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## Teachers' Attitudes and Classroom Engagement: Perceptions from Forestry Students in Politeknik Pertanian Negeri Kupang

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### Abstract

This study explores students' perceptions of lecturers' attitudes and their influence on student engagement in the Forestry Department of the State Agricultural Polytechnic of Kupang. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight students and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that key aspects of lecturers' attitudes influencing student engagement include enthusiasm in teaching, fairness in treatment, and supportive responses to students' questions and mistakes. On the other hand, some lecturer attitudes were perceived negatively by students, such as: favoritism, ineffective teaching method, and an authoritarian approach. These findings underscore the importance of enhancing the pedagogical competencies of vocational lecturers to create a participatory, equitable, and contextually relevant learning environment, particularly in regions with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. While no distinctive attitudes specific to vocational lecturers were identified, students in East Nusa Tenggara possess unique cultural and linguistic traits, which shape their perceptions of lecturers' attitudes. Also, this study does not yet explore in depth how cultural values or demographic diversity specifically influence these perceptions. Further research is needed to better understand how local norms and educational histories affect students' interpretations of teacher attitudes in the East Nusa Tenggara context.

**Keywords:** English for specific purposes (ESP), forestry students, lecturer attitude, student engagement, vocational education



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## **1. Introduction**

In pedagogy, "teacher attitude" generally defines as teacher's emotional stance, feelings, beliefs, and dispositions regarding students, the learning environment, and the teaching-learning process. According to Richardson (1996), there are some key points concerning teacher attitude, which are (1) beliefs and values: teachers' views about students' competencies, potential and learning environment, (2) emotional stance: whether a teacher expresses positive or negative emotions toward teaching, and (3) behavioural stance: observable classroom behavior and interactions with students. Positive teacher attitudes—such as being empathetic (Ode et al., 2023), enthusiastic (Mitchell, 2013), compassionate and understanding (Ulug et al., 2011), helpful and supportive (Kahveci, 2023) are often linked to increased student motivation, classroom engagement, and learning outcomes (Richardson, 1996). Meanwhile, negative teacher attitudes link to uninterested or apathetic, discrimination (Costa et al., 2021), judgemental, ineffective communication (Tang & Hu, 2022), and being unprofessional (Sutrisna & Artajaya, 2022). All these negative attitudes of teachers lead to students' demotivation and disappointment. Although the literature broadly affirms that teacher attitudes influence student engagement (Borg, 2001; Richardson, 1996; Woolfolk Hoy, 2008), further investigation is needed into how these attitudes manifest in different institutional types and how students interpret them in context. A more nuanced understanding could help move beyond generalizations and toward more context-sensitive models of effective teaching behavior.

### **1.1. Teacher attitude in vocational context**

Teacher attitudes in vocational education context may differ from those in Bachelor's Degree due to some reasons. Vocational institutions, particularly in Indonesia, has practical or practicums classes which focus on skill development and hands-on experience and theory-based classes. Teachers in vocational education typically prioritize practicum-based learning, which demands a strong alignment between instructional content and current industry standards (Na & Isa, 2024). Also, conducting practicum classes often take in numerous disciplines to give all-inclusive training or real-life world experience, so teachers need to be adaptable (Sugiarta et al., 2020), innovative (Herijanto et al., 2023), and digital literate (Jaedun et al., 2024). However, while these structural distinctions are frequently cited, the assumption that vocational educators necessarily adopt different attitudes compared to their university counterparts requires closer scrutiny. There remains a limited body of empirical, comparative research explicitly examining how and why teacher attitudes vary across

institutional types. Most studies—including Na and Isa (2024), Sugiarta et al., (2020), Herijanto et al., (2023), and Jaedun et al., (2024)—focus on describing the vocational setting rather than directly contrasting it with the university model. As such, claims about attitudinal divergence must be treated cautiously and framed as hypotheses rather than established facts.

