Analysis of Student Engagement: ECE Educators Teaching Skills Strengthening Courses in Distance Education

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ABSTRACT: Early childhood teacher education programs must figure out how to effectively educate the workforce as classrooms become more diverse due to children varied cultural backgrounds and skills. This study aims to analyse student involvement in the Strengthening of Early Childhood Educators Teaching Skills course in distance education. The research method used is descriptive qualitative. The research participants were 405 students of the Department of Early Childhood Education, consisting of 90% women aged between 20-55 years and an average age of 31 years. The research findings show that at the level of academic challenge, most students agree that the ECE Educators Teaching Skills Strengthening (TSS) course brings new ideas and certain experiences and is very helpful in applying theory or concepts to practical problems. Indicators of active/collaborative learning indicate that hands-on experiences help students work more effectively with others. Meanwhile, the student-faculty interaction component shows that they have carried out two-way discussions regarding material assessment and practice. Additionally, online tutorials have provided quick feedback on assignments and guidance in compiling practice reports. The student learning experience is greatly helped by the TSS course. Students acquire new knowledge and skills to support their profession as teachers.

Keywords: early childhood educators, engagement, teaching skill, distance education

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1 INTRODUCTION

The improvement of teacher instructional quality is attributed to the development of 21st-century skills competencies. However, a major obstacle to achieving the needed improvements is the absence of relevant strategies for supporting teacher professional development and a context-specific understanding of teaching practices (S. Kim et al., 2019). There is ample evidence to support the idea that ECE instructors' professional development improves the outcomes for their students (P. Jensen & Rasmussen, 2019). While Ackerman (2004) emphasizes the significance of continuing professional development for teachers that is tailored to their circumstances and experiences and is overseen by experts, Duhn et al., (2016) stress the value of having the assistance of highly qualified facilitators. Additionally, recent research suggests that teachers value the chance to advance their careers. Many people believe that the professional growth initiatives and activities of teachers' own work communities are encouraging and empowering (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013).

One of the practice courses in Open University is Teaching Skills Strengthening (TSS). It aims to provide students with the opportunity to apply the skills and attitudes obtained from various courses to the direct practice of managing learning activities in the classroom. The tutor's interaction with students is an important indicator of TSS learning activity. Interaction between teachers and students can increase student engagement (J. Fredricks et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2018; Quin, 2017). Engagement is defined as multifaceted including behavioral, cognitive, and emotional activity in the interaction of teachers and classmates (Muir et al., 2019). Behavioral engagement refers to participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities. Cognitive engagement is a combination of attention and willpower in exerting efforts to understand the subject matter and master the skills (J. A. Fredricks et al., 2004).

Student engagement is based on several aspects, such as student-student interactions, student-tutor interactions, and student-material content interaction (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). Students' interaction with other students is an important aspect of the online learning environment. This type of interaction gives students the opportunity to learn from each other through the exchange of learning resources, discussions, and sharing experiences and ideas (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012). Students' interaction with tutors is also an essential part of distance learning environments (Kang & Im, 2013). The role of online tutorials in the online learning environment is online tutorial can foster a sense of togetherness in various ways; online tutorial supports student participation and learning through online behavioral models by building the contribution of students who are involved in online discussions, tutor increasing the activeness of students by various means of communication and providing timely feedback (Martin et al., 2018). Interaction between students and the material content is an important component because students interact directly with teaching materials and lecture activity plans (Tuovinen, 2000).

The development of an online-based learning environment in the world of education goes hand in hand with the level of students' fraudulence during online learning (Hollis,

2018). Hollis (2018) asserts that students are also finding new ways to compromise academic integrity in online classes by buying or hiring others (jockeys) to help them complete college assignments. In fact, some students today can hire someone else (ghost-student) to take the entire class they take. Hollis (2018) also revealed that students who commit such fraud not only hire colleagues but also even hire tutors to do assignments and take over classes. Based on these gaps, the study aims to analyze student engagement in TSS practice courses in distance education.

