

Chapter 20

Activating Online Learning in Hybrid English Classrooms: From Passivity to Participation

Istiqamah Ardila

UIN Antasari Banjarmasin

ardilaistiqamah@uin-antasari.ac.id

A. THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE

The widespread adoption of hybrid learning models in Indonesian higher education has transformed the landscape of English language teaching. In many universities, hybrid policies now permit a portion of course sessions to be conducted online, often up to 30%, while the remainder are held face-to-face. This flexibility offers students greater access to education, yet it simultaneously presents a persistent challenge: student passivity during the online components of hybrid classes. This phenomenon is particularly concerning in English Language Teaching (ELT), where active communication and interaction are essential for developing language proficiency. Research has shown that while hybrid learning can foster cognitive engagement through active participation and critical thinking, emotional engagement varies considerably, as some students benefit from online flexibility while others struggle with reduced face-to-face interaction with lecturers (Nur et al., 2024)

The problem of student passivity in hybrid learning environments is multifaceted, stemming from both psychological and

pedagogical factors. Students attending online sessions while their peers are physically present in the classroom often experience a sense of isolation and "missing out," which negatively impacts their motivation and participation (Çağlak, 2026). The constraints of synchronous computer-mediated communication fundamentally reshape interactional spaces and restrict the forms of interaction available compared to face-to-face environments such as limited use of non-verbal cues and direct eye contact. In the Indonesian context, technical barriers such as unstable internet connectivity and unequal access to devices further discourage active engagement (Syakur et al., 2025). Studies have found that students often become inactive on online screens, experience delays in receiving lectures, and struggle with maintaining consistent motivation in virtual environments (Satriani et al., 2025). These challenges, combined with the psychological barrier of speaking anxiety in virtual spaces, contribute to what researchers describe as the "silence in the virtual classroom".

Addressing this challenge requires a fundamental rethinking of how we design and facilitate the online components of hybrid English courses. Effective hybrid learning designs that address cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement can significantly enhance student involvement and learning outcomes (Nur et al., 2024). Active learning has proven effective in promoting deeper understanding and knowledge retention, where instructional activities afford students agency for their learning. However, achieving active learning in the online portions of hybrid classes demands deliberate strategies that account for the unique psychological and logistical challenges of blended formats. Students need to feel that their online participation is equally valued and that they are fully integrated members of the learning community, even when not physically present (Çağlak, 2026). This chapter aims to explore practical, classroom-tested solutions for transforming quiet online components of hybrid English classes into vibrant, interactive learning spaces includes how gamified participation incentives, structured collaborative tasks, and accountability mechanisms can effectively increase student engagement and foster a more productive hybrid learning environment.

B. THE PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Transforming a passive online learning environment into an active learning space requires a multi-pronged approach addressing motivation, interaction, and accountability. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes fulfilling three basic psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness to stimulate intrinsic motivation, the solutions presented below are designed to create a learning environment where students feel motivated, connected, and empowered to participate (Çağlak, 2026). The Community of Inquiry framework also provides valuable guidance, highlighting the importance of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence in online learning contexts (Çağlak, 2026). While passive participation may sometimes reflect valid student choices, particularly when students lack confidence, our goal is to provide multiple engagement pathways that reduce anxiety and encourage active involvement. The following practical solutions have been implemented and refined in real online English classrooms, with demonstrated success in increasing student participation and learning outcomes.

Gamified Participation Incentives via WhatsApp

One of the most effective strategies for increasing student participation is implementing a gamified reward system. Gamification has been shown to effectively incentivize student engagement and foster more interactive online learning communities (Hasbi, 2026; Nor et al., 2026)). In this model, the teacher uses a familiar and accessible platform which is WhatsApp Group to create a dynamic virtual classroom environment where participation is both encouraged and rewarded (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2025). Research in the Indonesian context has demonstrated that WhatsApp can effectively facilitate online collaborative learning, as it is a platform most students already use daily and feel comfortable with (Hasbi & Maulani, 2021; Sundari & Febriyanti, 2025).