Additionally, teacher attitudes in vocational training contexts are shaped by a variety of interrelated factors, including practical application, professional development opportunities, and demographic influences. Shobing & Caiga (2024) conducted a study among higher vocational college teachers in China, indicating a clear focus on educators within vocational education settings. They found that vocational teachers often emphasize practical skills and real-world applications in their teaching, adopt a hands-on approach, and align their teaching methods with industry standards and practices. The study found significant differences in work attitudes and motivations based on demographics such as sex, age, experience, and education level. These factors may influence how vocational teachers perceive their roles compared to their counterparts in mainstream universities, who may have different demographic profiles and career trajectories. Although this study is situated in the Chinese context, its findings may resonate with vocational lecturers in other regions, including Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), Indonesia. Teacher attitudes are similarly influenced by a mix of institutional demands and individual backgrounds in NTT, where vocational education frequently faces challenges like limited infrastructure, remote location, and a diverse student body. For instance, because of the socioeconomic difficulties faced by their students and the necessity of tailoring instruction to the needs of regional industries like forestry, fisheries, and agriculture, instructors at rural vocational schools may take on more realistic and sympathetic stances. Additionally, NTT's professional development opportunities are often dispersed unevenly, which may have an impact on teachers' creativity, confidence, and receptivity to pedagogical change. A more static approach to teaching may result from some lecturers' lack of access to collaborative academic networks or regular training. On the other hand, instructors who receive more exposure—through national initiatives, outside funding, or online education—may grow more flexible and student-focused. These opportunities are also influenced by demographic factors; for example, lecturers in their early careers may be more open to trying out novel approaches, whereas senior staff members may stick to tried-and-true procedures influenced by their previous experiences at the institution. Thus, similar to the situation in China, NTT vocational lecturers must negotiate a complicated web of institutional, contextual, and personal factors that all work together to influence their teaching philosophies. In order to improve student engagement and inform locally appropriate teacher development strategies in Indonesian vocational education, it is imperative to comprehend these complex influences.

## ***1.2. Student engagement and its relation to teacher attitude***

Vocational students in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) often face particular educational and socioeconomic obstacles that set them apart from other students in more developed areas. A large number of students originate from semi-rural or rural regions with limited access to technology, educational resources, and industry exposure. Language barriers may also have an impact on students' confidence and engagement in class activities, especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) settings, especially in areas where Bahasa Indonesia or local languages are more widely spoken than English.

These contextual differences have important implications for student engagement and its relationship with teacher attitudes. Student engagement refers to the level of interest, attention, and motivation a student demonstrates in their learning process. It involves a student's active participation and involvement in the learning experience, encompassing behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects (Davies et al., 2018; Li & Xue, 2023). Research indicates that perceived teacher support is a critical factor in vocational students' learning engagement, so the needs of students in NTT might even more dependent on positive teacher influence. Studies have shown that when students feel supported by their teachers, they are more likely to be engaged in their learning processes. For instance, one study found that teacher support can directly and indirectly influence students' academic self-efficacy and professional commitment, which in turn enhances their learning engagement (Xu et al., 2023; Zhou & Wu, n.d.). Another study highlighted that teacher support can stimulate students' learning drive and help them develop a positive and optimistic attribution style, fostering active participation in learning and school life (Xu et al., 2023).

The practical implications of these findings are clear. Vocational education institutions should prioritize professional development programs that enhance teachers' ability to provide effective support. This includes training in communication skills, empathy, and strategies to create a supportive learning environment. Additionally, institutions should encourage teachers to provide regular feedback, set realistic goals, and tailor their teaching to individual student needs (Wahlgren, 2024). The learning environment in vocational education settings is also significantly influenced by teacher attitudes and behaviours. Research has shown that students prefer learning environments that are interactive, collaborative, and respectful. For example, one study found that students in vocational education settings prefer active learning strategies, such as problem-solving and group work, over traditional lecture-based methods (Noguera et al., 2024). Another study highlighted that students value learning environments that are practice-oriented and closely linked to real-world applications, as these environments prepare them better for their future careers (Said, 2018; Wahlgren, 2024). To create a conducive learning environment, vocational education institutions should prioritize the integration of active and practice-oriented teaching strategies. This includes the use of authentic, vocationally relevant tasks that allow students to take an active role in their

learning. Additionally, institutions should encourage teachers to incorporate digital tools and online platforms into their teaching practices, enhancing the flexibility and accessibility of learning (Noguera et al., 2024).

As a result, the findings of earlier research highlight how crucial teacher attitudes and support systems are in areas like NTT. In addition to pedagogical skills, teacher training programs in these fields should emphasize the development of cultural sensitivity, contextual awareness, and the capacity to create materials that are in line with the students' local realities. Enhancing learning outcomes and engagement among NTT vocational students requires the creation of inclusive, courteous, and practice-based learning environments.

### **1.3. Research question**

At State Agricultural Polytechnic of Kupang (henceforth: Politani Kupang), Forestry department has two study programs, which are Forestry Management (*Pengelolaan Hutan*) and Forest Resource Management (*Manajemen Sumber Daya Hutan*). Forestry is a relatively new department, besides Fisheries and Marine Science department, since it was constructed in 2017. Though it is recently developed, Forestry department is a highly sought-after major which has more than 600 students (*Statistik Akademik*, 2021). Hence, his research is urgently needed because there is lack of context-specific research (e.g., vocational universities in Indonesia) let alone in Forestry department in NTT. Besides, this study is significant in contributing to a deeper understanding of how lecturer attitudes influence student engagement in a vocational education context, particularly within the Forestry Department at Politani Kupang. As one of the newer and rapidly growing departments, insights gained from this research may help improve teaching strategies, enhance student learning experiences, and support policy development aimed at increasing student motivation and retention.

