
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

An overview of the multidimensionality of Academic Engagement in language learning and how it has been investigated in the Saudi EFL context

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| ABSTRACT

This systematic review presents the multidimensional nature of academic engagement in language learning, with a particular focus on how it has been investigated in the Saudi EFL context. Drawing on a wide range of theoretical and empirical studies, the review synthesizes key perspectives on academic engagement as a dynamic and context-dependent construct encompassing behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. The review highlights how engagement is closely linked to learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and academic achievement, and how it functions as a mediator between instructional practices and learning outcomes. The review further explores major theoretical frameworks, including engagement theory and self-determination theory, to explain how learners' psychological needs and classroom environments influence their involvement in language learning. Evidence from recent research in the Saudi EFL context indicates that factors such as online learning environments, teacher support, learner autonomy, and the use of language learning strategies significantly contribute to enhancing student engagement. Moreover, the findings suggest that engagement is not only a predictor of academic success but also a key factor in promoting positive emotional and social experiences in language classrooms. Despite the growing interest in this area, the review identifies a relative scarcity of comprehensive research addressing all dimensions of engagement in the Saudi EFL context. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of adopting a holistic approach to engagement in language learning and calls for further empirical research to explore its multidimensional nature across different learning settings.

| KEYWORDS

Academic engagement, EFL, learner engagement, multidimensionality, Saudi EFL context

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1.1 Introduction

Academic engagement has been greatly related to students' investment in their academic work and how much they are connected to their academic society. It has been viewed by many researchers as critical to foster student learning (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012; Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh et al., 2006; Thomas, 2012; Trowler & Trowler, 2010). Moreover, it has been used to determine the impact of university education on students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Academic engagement has triggered the attention of researchers as a crucial concept to be investigated within higher education and as a solution for several educational problems such as low achievement and demotivation (Fredricks, 2014). It has been studied in relation to different contexts and different time frames. The dynamicity of higher education has led to rethink of and conceptualize student engagement with regards to student achievement and learning which accordingly change the concentration of many universities to exploit their efforts and resources in the enhancement of academic engagement enhance (Kahu, 2013; Healey et al., 2014; Sinatra et al., 2015).

In this overview, varied topics are presented regarding academic engagement. First, the concept of academic engagement is thoroughly explained with relation to the notion of learner engagement. Then, there is an extensive interpretation to the engagement theory in language learning. Moreover, the role of engagement in language learning is distinctly elucidated. Next, the dimensions of academic engagement are fully illustrated with specific clarification for the indicators of every dimension. The last topic presented in this section is a critically review for investigating learner engagement in the Saudi EFL context.

1.2 The Concept of Academic Engagement

Academic engagement has been defined in terms of its connection to positive academic outcomes and achievement (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2019; Kuh et al., 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2022; Wang & Eccles, 2012), its impact on learners' self-efficacy (Bowden et al., 2021; Linnakylä & Malin, 2008), and how much it is related to having positive emotions towards learning (Reschly et al., 2008). Engagement can be described as the realistic attention and participation that students present during their learning by which their progress is shaped (Zhou et al., 2023). Thus, being engaged in learning requires action and paying effort whether this effort is invested behaviorally, cognitively, or emotionally (Mercer, 2019). The concept of academic engagement evidentially pictures learners' actions, thinking, feelings during classroom activities (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Moreover, academic engagement can be used to refer to the way that learners utilize to position themselves and develop their personal and social identities in their academic worlds by enacting congruent practices (Hiver et al., 2021). Indeed, different desirable attributes can be used to describe how much a learner is involved in his learning such as higher level of attention, academic achievement, persistence and determination, and positive attitude and satisfaction (Fredricks et al., 2019; Reschly & Christenson, 2022).

Academic engagement is the action that learners take in order to express motivation and accomplish specific goals (Fredricks et al., 2004), and this definition confirms that engagement can be defined according to its characteristic of requiring an action. In regards of this characteristic engagement is viewed as 'constructive, enthusiastic, willing, emotionally positive and cognitively focused participation with learning activities in school' (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012: 22). Another characteristic that needs to be considered to define engagement is that it is highly context-dependent. Therefore, learner's engagement is a result of interaction between several factors such as cultures, communities, schools, and other contextual influences (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Pianta et al., 2012; Shernoff, 2013). In addition, engagement requires an object to be engaged with such as a task or a topic that is why academic engagement is defined in relation to intrapersonal and situated components. It can be considered as a result of classroom interpersonal relations and educational quality, as well as personal factors such as motivation and aptitude. Besides, academic engagement is a dynamic construct in which learners get affected easily by many factors (Appleton et al., 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2022).