The WhatsApp-based reward system works as follows: students are provided with learning materials to read before the online

session, and the teacher poses graded questions related to the material. The first five students to respond correctly receive extra credit points. This creates urgency and friendly competition that motivates students to stay engaged throughout the session. The immediate feedback provided by this system, where students see their responses acknowledged and rewarded in real-time, addresses the need for competence and recognition, key drivers of motivation. This approach also leverages the "behavioural engagement" dimension identified in engagement research, where students actively participate in tasks and activities (Nur et al., 2024)

Zoom Breakout Rooms for Student-Centered Collaborative Learning

Passive learning often stems from a lack of opportunity for meaningful interaction. Zoom breakout rooms offer a powerful solution by transforming the whole-class lecture format into small-group collaborative workspaces. Research has shown that peer engagement (learner-learner interaction) is often the strongest engagement factor in online learning environments (Çağlak, 2026). Breakout rooms allow students to engage in focused, task-based discussions in a less intimidating setting (Almazmome, 2023), which can significantly reduce the anxiety associated with speaking in front of a larger group (Çağlak, 2026).

To implement this effectively, the instructor assigns students to small groups and provides them with a structured, manageable task related to the lesson material. The task should be designed to be completed within a specific time frame—for example, discussing comprehension questions, analyzing a text, or preparing a brief presentation on a topic. After the breakout session, a representative from each group presents their findings to the whole class. This structure ensures that every student is actively involved in the discussion, as they know they may be called upon to share their group's work. The use of breakout groups also addresses the need for relatedness, as students collaborate with peers and build a sense of community. Moreover, by giving students a task to accomplish within a set time, the instructor promotes active learning through problem-

solving and collaborative discussion. This strategy effectively simulates the dynamics of an offline classroom, making the online experience more engaging and less isolating.

Real-Time Accountability Through Time-Bound Assignments

A third practical solution involves implementing simple, time-bound assignments that serve as both a learning activity and an attendance check. This approach creates a sense of accountability and urgency, encouraging students to remain focused throughout the online session. Unlike traditional homework that can be completed at any time, these assignments must be submitted by the end of the class period according to the scheduled timetable. Research in Indonesian postgraduate EFL contexts has shown that structured delivery and clear expectations are valued by students and can positively affect participation (Hamid et al., 2025).

The assignment itself should not be overly complex; its purpose is to reinforce the lesson and engage students in immediate application of what they have learned. For example, students might be asked to write a summary of key points, create a concept map, or answer a few reflective questions based on the material just covered. The key is that the task is directly tied to the session's content and can be completed within the class period. Students who fail to submit the assignment are marked as absent, which provides a strong incentive for active participation. This approach taps into the concept of behavioural engagement, which refers to students actively taking part in tasks and activities. By making participation a prerequisite for being recorded as present, the instructor sends a clear message that the online session is a serious academic endeavor requiring students' full attention and effort. This can also be seen as addressing the need for structure and clarity in an often ambiguous online environment.

C. THE FUTURE DIRECTION

As hybrid learning becomes an enduring feature of higher education, the challenge of student engagement will remain a critical area for pedagogical innovation. While the practical solutions

presented in this chapter—gamified incentives, collaborative breakout rooms, and time-bound accountability tasks—have demonstrated success, they are by no means a complete answer to the complex problem of student passivity. Future developments in this area will likely involve a more nuanced understanding of student motivation and the integration of advanced technologies to create more immersive and responsive learning environments.

One promising direction is the development of more sophisticated hybrid learning models that integrate multiple modalities. Recent research has explored models combining face-to-face, synchronous online, asynchronous online, and even virtual reality modalities to provide students with full flexibility and control while enhancing engagement, creativity, and critical thinking skills (Mahande et al., 2025). Such innovations align with calls for more adaptable instructional designs that balance structure and autonomy, sustain engagement, and provide meaningful feedback (Hamid et al., 2025). However, educators must be cautious about over-reliance on extrinsic rewards; the ultimate goal should be to foster intrinsic motivation where students engage because they find learning itself meaningful and enjoyable. Future strategies should focus on creating learning experiences that are inherently motivating by connecting course material to real-world contexts and providing students with greater autonomy in their learning paths.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The effectiveness of any engagement strategy will depend on the specific context of the institution, the digital literacy of the students, and the availability of resources. In many developing regions, issues of digital inequality—such as limited access to reliable internet connections or adequate devices—can be a significant barrier to participation, regardless of pedagogical approach. Therefore, future directions must also include advocacy for greater institutional investment in infrastructure and support, as well as ongoing professional development for teachers in online pedagogy. It is also critical to move beyond a deficit model of student engagement, where passivity is seen solely as a student failing, and instead adopt a more collaborative and responsive approach. Educators and institutions