Thus, this study is interested to find out: (1) what are vocational students' perceptions of lecturers' attitudes in their classroom, (2) how do students describe their engagement in classes where they perceive positive or negative lecturer attitudes, and (3) what aspects of lecturer attitudes are most closely associated with higher student engagement, according to students. The findings can serve as a reference for lecturer training and professional development programs focusing on effective classroom interaction and student-centered teaching approaches in vocational institutions.

Further, this study focuses on the perceptions of forestry students at Politani Kupang regarding lecturer attitudes and their relationship to classroom engagement. The research is limited to students enrolled in the two study programs under the Forestry Department: Forestry Management and Forest Resource Management academic year 2024/25. Data collection is based on student interviews and may reflect subjective experiences rather than objective evaluations of teaching performance. The study does not include perspectives from

lecturers or other departments, and therefore its findings may not be generalized beyond the forestry vocational education context. Case method approach is used to pay attention to the importance of real and complex contexts in the world of vocational education and use to allow researchers to understand the factual challenges faced by educators in preparing competent human resources to face the digital and modern era (Yin, 2012).

## **2. Method**

### ***2.1. Research design***

This study aims to explore forestry students' perceptions of lecturer attitudes and their engagement in class. To explore this phenomenon further, a qualitative method with a case study approach is used. The selection of this method is based on research conducted by Creswell & Creswell (2018) who state that case studies are very appropriate for examining phenomena that occur in an educational community, such as teachers or lecturers and students. Qualitative approach is used as the main because it assumes that truth is relative rather than singular, allowing for multiple interpretations of reality (Rahmat, 2009). It also aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research participants as a whole and in depth (Lexy, 2005). This understanding is achieved through the collection and analysis of descriptive data presented in narrative form using words and natural language. Methodologically, this study seeks to explore in-depth and meaningful information, so that the results obtained can accurately represent the reality that occurs in the field. The main focus of this study is to explore the extent of pedagogical competence possessed by teachers, as well as their readiness to carry out the learning process.

### ***2.2. Participants and data collection***

8 students of Forestry department academic year 2024/2025 in the even semester were selected using purposive sampling to be interviewed in this study. The recommendation for the number of participants for qualitative interviews, such as 8 students, comes from several academic sources and qualitative practitioners that are often referred to in social and educational research (Creswell, 2012; Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010). In this study, pseudonyms are used to maintain participants' confidentiality. Therefore, in this journal article, they are referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and so on, up to Participant 8.

A literature review was initially conducted to examine students' perspectives on lecturer attitudes and classroom engagement, which informed the development of the interview guide. The semi-structured interview was divided into four sections: introduction, perceptions of lecturer attitudes, student engagement, and wrap-up questions, as shown in Table 1. The researcher used 12 core questions as a guide and adjusted the flow by adding or omitting questions depending on the interviewees' responses. Prior to the interviews,

participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent to participate was obtained. All participants agreed to take part in the research.

*Table 1. Semi-interview structure*

<b>Introduction (warm-up questions)</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you tell me a little about your class and your favourite subjects?</li> <li>2. How would you describe your typical classroom experience in general?</li> </ol>
<b>Perceptions of Lecturer Attitude</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What do you think makes a “good” lecturer in your opinion?</li> <li>4. Can you describe a lecturer you enjoy learning from? What is their attitude like?</li> <li>5. Have you ever had a lecturer whose attitude made it hard for you to learn? What happened?</li> <li>6. How do your lecturers usually respond to questions or mistakes in class?</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Adapted from Stronge (2018), Teven &amp; McCroskey (1997), and Wubbels et al., (1991).</i></p>
<b>Student Engagement</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. What makes you feel excited or interested to participate in class?</li> <li>8. When do you feel most engaged during lessons? What is the lecturer doing at that time?</li> <li>9. Have there been times when you didn’t feel like engaging in class? Why?</li> <li>10. In your opinion, how does your lecturer’s attitude affect your interest in the lesson?</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Adapted from Fredricks et al., (2004) and Skinner &amp; Belmont (1993)</i></p>
<b>Wrap-up Questions</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. If you could give advice to lecturers about how to help students stay engaged, what would you say?</li> <li>12. Is there anything else you’d like to share about how lecturers affect your motivation to learn?</li> </ol>

### **2.3. Data analysis**

Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach to generate emerging themes (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). The stages of analysis followed Saldana’s (2016) guidelines, which included selecting quotes and keywords, applying codes and sub-codes, identifying themes, conceptualizing findings, and developing theoretical frameworks. Interview results were systematically identified and integrated into the writing. A thematic map was created based on the research questions, illustrating conceptual relationships and interactions across various levels. For example, a response such as *“I feel more motivated when my lecturer smiles and gives us feedback”* was initially coded as *positive emotional stance* and *feedback responsiveness*, contributing to the broader theme of *Supportive Lecturer Attitudes*. A thematic map was created to visualize the relationships among themes and subthemes.

