

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, where learners often have limited exposure to English beyond the classroom, fostering student engagement becomes a key challenge for teachers (Bond et al., 2020; König et al., 2020; Reeve, 2012). Among the various dimensions of engagement, behavioral engagement, which includes students' active participation, adherence to classroom norms, and consistent effort in academic tasks is especially important for promoting effective language learning (Finn, 1993; Skinner et al., 2009; Svalberg, 2009). Behavioral engagement is further conceptualized following Nguyen et al. (2016), who distinguish three levels of engagement: active engagement, passive engagement, and disengagement. This framework provides a nuanced lens for understanding student participation beyond mere physical presence, highlighting that students may appear compliant but remain uninvested in learning. Such distinctions are important, as previous studies consistently show that higher levels of meaningful engagement are associated with better academic performance and more effective language learning (Astin, 1984; Hospel & Galand, 2016). Crucially, teacher support has been identified as a primary factor in shaping such engagement, especially in EFL contexts where the teacher often serves as the main linguistic and motivational resource (Osterman, 1998; Furrer et al., 2006).

Despite its importance, it can be challenging for pre-service teachers to keep students interested and behave well. As they step into real classrooms for the first time,

pre-service teachers have to deal with the complexities of student behavior and engagement barriers (Flores & Day, 2020). While pre-service teacher education equips them with foundational knowledge of pedagogy, much of this learning is still delivered through lectures, limiting opportunities for practical application (Jensen & Rørbæk, 2022). As a result, a disconnect often arises between what is taught in coursework and what is encountered in the real classroom (Golubtchik, 2024). Although pre-service teachers may observe student engagement dynamics during their practicum, they frequently struggle to translate these insights into effective teaching strategies (Maaranen & Stenberg, 2017). As Lehtinen, Kostiainen, and Naykki (2025) suggest, learning to teach is not only about acquiring educational theory but also about participating in the situated processes of teaching itself. Therefore, behavioral engagement should not be seen solely as a student-related issue, but also as a pedagogical challenge that shapes how pre-service teachers grow into the profession.

Understanding what drives students' behavioral engagement is therefore essential, not only for experienced educators but especially for pre-service teachers seeking to develop practical classroom strategies. Many studies have looked at how school climate, teacher support, and classroom structure affect student engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). In many Western and East Asian contexts, positive classroom environments and strong teacher-student relationships have been shown to foster students' behavioral participation (Bear et al., 2018; Li, Chen, & Liu, 2025). In Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, more recent research highlights the value of interactive, student-centered teaching methods in

improving students' behavioral engagement in structured classroom settings (Krongyut & Srijongjai, 2024; Tiana & Rahayuningsih, 2022).

In Indonesia specifically, engagement in EFL classrooms remains a concern, particularly in public schools where resources and exposure to English are limited. While some studies have focused on students participation during peer discussions and its effect on English achievement in the EFL classroom (Qudsyi et al., 2020), few have examined how pre-service teachers, who are still in the process of forming their professional identity, perceive and respond to engagement challenges during their teaching practicum. This gap is significant since Indonesian teacher education still requires a strong emphasis on professional competency for pre-service teacher (Law No. 14/2005), but it also still offers little understanding of pre-service teachers' real experiences in managing classroom settings (Zein et al., 2020).

To address the gap, this study uses a self-study methodology and reflective practice as a foundational. Through self-study, pre-service teachers can critically analyze their teaching practices and investigate how their teaching practices affect students' behavioral engagement (Samaras et al., 2019; Gal, 2023). In Indonesia, not many studies provide first-hand accounts from pre-service teachers actively managing these classroom dynamics, even though many emphasize the value of practicum and reflection (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Allen & Wright, 2013).