Learner engagement as a notion is used to refer to "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes" (Kuh, 2009, p. 683). Thus, learners' sense of self and their determination should be considered to define learner engagement (Winstone & Carless, 2020). The concept of engagement in learning describes how actively a learner is involved in the learning tasks and how much his/her effort is goal-directed and purpose-driven (Hiver et al., 2021). In the context of language learning, engagement has been explicated as the amplitude of learners' understanding of the content and objectives of learning tasks and the effective utilization of resources to fulfil these tasks (Bygate & Samuda, 2009). It has been suggested that learner engagement is not only about promoting learners to invest their time and effort in academic performance. However, it is a holistic and deeper understanding of learners' behaviors, feelings, and attitudes as well as their social and psychological relations in their academic contexts (Moser, 2020). Such considerations interpret the multidimensionality of learner engagement by which greater improvements in learner's educational, social, phycological experiences can be achieved. As students are engaged in their learning with their academic worlds, they take responsibility of their learning and develop collaboration with their academic societies to construct knowledge and enrich experiences (Ashwin & Mcvitty, 2015; Coates, 2005; Velden, 2013). Furthermore, meta-construct nature of engagement requires to observe active behavior, measure cognitive skills, and investigate sociocultural interactions and emotional reactions (Fredricks et al., 2016). Therefore, learner engagement can be generally defined as an umbrella term that includes all the visible and invisible efforts that learners pay to get involved in their learning (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Indeed, it is a complex task to conceptualize learner engagement not only because learners can get disengaged at any point but also because the numerous factors that can intervene within the process of engagement (Price et al., 2011; Zhang & Hyland, 2022).

1.3 Engagement Theory in Language Learning

Engagement has emerged as an influential variable in formal education research including language education. It has been used as reference to student involvement and dropout rates in schools as it has been originated in the field of education research (Newmann, 1981). Moreover, it has been proposed that students' involvement in their academic activities contributes to prosper their learning and personal development (Astin, 1999, 1977). Many scholars have discussed engagement in education

even if they refer to it using different conceptualizations. Some studies have investigated the concept of learner engagement in language learning contexts explicitly (Ellis, 2010; Han & Hyland, 2015; Storch, 2008; Svalberg, 2009). However, others have utilized various terms that indirectly related to engagement such as collaborative dialogue (Swain & Lapkin, 2001) and 'language-related episodes' (Storch, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). Engagement in language learning has also been subsuming into task-based interaction (Hiver & Wu, 2023; Philip & Duchesne, 2016; Seedhaus & Almutairi, 2009).

Kearsley and Shneiderman's (1998) theory of engagement is considered as an outstanding theory that demonstrates the significance of engagement in learning and captures its determinants. This theory states that getting engaged in learning activities is a condition for learning to fully occur. According to this theory, students can be connected through meaningful interaction with peers and teachers as well as with learning tasks and this connection enhances the process of engagement (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). The statement of this theory clarifies how much it is similar to considerable and knowledgeable theories of learning. For instance, it emphasizes the importance of collaboration and interaction with peers for learning to happen which aligns with collaborative learning in form of reciprocal learning/teaching activities and situated learning theories (Dillenbourg, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, the theory of engagement asserts the essentiality of involving the learners in meaningful learning tasks to construct their knowledge and foster their engagement by which it can be linked to constructivist approach of learning (Bruner, 1966). Besides, the determinants that have been stated in theory of engagement support the principles of adult learning theories such as learning through experience, self-directed learning, and motivation (Knowles, 1980). The explanation of the theory of engagement highlights the significance of promoting self-regulated learning and developing its strategies for learners (Zimmermann, 2008). Adopting the theory of Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998) maintains the responsibility of language learners and reinforces their autonomy towards their learning as they get engaged in varied cognitive processes during interactive tasks (Mercer, 2019; Svalberg, 2009). This interaction in learning activities reveals learners' attitudes and assists them to express their ideas which accordingly develop their academic and social identities as well as encourage them to be more creative (Svalberg & Askham, 2014).