Validity in qualitative research was ensured through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through data

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triangulation by utilizing multiple data sources. Dependability and confirmability were supported by detailed documentation of each research stage and collaborative discussions among the researchers. Researcher triangulation, involving two researchers at every stage of the study, was conducted periodically to enhance reliability (Patton, 2015). This process also minimized bias through cross-checking the consistency of participant responses (Anney, 2014). The involvement of multiple researchers examining the same issue contributed diverse perspectives, thereby reinforcing the trustworthiness of the findings.

To ensure the rigor of the study, criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were addressed (Anney, 2014):

1. *Credibility*: Achieved through data triangulation (e.g., literature review, multiple participants) and member checking where participants were invited to review and verify selected interview summaries.
2. *Dependability and Confirmability*: Supported by an audit trail documenting each research phase, from interview design to theme development.
3. *Researcher Triangulation*: Two researchers were involved throughout the study—from coding to interpretation. Coding was conducted independently and later compared, with disagreements resolved through discussion and consensus. While inter-coder reliability was not quantified statistically (e.g., Cohen's Kappa), agreement was periodically reviewed and refined until thematic coherence was achieved.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

At Politani Kupang, the classes divided into practical classes or practicums and regular classes. To be noted, this research only focuses on regular classes because most lecturers do not teach the practicums; the practicums are assisted by technicians. Additionally, it will be challenging to conduct research in practicum classes because it is held in the campus forest or in the field, particularly in Forest department.

All of the interviews were conducted on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025 in Indonesian language. It is worth noting that evidently the participants had difficulties to express themselves in Indonesian language. At that time, the interviewer emphasized that the participants could answer the questions using the local language, *Bahasa Kupang*. The interviewer also had to re-explain several questions because the participants could not comprehend the meaning of several words or misunderstood the questions. This finding is supported by Azzizah (2015) that Indonesian language is not the mother tongue of most Indonesians in the eastern part of the country, including East Nusa Tenggara, so most participants encountered difficulties in understanding and articulating themselves in Indonesian language.

### 3.1. Characteristics of lecturers with positive attitudes

Students experienced several positive lecturer attitudes during teaching and learning activities. These included being humorous, fair, disciplined, enthusiastic, using effective teaching methods, and giving breaks during lessons. These positive traits were appreciated by students as they contributed to a more engaging and supportive classroom atmosphere. The following explanation presents the details of these positive attitudes, as described by the participants during interviews.

First, most respondents described ‘good’ lecturers as friendly, humorous, firm yet relaxed, and able to build close relationships with students. For example, two participants expressed in their local language, “*Ada waktunya untuk ‘main gila’, ada waktunya untuk serius belajar*”, (There is a time to ‘goof around’, and there is a time to study seriously) (Participant 2, personal communication, March 2, 2025). “*Dalam waktu mengajar bisa ‘main gila’ dengan mahasiswa. Belajar jangan terlalu serius kek ketawa-ketawa sa, kalau serius pun beta bisa serius*”, (During teaching, it's okay to ‘goof around’ with students. Studying shouldn't be too serious—just laugh a little. But if it needs to be serious, I can be serious) (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2, 2025). ‘*Main gila*’ is a dialect expression in the Kupang language which means ‘being humorous’ or ‘goof around. In this context participant 2 and 7 perceived a good lecturer as someone who can be serious as well as being humorous in the class. Besides having a sense of humor, Participant 5 adored lecturers who could be firm too, as she said, “*Tegas dalam hal memicu mahasiswa melakukan berbagai hal baik ke depan*”, (Firm in encouraging students to take various positive actions for their future) (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2, 2025), which means being firm could encourage students to take positive actions in the future. This is aligned with studies done by Lu’mu et al., (2023); Nienaber et al., (2019); Tran, (2020) that a lecturer's friendly, humorous, firm yet relaxed attitude has been empirically proven to support student engagement, foster a positive learning environment, and strengthen lecturer-student relationships. Adopting such attitudes in teaching practices can enhance learning effectiveness and promote students’ well-being.