should work together to understand the barriers to engagement—from technical difficulties to psychological barriers—and create supportive environments that foster, rather than demand, active participation. By balancing the need for accountability with empathy and support, we can transform online learning from a source of anxiety into a space of genuine engagement and growth.

Author



Istiqamah Ardila, M.Pd. is a English lecturer at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, Indonesia. She has extensive experience in English language teaching, having taught at STAI Rakha Amuntai from 2017 to 2024 and at Ponpes Raudatut Thalibin from 2018 to 2020. She also served as Deputy Head of Curriculum at MAS Sulaiman Yasin in 2019. Her teaching portfolio includes courses in English Language Teaching. Her research interests encompass English Language Teaching (ELT), the teaching profession, and the development of the four core language skills in ELT.

References

- Almazmome, R. (2023). Students' Interaction in Breakout Rooms. In L. Waller & S. Kay Waller (Eds.), *Education and Human Development* (Vol. 6). IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.108184>
- Çağlak, I. (2026). From emergency remote to hybrid education: Instructor insights on engagement and social presence across teaching modalities. *Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, (78), 107–127. <https://doi.org/10.21764/maeuefd.1894021>

- Hamid, R. J., Maing, R. A., Rampeng, Muhammad, A. F., & Sahib, N. (2025). Postgraduate EFL instructional models in Indonesia: Aligning student perceptions with lecturer rationales. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), 2590863. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2590863>
- Hasbi, M. (2026). Harry Potter and the Last Spell Standing: A gamified pre-exam review activity in the EFL classroom. In *Games in English Language Teaching* (pp. 37-51). Rizquna.
- Hasbi, M., & Maulani, U. (2021). EFL students' interest and attitude in learning through WhatsApp Group. In *Conference on English Language Teaching*, 1(1), 88-98. <https://doi.org/10.24090/celti.2021.269>
- Mahande, R. D., Abdal, N. M., Nasir, N., & Rahmi, U. (2025). Design and effectiveness of the HyFlex-VR learning model for emancipated learning in higher education. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 18(3), 951–972. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-12-2024-0713>
- Nor, H., Islamiah, N., Maknun, L., Hasbi, M., Amalia, E. R., Susyetina, A., Kuswardani, R. (2026). *Games in English Language Teaching*. Rizquna.
- Nur, S. A. A., Noni, N., & Korompot, C. A. (2024). Student Engagement Dynamics in Hybrid English Speaking Classes: A Study on Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning in Indonesia. *Seltics Journal: Scope of English Language Teaching Literature and Linguistics*, 7(2), 144–158. <https://doi.org/10.46918/seltics.v7i2.2497>
- Satriani, E., Idayani, A., & Kadar, D. P. (2025). EFL Lecturers' Method for Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning through Moodle on Intensive Reading Course. *J-SHMIC: Journal of English for Academic*, 12(1), 31–44. [https://doi.org/10.25299/jshmic.2025.vol12\(1\).21397](https://doi.org/10.25299/jshmic.2025.vol12(1).21397)
- Sundari, H., & Febriyanti, R. H. (2025). Exploring Hybrid Collaborative Learning: A Snapshot from Indonesian Undergraduate scholars. *Proceedings of Forum for University Scholars in Interdisciplinary Opportunities and Networking*, 2, 517–527.

Syakur, A., Santosa, M. H., Padmadewi, N. N., Adnyani, N. L. P. S., Prasetya, R., & Saputra, D. F. (2025). Synchronous Model in Teaching ESP during Emergency Remote Teaching in Indonesia. *International Journal on Advanced Science, Engineering and Information Technology*, 15(6), 1755–1762. <https://doi.org/10.18517/ijaseit.15.6.21243>