2 METHOD

The research method uses a qualitative descriptive approach, data that provides a subjective description of "who", "what", and "where" events or experiences are generated through the qualitative descriptive research (Kim et al., 2017). The participants of the study were 405 students of the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Department of ECE, consisting of 90% women and aged between 20-55 years old with an average age of around 31 years old. Their average income is around 980,622.10 (IDR). Respondents are currently students of semesters 3-22 with an average semester around semester 7. Figure 1 shows that most of the respondents came from Central Java Province (18.3%), East Java (14.8%), West Java (10.4%), East Kalimantan (7.7%), and North Sumatra (5.7%).
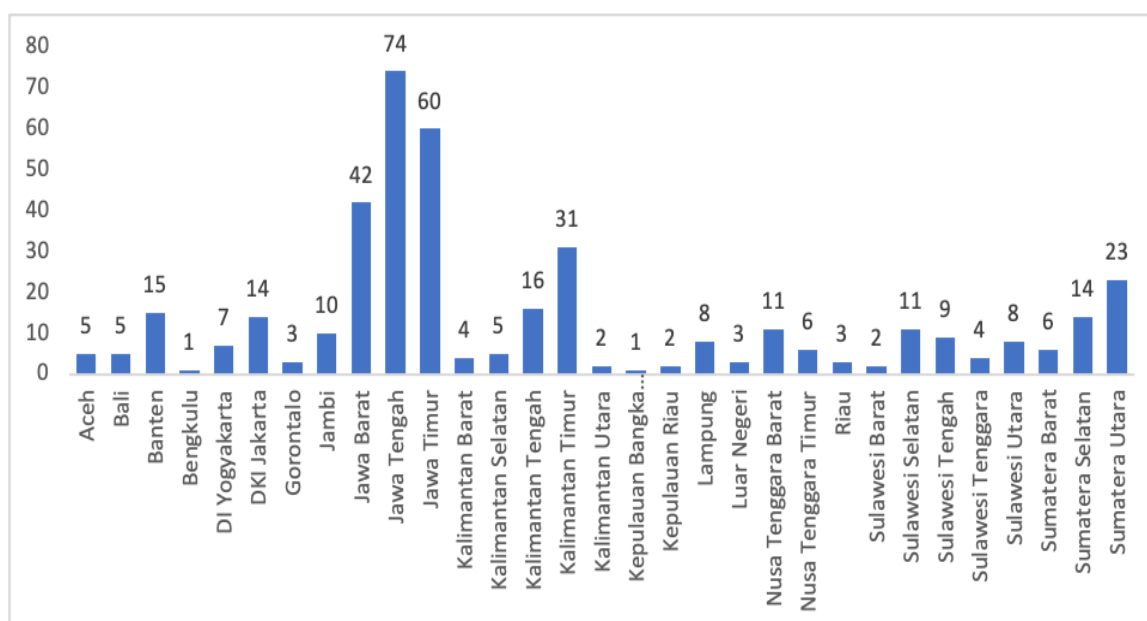

Figure 1. Distribution of Provincial Origin of TSS Course Respondents.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Result*

The results of the analysis of the student engagement components in the TSS course are described as the level of academic challenge, active/collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and enriching educational experience.

3.1.1 *Level of Academic Challenge*

The level of academic challenge is a way of measuring to what extent the colleges emphasize students' efforts and students' high expectations including the statements in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage of Student Academic Challenge Level on the TSS Course

No	Level of Academic Challenge	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I often work harder to meet the tutor's standards or expectations.	35,6	53,8	6,2	2,0	2,5
2	The practice of composing learning plans challenges me to give my best effort.	35,8	57,5	4,7	1,2	0,7
3	Learning simulation exercises provide new experiences in teaching.	40,7	54,6	3,7	0,2	0,7
4	There are too many chapters in the guidebook that is assigned to be read	4,2	34,1	31,4	28,1	2,2
5	I can finish all lesson plans assignment on time.	25,7	58,8	13,3	1,7	0,5
6	It took me longer than I expected to work on one lesson plan.	10,9	43,7	22,7	17,8	4,9
7	The learning practice experience helped me to express ideas more clearly.	32,8	59,3	6,9	0,5	0,5
8	The experience of composing practice reports helped me to write more clearly.	31,4	62,0	5,9	0,5	0,2
9	The learning practice experience helped me to think more critically and analytically.	34,6	59,0	5,2	0,7	0,5
10	I was able to analyze (quantitative) problems better after following learning practices.	15,6	63,0	19,8	1,2	0,5
11	TUTON/TUWEB/TTM guidance in my class, encouraging the emergence of ideas or methods in the learning process.	35,3	55,8	7,2	0,2	1,5
12	I have a lot of difficulty in completing practical tasks, due to the availability of facilities.	13,1	36,5	25,7	20,5	4,2
13	Practice assignment help me to come up with certain ideas, experiences, or theories, especially when I examine a particular case or situation in depth.	30,4	62,5	5,4	1,0	0,7
14	Practical tasks help me associate and organize ideas, information, or experiences into interpretation.	30,4	61,2	6,9	0,7	0,7
15	I feel pressured by the practical tasks given*	5,2	14,3	26,2	43,7	10,6
16	Practical tasks help me apply theories or concepts to practical problems, including in new situations.	33,1	60,2	5,2	1,0	0,5