The second most frequently mentioned positive lecturer attitude by respondents is fairness, as shown by the responses of Participants 4, 5, and 7. Participant 4 stated that she felt more respected when lecturers did not compare students and allowed space for questions. She added that lecturers who “do not play favorites” and assess students based on their academic performance are highly appreciated. Fairness in feedback and assessment practices indeed contributes to students’ perceptions of lecturers as supportive and professional, fostering a positive learning environment (Iyobhebhe, 2024). Similarly, Participant 5 valued fairness in grading, emphasizing that lecturers should evaluate based on students’ actual abilities. She noted that most lecturers can show empathy—when a student’s grade falls below the standard, the lecturer responds with understanding, encouragement, and guidance

on how to improve. Participant 7 also associated fairness with giving students the opportunity to complete additional assignments as a substitute for missed attendance. It is proven that fairness in educational settings fosters a supportive and inclusive environment, which enhances students' motivation and engagement.

The third most frequently mentioned aspect concerns lecturers' flexibility and disciplined. Participant 2, 3, and 5 described an ideal lecturer as "relaxed but still demands punctual responsibility". They describe lecturers as the role model who always come to the class on time and demand the students to submit assignments within the designated timeframe. This is in line with Bazar & Baluyos (2023) and Elkadi & Sharaf (2023) who found that lecturers' positive such as discipline, in terms of classroom management, is an efficient aspect that influence students' behavior. Students take part greatly in different classroom activities whenever a lecturer models and reinforces appropriate classroom techniques.

Further, all participants agreed that they appreciated lecturers who showed enthusiasm in teaching. Participant 5 specifically mentioned that she enjoyed having enthusiastic lecturers because it made her feel that the registration and tuition fees she paid were truly worth it. In her words, a lecturer's enthusiasm contributes significantly to the overall learning experience and gives value to the students' investment in their education. "*Kalau dosen yang antusias, rajin masuk kelas, sering memberikan tugas untuk mahasiswa lebih memahami materi yang disampaikan, kalau dosen yang tidak antusias misalnya jarang masuk kelas, acuh tak acuh terhadap mahasiswa. Jika mahasiswa salah tidak ditegur*", (If a lecturer is enthusiastic, they show up regularly, assign work so students better understand the material. If the lecturer isn't enthusiastic—for example, rarely attends class or is indifferent toward students—when students make mistakes, they don't get corrected) (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2, 2025). This finding is supported by several studies (Davies et al., 2018; Fadhilah & Warni, 2024; Mitchell, 2013) that lecturer's enthusiasm can boost students' motivation, while lecturers' lack of enthusiasm can demotivate students (Kodero et al., 2011; Tang & Hu, 2022).

Regarding teaching method, participants highlighted teaching methods that enhanced their understanding and engagement. Participant 5 appreciated lecturers who did not rely solely on PowerPoint presentations but instead emphasized key points that helped students grasp the material more effectively. Similarly, Participant 6 valued interactive and practical approaches, mentioning the use of games, such as in the English course. She explained that students were asked to recall and apply what they had learned by naming terms—such as identifying the English word for "forest trail"—and matching them with the corresponding images. These methods were seen as effective in reinforcing learning in a more engaging way. Participant 8 appreciated lecturers who provided follow-up questions after explaining the material, asking students whether they had understood the lesson or not. Based on the participants' responses, the lecturers primarily used lecturer-centered methods, such as

lecture-based teaching with PowerPoint or PDF presentations, which often lacked interaction and failed to emphasize key points clearly. However, there were also instances of student-centered and interactive approaches, particularly in courses where lecturers incorporated games, quizzes, and practical exercises to reinforce learning and improve engagement. Techniques like follow-up questioning were also highlighted as effective, as they encouraged student participation and checked for understanding. Hence, the teaching methods observed by participants ranged from traditional lecture-style delivery to more interactive and practical methods, with the latter being preferred for fostering better comprehension and engagement. Regardless lecturer-centered or student-centered, students found effective methods and techniques in teaching and learning situation brings positive impacts to them, which is also evidently supported in Kahveci's (2023) study.

Finally, participant 1 and 6 stated that a lecturer with positive attitude was someone who gave breaks during the lesson. This is supported by Hosain (2020) who investigated 527 undergraduate and graduate students of three universities in China and three universities in Bangladesh on a random sampling basis. The results reveal that recurrent short breaks can make students revitalize, more enjoyable and more focus.

### ***3.2. Characteristics of lecturers with negative attitudes***

On the other hand, some lecturer attitudes were perceived negatively by students, such as favoritism, ineffective teaching method (restricting students from asking questions, speaking too softly, lack of enthusiasm), and an authoritarian approach. These behaviors contributed to an uncomfortable and less engaging learning environment.