This study draws upon a self-study I conducted during my seventh semester of undergraduate study, which involved a full-semester teaching practicum at a public junior high school in Indonesia. The genesis of this inquiry emerged organically from

my reflections and initial observations of student passivity in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. By systematically documenting and critically reflecting on this lived teaching experience, particularly my efforts to promote behavioral engagement, I seek to provide an authentic, insider perspective that contributes to the underrepresented voices in the literature on pre-service teacher development.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This self-study explores my experiences as a pre-service teacher in promoting students' behavioral engagement during teaching practice. By systematically reflecting on my classroom practices, challenges, and strategies, I aim to gain insights into how behavioral engagement can be effectively managed and fostered in an EFL context.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What challenges related to students' disengagement and passive behavioral engagement did I encounter while promoting behavioral engagement in the EFL classroom?
2. How did I attempt to address these challenges and foster more active behavioral engagement among students?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the challenges I faced in managing my disengagement and passive students' behavioral engagement in the EFL classroom.
2. To explore how I foster more active my students' behavioral engagement in the EFL classroom.



#### **1.4 Scope and Limitations**

This study is limited to my experience as a pre-service teacher during a teaching practicum in an EFL classroom at a public junior high school in Indonesia. The focus is specifically on behavioral engagement, including students' participation, classroom conduct, and academic effort during English lessons. This study does not investigate emotional or cognitive aspects of engagement in depth, although they may emerge as supporting themes.

The findings are context-specific and not intended to be generalized to all pre-service teachers or classroom settings. As a self-study, this research is inherently subjective. While I have made efforts to ensure transparency and trustworthiness through reflective journals, focus group discussions, and video-recorded teaching sessions, the interpretations are shaped by my personal experiences and positionality. Additionally, limitations such as time constraints during the specific time of practicum period and the dynamics of a single school setting may affect the depth and variability of the insights gathered.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on reflective practice and self-study in teacher education for pre-service teachers, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context. It provides a practical, first-person perspective on how a pre-service teacher interprets and responds to student engagement challenges, especially how to motivate the students to learn English by increasing students' behavioral

engagement. This study may provide pre-service teachers with a better understanding of how behavioral engagement appears in EFL classrooms and how self-reflection can be utilized as a tool to develop their teaching strategies by recording personal experiences (Farrell, 2018; Lee, 2020). Since they emphasize the necessity of structured reflective practices to assist pre-service teachers in managing student engagement, the findings are pertinent to teacher education programs (Zeichner & Liston, 2013; Farrell, 2016). Lastly, this study expands the existing literature on EFL teaching research, addressing the gap in studies that explore behavioral engagement and its relationship with reflective teaching practices (Hiver, Al-Hoorie, & Mercer, 2021; Richards & Lockhart, 2007).

### **1.6 Originality of the Study**

The originality of the study is how this research makes a contribution to the field of EFL pedagogy by focusing on pre-service teachers' reflective practice. Especially, this study offers identified challenges and managed strategies to promote behavioral engagement in EFL classroom. While the cognitive and emotional aspects of student engagement have been extensively studied (Hiver et al., 2021; Skinner et al., 2009; Dao, 2019), behavioral engagement has not received as much attention, especially in EFL contexts where students actually has little exposure to the target language outside of the classroom.

Furthermore, existing literature does focus on behavioral engagement often examines the role of experienced teachers. It's overlooking the lived experiences of pre-service teachers who are still in the learning process of building their professional

pedagogy in the classroom. By describing the situated, real-time difficulties I encountered and the reflective method I employed to overcome them, this study fills that knowledge gap.

I capture the dynamic process of identifying engagement by using reflective journals that supplement with peer discussions and video-recorded teaching sessions. This self study research also contributes to the studies on reflective practice (Beauchamp, 2015; Maaranen & Stenberg, 2017) by illustrating how reflection serves as a practical method to promoting students' behavioral engagement in authentic classroom settings. In the underexplored Indonesian EFL context, where large classes, diverse proficiency levels, and limited resources are common, this study provides insight into how I actively constructed engagement strategies in response to my unique classroom realities.

Ultimately, this study adds a first-person, practice-based perspective to the literature, emphasizing my agency as a pre-service teacher in shaping my own learning while fostering student engagement in EFL learning.