Description: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U - Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 1. shows that the largest percentage in almost all questions were in the agreed column, except in the statement item "I feel pressured by the practice tasks" given more than three-quarters of respondents answered slightly agree, disagreed, and strongly disagreed. This means that this TSS course can still be considered fun for students and does not make them feel depressed with the tasks given, except for about 19.5% of students.

3.1.2 *Active/Collaborative Learning*

Active/collaborative learning, measuring student engagement with learning both alone and with other students includes the following Table 2 statements.

Table 2. Percentage of Student Active/Collaborative Learning on the TSS Course

No.	Active/Collaborative Learning	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I often work in groups with other students in the tutorials I follow.	21,5	52,3	16,3	8,6	1,2
2	I often study together and share my knowledge with other students.	25,2	58,0	13,1	2,5	1,2
3	I often consult/discuss with tutors/supervisors.	27,9	58,3	10,6	2,2	1,0
4	I often visit digital learning resources (Guru Guru Pintar Online (GPO), UT-TV, virtual reading rooms, web supplements, etc.) for additional reading materials related to practice tasks.	21,2	52,3	19,3	6,4	0,7
5	Practice experience helps me work more effectively with others.	33,1	61,7	4,0	0,7	0,5

Description: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U - Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 shows that the largest percentage of those who agree and strongly agree is in the statement "Practice experience helps me work more effectively with others". This means that those who are involved in TSS courses get more effective work experience than before.

3.1.3 *Student-Faculty Interaction*

Student and lecturer interaction, measuring the extent to which students interact with faculty inside and outside the classroom, includes the revelations in table 3.

Table 3. Percentage of Student-Faculty Interaction on the TSS Course

No.	Student-Faculty Interaction	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I often discuss ideas from reading or learning materials with my tutor.	23,0	60,0	13,1	2,7	1,2
2	I often work with tutors/supervisors regarding the practice assessment component.	25,2	60,0	10,4	3,0	1,5
3	I always receive quick feedback from tutors/supervisors about my practice exercises/assignments.	30,6	56,3	8,9	3,0	1,2
4	I often get guidance in carrying out practices from tutors/supervisors.	29,6	59,0	7,4	2,2	1,7
5	I often get guidance in composing the practice reports.	31,4	57,3	7,7	2,2	1,5

Description: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U - Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 shows that most respondents in the TSS course agree and strongly agree that they often get guidance in carrying out practices from tutors/supervisors (88.6%) and often get guidance in composing the practice reports (88.6%). In addition, respondents stated that they always receive quick feedback from tutors/supervisors about their practice exercises/assignments (86.9%), frequently consult with tutors/supervisors regarding the practice assessment component (85.2%) and often discuss ideas from reading or learning materials with the tutor (83.0%). The indicator shows that the interaction of students and lecturers has been running in two-way discussions related to materials and practice

assessments, tutor has provided quick feedback on lecture assignments, and tutor provides guidance in the preparation of practice reports.

3.1.4 *Enriching Educational Experience*

Enriching the educational experience, measuring some educational activities, which include questions about interaction with others and participation with the learning community, learning services, internships, research with lecturers, and so on are detailed in table 4.

Table 4. Percentage of Enriching Educational Experience on the TSS Course

No	Enriching Educational Experience	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I often communicate regularly with other students about things unrelated to tutorials (possibly related to work, family, race, religion, political beliefs, etc.)	18,0	50,9	18,3	9,4	3,5
2	I often use online learning tools (LMS, zoom, computer, etc.)	39,5	46,4	10,9	2,5	0,7
3	Practice experience has helped me acquire work-related knowledge or skills.	36,5	59,0	3,2	0,7	0,5
4	I often participate in online class discussions (including via email, WA groups).	36,3	52,6	9,4	1,0	0,7
5	I often use computer technology to analyze data (involving statistics, spreadsheets, etc.).	25,4	54,8	16,8	2,7	0,2
6	I always make practice videos and upload them to online platforms (YouTube, TikTok).	17,8	42,7	26,9	10,4	2,2
7	Practice experience helped me learn effectively and independently.	38,0	56,8	4,2	0,5	0,5
8	I often take training on the use of practice-related apps (LMS page, practice page).	23,2	53,1	18,0	4,2	1,5

Description: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U - Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 4 shows that 95.6% of respondents to the TSS course agreed and strongly agreed that practice experience had helped them gain work-related knowledge or skills and 94.8% stated that practice experience helped them learn effectively and independently. In addition, respondents also admitted that they often participated in online class discussions (including via email, and WhatsApp groups) as much as 88.9%, often used online learning tools (LMS, zoom, computer, etc.) as much as 85.9%, and often used computer technology to analyze data (involving statistics, spreadsheets, etc.) as much as 80.2%.