Participant 4 and Participant 6 shared experiences of lecturers who were closer to certain students, resulting in unfair assessments. Issues of unfair treatment and favoritism were also raised by several participants. Participant 4 described the lecturer as indifferent and unfair, sharing an example: "*Misalnya kita ada kerja kelompok, terus kerja sama-sama, tapi karena dosen lebih akrab dengan kita punya teman, nilai teman lebih bagus*", (For example, during group work, we all work together, but because the lecturer is closer to one of our friends, that friend gets a better grade) (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2, 2025). Similarly, Participant 6 mentioned that the lecturer tended to favor students who had personal or family connections with them, giving those students more opportunities to ask questions or receive responses. Despite Participant 6's attempts to engage by asking questions, the lecturer ignored them and continued to limit further inquiries.

In addition to favoritism, several participants highlighted the issue of limited opportunities to ask questions during lectures. Participant 4 mentioned that the lecturer restricted questions, choosing to continue the explanation even when students wanted to inquire further. Similarly, Participant 6 also noted that the lecturer limited students from asking questions. Participant 5 emphasized that the lecturer did not provide opportunities for students to ask at all.

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Additionally, Participant 5 observed the lecturer's indifferent attitude, showing little concern for whether students understood the material, or whether the class was noisy or disengaged.

Another recurring concern was related to the delivery of teaching materials. Participant 5 criticized the lecturer's monotonous delivery, stating that the teaching method failed to engage students. "*Materi tidak dibuat dalam bentuk PowerPoint, tetapi ditampilkan secara PDF menyeluruh, jadi tidak tahu penyampaiannya yang mana, point intinya yang mana, kita mahasiswa tidak tahu*", (The material wasn't made into PowerPoint slides but shown as a full PDF, so we couldn't tell which parts were being explained or which were the main points. We students didn't understand) (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2, 2025). Similarly, Participant 6 pointed out technical issues with the presentation slides, saying, "*dia punya penjelasan tentang PowerPoint itu, sudah buram dia punya PowerPoint, warna layer tabrakan dengan tulisan*", (heir explanation using PowerPoint was unclear; the slide was already blurry, and the background color clashed with the text) (Participant 6, personal communication, March 2, 2025). The slides were too numerous, and the text was difficult to understand, with lecturers merely reading from the PPT without further explanation. Participant 7 also noted that some lecturers delivered material too quickly, sharing that "*Kadang ada dosen yang kita minta ulangi, dibilang pas*", (Sometimes, when we ask a lecturer to repeat something, they say it was clear already) (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2, 2025), indicating a lack of willingness to repeat or clarify when students requested it. Further, several participants highlighted issues related to the lecturer's voice and clarity of speech. Participant 2 pointed out that the lecturer spoke too softly, making it difficult for students to follow. Participant 6 added that the lecturer's voice was not only too low but also unclear in pronunciation. Despite students requesting the lecturer to speak louder, the lecturer remained indifferent and did not make any adjustments.

Based on the participants' responses, the teaching method used by the lecturer was predominantly teacher-centered and lecture-based, with minimal interaction and limited opportunities for student engagement. The lecturers mainly relied on one-way communication, using PowerPoint or PDF slides as the primary medium of delivering material, often by reading the slides verbatim without further explanation. The materials were not effectively designed, with unclear key points, poor visual quality, and overwhelming amounts of text, which hindered student understanding. Additionally, time management issues were evident, as lecturers often rushed through the material, spoke too softly, and did not repeat explanations even when students requested clarification. Opportunities for students to ask questions were restricted or ignored, creating a passive learning environment where students felt hesitant or afraid to participate. These negative attitude such as minimal interaction, teaches at a fast pace, disallow questions in class, does not answer questions also mentioned in Kodero et al.'s (2011) study. They suggest that ineffective teachers should undergo in-service training conducted by stakeholders, as Iyobhebhe's (2024) stated that

teachers should modify their approaches to accommodate a range of learning requirements. There is the huge need to customize teaching methods in order to meet the varied backgrounds and expectations of the students and conduct an effective teaching and learning situation.

Despite these shortcomings, there were some instances where lecturers employed direct correction and follow-up questioning, which were appreciated by students who valued immediate feedback. Participant 8 preferred to be directly corrected in class, feeling that immediate feedback helped improve understanding and performance. In contrast, Participant 4 did not share this preference, as they felt uncomfortable being corrected in front of others. Again, lecturers need to be flexible and understand students' character.

