended to give up finishing the doubtful question, although co-learning assistant still supported him.
4. Facilitators and Impediments

Based on the description of facilitators and impediments in learning a language, the researcher can say that some factors can be double-edged swords for blind students’ engagement in learning English. Each person may have different results.

4.1 Cognitive Domain

Some factors in Cognitive domain affected equally to both of blinds students’ engagements. Course schedule can be either a facilitator or impediment for them, which can have a huge effect toward their energy level. Immediate surroundings tended to negatively affect both students. A different case may be faced by student A if his mood is low. Thus, made emotional state of student A was labile and be a dangerous impediment to his engagement in learning, but it became facilitator for student B because his emotional state during the class was kept well. The listening and reading courses mostly became impediment for student A as he claimed to get low technical ability in hearing and reading. Student A also added that he was having low interest in pedagogical courses. While it became facilitator for student B because his lecturer made him easier and comfortable in collecting several tasks by letting him typing or sending voice recordings. Both students claimed that teaching approach of lecturers are positively affecting their cognitive engagement since most lecturers were applying student-centered approach in teaching inclusive classrooms.

4.2 Affective Domain

Student A informed that his English mastery was standard as he knew general information about related courses. Meanwhile student B claimed that his English proficiency in writing and speaking was poor. Thus, were sustained by student B’s passive action and less engaged at class and doing the examination. Teaching approach of lecturers becomes their facilitator since most lecturers were applying student-centered approach and providing accessible handout in teaching inclusive classrooms. Student B had any problem in receiving related course information from the lecturer, yet student A testified that some lecturers were very clear, confusing, or sometimes forgetful. Both students are using screen reader phone-based application as their everyday use. As a matter of fact, the phone sometimes limits the students to have optimal access to the module.

4.3 Social Domain

Student A frequently having interactions with lecturers and peers, while Student B tended to have low interaction with lecturer. They also claimed PSLD had already provided excellent academic proponent especially for visually impaired Brawijaya students, yet they claimed that both of them rarely used it.

4. DISCUSSION

Student A frequently having interactions with lecturers and peers, while Student B tended to have low interaction with lecturer. They also claimed PSLD had already provided excellent academic proponent especially for visually impaired Brawijaya students. Based on Denzin in the 1970’s, there are four types of triangulation: (1) Data Triangulation, (2) Methods triangulation, (3) Investigator triangulation, (4) Theory triangulation [5]. This research employs data triangulation which has semi-structured interview results, a classroom observation result, and an examination observation result as the data sources of student A and student B. This is meant and to sharpen superior engagement factors of students in learning English and strengthen the conclusion about the findings, as shown in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 The Trustworthiness of The Research**
By having the further and detail explanation above, the researcher discovers that the first previous research conducted by [2] Lintangsari, Alies Poetri. Emaliana, I., (2019), the second previous research conducted [6], and the present research, have several similarities. The main engaged factors found are the teaching approach and attitudes that lecturer have while conducting the learning English process, the better engagement that students will have. Based on the interview and observation data of the 2nd research, the two blind students still have their own unique and unexpected way of learning English unconsciously. It was also found in the present research that Student A would not stop learning by reading poems, short stories, songs and producing literature products, and student B unconsciously get and learn new vocabulary from his IT hobby. Their unique learning autonomy can balance the low classroom’s learning input.

Course schedules can be significantly a supporter or an obstacle toward students’ energy and enthusiasm level in learning English. Uncertain emotional state that student A has anywise more affects the learning process for whole day. Both blind students agreed that maintain good and proportional interaction with peers can boost their learning English engagement meanwhile outside or inside classroom noises did not give any impact toward it.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to report the FIB UB inclusive learning and teaching practices from the field facts and also two blind students’ perspective by student learning language engagement analysis of three dimensions; cognitive, affective, and social. The fluctuate results were found based on the two times interviews and two times observations data. The result and the findings of this research can be an elaborative insight for UB in improving service for blind students’ learning language experience, feedback for PSLD to improve their academic support that meets blind students’ needs, disability awareness and the provision of inclusive education information to the lecturers or surroundings, and a reference for other researchers who conduct researches with the same topic.

Based on the conducted research, teaching approach, teacher attitudes, and student learning autonomy are the fundamental factors that can create a positive impact on student engagement in learning language, especially English. The use of an insightful inductive teaching approach supported by a proper and comforting teaching attitude, will contribute to the better inclusive teaching and learning experience without excluding one student from another. Intensive and comprehensive inclusive teaching trainings from UB, will also be a helpful proponent for educators to understand the inclusive teaching principles, and create innovative and up-to-date ways of improving the students’ learning English engagement. The comfortable and enjoyable learning techniques from doing literature activities or IT hobby of students can also boost the English learning engagement, yet they claimed that both of them rarely used it.

REFERENCES