Other data showed that they also frequently participated in training on the use of practice-related applications (LMS pages, practice pages) as much as 76.3%, often communicated regularly with other students about things that are not related to tutorials (possibly related to work, family, race, religion, political beliefs, etc.) as much as 68.9%, as well as always making practice videos and uploaded to online platforms (YouTube, TikTok) As much as 60.5%.

3.2 *Discussion*

The findings of the research show that the TSS course can still be considered fun for students and does not make them feel pressured by the assignments given, except for

around 19.5% of students. This is due to the increasing ease of access for students to upload assignments or communicate with tutors to solve problems in the field of children's learning. This high percentage of student responses also shows that student involvement is effective in improving their teaching abilities, which is a lecture strategy that attracts student interest. In line with Schachter's (2015) opinion, a promising strategy for improving the quality of prospective ECE teachers to improve early childhood learning outcomes is proper professional development. Other similar studies have.

The next finding is the category when practical experience helps students work more effectively with others (senior teachers). This means that those who take TSS courses get more effective work experience than before because this TSS course is a course that asks students to do microteaching exercises or do internships at ECE institutions and practice with senior teachers. Students who take advantage of this field practice experience, by being actively involved in every practical assignment, will get many advantages in strengthening their teaching abilities. Similar research on ECE teacher candidate professional development interventions in two investigations in Denmark, quite similarly, preschool staff was trained as part of the intervention to critically evaluate existing procedures and adapt them as necessary (Jensen et al., 2013). New knowledge can change daily routines and have a positive impact on the scores of the children included. Jensen et al., (2017) focused more on evidence-based knowledge in preschool staff training programs. Both studies show that the professional development of preschool teachers has a beneficial impact on children's behavior.

Subsequent findings related to indicators showing that student and lecturer interaction has carried out two-way discussions regarding material and practical assessment, tutors have provided quick feedback on coursework, and tutors have provided guidance in preparing practical reports. This also shows that the involvement of students in interacting with lecturers or tutors and being actively involved in working on bills of coursework determines the success of strengthening their teaching abilities. An instructional design strategy that can alter education is necessary for distance learning. Advanced flexibility, learner autonomy, and substantial use of digital technologies to improve learning outcomes are characteristics of this. The physical distance between teaching staff, students, and educational institutions is the key characteristic of this methodology. Different technology techniques are utilized to close this gap and enhance engagement and communication. In order to emphasize ways for improving communication and interaction in online learning settings, this article reviews the relevant research on the topic (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019).

The last important finding in this study is the category that shows that TSS has enriched the educational experience, measuring several educational activities, interactions with others, and participation with learning communities, learning services, internships, and research with lecturers. Distance education (DE) is defined as instruction that takes place away from the location of learning and calls for the use of modern technology (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). The Open University approach, which involved mailing course materials

to students, was the first to introduce distance education. The communication problems these early models had have been substantially resolved by online learning thanks to technological advancements. Augmented and virtual reality will undoubtedly further reshape this area as we develop new learning tools and techniques.

4 CONCLUSION

Student engagement is reviewed from the four components: 1) level of academic challenge, 2) active/collaborative learning, 3) student-faculty interaction, and 4) enriching educational experience. The level of academic challenge shows that most students agree that TSS course activities help bring new ideas, and certain experiences, and are helpful to apply theories or concepts to practical problems. Active/collaborative learning indicators show practice experience helps students work more effectively with others. This means that students taking TSS courses get a more effective work experience than before and make students more confident when they are in contact with the surrounding environment. The student interaction component with lecturers shows that student and lecturer interaction has been running in two-way discussions related to materials and practice assessments, the tutor has provided quick feedback on lecture assignments, and the tutor guides the preparation of practice reports. Indicators show that enriching the student learning experience is greatly helped by the TSS course. Students acquire new knowledge and skills in support of their profession as teachers.

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