### ***3.3. Student engagement in response to positive and negative lecturer attitudes***

Positive attitudes from lecturers, such as teaching enthusiasm, interactive learning, and allowing space for questions, clearly encouraged active student engagement. Participant 5 claimed that she has always been an active student in class, but certain situations made her feel reluctant to participate. She shared, "*Kalau kelas yang tidak aktif itu misalnya ada beberapa dosen yang penyampainnya saya benar-benar tidak paham betul-betul, maka saya tidak aktif*", (In some classes, I tend to stay passive and don't ask questions because I genuinely don't understand the way certain lecturers explain the material) (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2, 2025). She explained that she had tried to ask questions, but often the lecturer's explanation extended beyond the allocated class time, leaving no opportunity for discussion. Although the scheduled class duration was three hours, some lecturers frequently arrived late. Participant 5 tolerated this because she understood that some lecturers had other activities or busy schedules. However, she emphasized that the lecturer's indifferent attitude negatively impacted students' motivation to learn. For instance, when a student missed a practicum and requested a make-up session, the lecturer's indifferent or self-centered attitude, often citing busyness, discouraged students from being motivated. Furthermore, she suggested that lecturers should design more engaging lessons and avoid making the classroom atmosphere too tense, noting that even a little humour would make a positive difference. These negative attitude such as lateness to class, absenteeism from class, shortens class time, lacks sense of humour, dull in class, and lacks in enthusiasm in class also shown in Kodero et al.'s (2011) study indicating inefficient lecturers that lead to disengagement.

Further, engagement dropped significantly when lecturers: (1) did not give opportunities for questions (as reported by Participant 6 and Participant 5), (2) spoke in a low voice, explained too quickly, or relied too much on slides, such as long, monotonous PPTs or PDF, and (3) presented material without contextualizing it with real-life applications. These behaviours made students feel unappreciated and eventually choose to remain silent or passive in class, even feeling reluctant to attend lectures. Participant 6 also emphasis that she

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has always been active in class and has never been passive. She enjoys the course, especially when the learning situation is not monotonous and there are games, quiz, and so on: *“pembelajaran tidak monoton, tidak hanya satu lurus sa, tapi ada games, kuis, dan segala macam”*, (The learning process shouldn't be monotonous or just one straight method. It should include games, quizzes, and other activities) (Participant 6, personal communication, March 2, 2025). However, she criticized lecturers who teach without enthusiasm. When lecturers are in a bad mood or teach half-heartedly, students struggle to understand the material because everything depends on the lecturer's emotional state. In such situations, students feel that everything she did seems so wrong, *“bertanya salah, tidak bertanya salah”*, (*If you ask a question, it's wrong. If you don't ask, it's also wrong*) (Participant 6, personal communication, March 2, 2025).

In relation to the fast-paced teaching method, Participant 2 mentioned that the lecturer's teaching method was too fast and difficult to understand. Both Participant 2 and Participant 4 admitted that they were hesitant to speak up because they were afraid. Even when they did not understand the material, they were too afraid to ask questions. Supporting this statement, Participant 5 confirmed that the issue often stems from personal factors, explaining that students are generally reluctant to ask questions—not out of mere shyness, but due to fear of making mistakes or being laughed at. As Participant 5 stated, *“Itu kembali pada pribadi masing-masing, memang pada dasarnya mereka malu untuk bertanya, bukan malu tapi takut salah atau takut ditertawakan, jadi mahasiswa disuruh bertanya, tidak bertanya”*, (It depends on each person. Basically, they're not shy to ask, but afraid of being wrong or laughed at. So even when encouraged to ask, they still don't) (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2, 2025).

Additionally, it is important to be noted that students in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) have distinctive characteristics though this is not the focus on this study. The interview had asked why they did not try to ask the lecturers to give them opportunities to ask, communicate to the lecturers that they still did not understand the material, or requested the lecturers to speak louder. Most of them felt afraid, shy, and hesitant. This is also discovered in Brihandhono et al.'s (2024) who do research about social behaviour of NTT students' class of 2022 in the teaching and learning process at PGRI Universitas Kanjuruhan Malang, East Java. They observed that students felt shy and hesitant in voicing their arguments as they were fear of being judged or ridiculed by others if they gave the wrong answer. The same experience also faces by students in Politani Kupang. According to Nurrahmah et al. (2016), students' participation and achievement in education are influenced by their inherited cultural capital, personal experiences, community background, and the culture they are exposed to during the learning process at school. In other words, students' engagement and success reflect the cultural influences they receive from both their school environment and their community. When the cultural context of teaching and the community evolves, it directly impacts the

learning process and student outcomes. Conversely, changes in teaching practices can also reshape the culture of both students and their communities. This cultural transformation can bring about either positive or negative effects on both the community and the educational process itself.

#### **3.4. Aspects of lecturer attitudes most closely associated with student engagement**

Teaching enthusiasm ranked highest in its connection to student engagement. Participant 6 noted that enthusiastic lecturers inspired students because “the lecturer’s enthusiasm is contagious.” Participant 5 also emphasized the importance of lecturers who are “fully present” and active in teaching. Lecturers who acted fairly and did not discriminate among students also had a strong influence on engagement. Injustice—such as in group grading, inconsistent physical punishments, or favouritism during discussions—caused other students to withdraw from active participation. Students were more engaged when they felt their questions were appreciated. Lecturers who responded appropriately (gave clear answers and feedback) helped create a comfortable learning atmosphere and increased students’ confidence to ask questions. These findings suggested that teacher-student relationships and positive teacher behaviour are key factors affecting students’ participation in classroom learning (Li & Xue, 2023).

Participant 4 suggested that lecturers could be more proactive in clarifying material by saying, “ *mungkin dong datang ke kita terus jelaskan ulang*”, ((maybe they (lecturers) could come to us and explain directly)) (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2, 2025), implying that lecturers should approach students and explain the material again if it is not understood. Participant 5 shared a positive experience where the lecturer provided an opportunity for students to ask questions. After answering, the lecturer would follow up by asking for feedback, “*memberikan kesempatan bertanya, setelah bertanya dosen menjawab dan menanyakan respon balik kepada kita, apakah puas dengan jawaban tersebut, kalau tidak puas bisa ditanyakan lagi*”, (They give us a chance to ask questions. After we ask, they answer and then check our response—whether we are satisfied with the answer. If not, we can ask again) (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2, 2025). This approach made students feel heard and encouraged further interaction. Similarly, Participant 6 highlighted that when students asked questions, the lecturer would immediately respond and address their inquiries, showing attentiveness and responsiveness during the learning process.

#### **3.5. Discussion**

The results of this study show that, in vocational higher education settings, teacher attitudes have a significant impact on how students engage in the classroom. When lecturers were lively friendly, and approachable, students said they felt more inspired and self-assured. One participant, for instance, said that when “the lecturer is funny and can make the class less boring,” they felt more involved. This is in line with Wubbels et al. (2012), who highlighted the value of supportive classroom environments and teacher-student relationships in

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encouraging student participation. Students also experienced several positive lecturer attitudes during teaching and learning activities. These included being humorous, fair, disciplined, enthusiastic, using effective teaching methods, and giving breaks during lessons. These positive traits were appreciated by students as they contributed to a more engaging and supportive classroom atmosphere.

On the other hand, some lecturer attitudes were perceived negatively by students, such as: favoritism, ineffective teaching method (restricting students from asking questions, speaking too softly, lack of enthusiasm), and an authoritarian approach. These behaviors contributed to an uncomfortable and less engaging learning environment. Students tended to become passive when lecturers gave unclear explanations of the material. "In some classes, I tend to stay passive and don't ask questions because I genuinely don't understand the way certain lecturers explain the material," one student said. This implies that maintaining student engagement requires effective teaching methods and clear communication, particularly in situations where students may already feel uncomfortable asking questions or speaking in English.

These results highlight how important it is for vocational schools to help instructors advance their interpersonal skills and culturally sensitive teaching methods in addition to their pedagogical content knowledge. Students' willingness to participate and engage meaningfully in the classroom can be greatly increased by fostering trust, maintaining clarity, and striking a balance between humor and seriousness. However, this study does not yet explore in depth how cultural values or demographic diversity specifically influence these perceptions. Further research is needed to better understand how local norms and educational histories affect students' interpretations of teacher attitudes in the NTT context.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study explored how university students perceive teacher attitudes and how these perceptions affect their engagement in vocational classroom settings. The findings reveal that positive teacher traits—such as clarity in instruction, humour, and a supportive demeanour—can enhance student motivation and participation, while negative or unclear communication can discourage engagement. These insights emphasize the central role of teacher-student interaction in fostering an active learning environment, especially in vocational contexts where practical application is key.

Overall, there are no significant differences between lecturer attitudes in vocational universities and regular universities. However, an interesting observation emerged regarding students' personal traits, though it was not the main focus of this study. Many students are reluctant to speak up in class due to feelings of shyness and fear of making mistakes, a finding that is also supported by previous research. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers take

students' characteristics into account and apply suitable teaching methods to foster better engagement.

This study contributes uniquely to the intersection of ELT/Applied Linguistics and vocational education by foregrounding student voices from a culturally distinct and underrepresented region—East Nusa Tenggara. It highlights the importance of adapting teacher attitudes and pedagogical approaches to align with students' cultural and educational backgrounds. However, this study does not yet explore in depth how cultural values or demographic diversity specifically influence these perceptions. Further research is needed to better understand how local norms and educational histories affect students' interpretations of teacher attitudes in the NTT context. This would deepen our understanding of how sociocultural dynamics shape classroom engagement and could inform more culturally responsive teaching practices in vocational English education across diverse Indonesian settings and beyond.

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