The engagement theory in language learning emphasizes the necessity of authentic learning as it contributes to learner's satisfaction and motivation (Svalberg & Askham, 2020). Language learning should be processed in relevant activities to the context of learners to reinforce their engagement. Such emphasis has been described as under-researched area in the field (Tian and Lowe, 2013). According to the engagement theory, learners should be given the choices to select learning activities and value their voices and attitudes which accordingly can increase their engagement and enjoyment (Mercer, 2019). It can be more effective and fruitful for language learners to choose the tasks in which they construct their knowledge and practice the target language as it can create memorable situations of foreign language learning. Moreover, emotions as a fundamental determinant of learner engagement are greatly affected by the cognitive challenges, they encounter during learning activities. An interconnection between all these issues can be distinctly observed related to engagement in language learning (Svalberg, 2009). Task-based interaction is considered the platform for learning to happen and engagement to be enhanced (Lambert, 2017; Philip & Duchesne, 2016). Therefore, task engagement has been suggested to be studied and linked to academic engagement research (Reschly & Christenson, 2022; River & Wu, 2023; Fredricks et al., 2019) and to be considered as an aspect of foreign language classroom engagement (Hiver et al., 2021; Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

Self-determination theory (SDT) as an important theory of language learning motivation has been linked to learner engagement to interpret conditions that can influence how much students are involved in their learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT asserts that learner's satisfaction is a prerequisite for their devoted effort and attention to be engaged in learning activities. To demonstrate, learners show deliberate involvement through various behaviors when their psychological needs are satisfied. SDT helps to understand the driving forces of human behaviors in different domains such as language learning (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). In academic settings, satisfying the psychological needs for learners can lead to high-quality academic engagement (Noels et al., 2019; Sugita-McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). According to SDT, students' lack of motivation and getting disengaged can be attributed to different factors related to classroom environment. Classroom environments has been described as an influencing factor on learner engagement variously, it can be supporting and motivating as well as impeding and frustrating (Hiver et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers as a substantial part of learning environment, are considered facilitators of learner motivation which affects their academic engagement (Bureau et al., 2022). Therefore, SDT can be accounted for as justification for the interrelation between academic engagement and learning environment including teachers' practices during classroom instruction (Zhou et al., 2023).

1.4 The Role of Engagement in Language Learning

Student engagement is a fundamental concept in foreign language instruction and a necessary aspect for feedforward benefits (Hiver et al., 2021). It is viewed as central to language learning according to the cognitive-interactionist approach (Hiver & Wu, 2023). In addition, it can be used as a crucial mark of predicting success in language education (Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

Engagement in language learning mediates between the external experiences of learners, their internal cognitive processes, and their level of achievement (Hiver & Papi, 2019; Lam et al., 2012). To be engaged in language learning, learners perform learning tasks in form of action and intellectual activities as well as integrate their emotions. Academic engagement in language learning can assist to understand why and how language learners invest their efforts and show their determination to be involved in meaningful learning opportunities and practices (Dornyei, 2019). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that learners' perception of meaningfulness has been argued to be highly an influencing factor on learner engagement (Svalberg, 2018).

Engagement plays a pivotal role in academic success in language learning. A number of studies in the field of language education has attributed achievement in test scores and higher grades to the extent students are engaged in their learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reeve, 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Moreover, student engagement has been argued as a contributor in decreasing negative emotions, depression, and registering low rates of delinquency (Li & Lerner, 2011; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). The meta-construct nature and multidimensionality of engagement makes it appealing in language learning as it includes measurable behaviors, internal cognitions, and affection which are evidently substantial determinants of language learning progress (Fredricks et al., 2004). Furthermore, engagement is dynamic in which it can be responsive to changing pedagogical patterns and teaching practices (Fredricks, 2011). It is flexible to be embedded with various educational patterns and teaching systems for different levels of learners (Fredricks et al., 2004; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). An important role of engagement in language learning is feedback providing for teachers (Zhou et al., 2023). The extent of student engagement can assist teachers to modify their practices and reform their efforts to maintain their student's motivation during classroom instruction (Reeve, 2012). A lack of motivation to learn a foreign language has been linked to getting disengaged and losing interest (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004; Ladd & Dinella, 2009). Since disengagement has been reported by teachers as the biggest challenge, engaging students in their learning is considered a substantial educational goal (Fredricks, 2014).

Integrating engagement as a desired purpose in language education can be an inspiring source of productivity, development, and creativity. For instance, engagement enriches the implementation of task-based language teaching and lightens the paths for teachers to combine these interventions during classroom instruction (Hiver & Wu, 2023). Thus, task engagement has been proposed not only as a part of engagement but as a strategy of language learning by which learners can develop varied and complex skills (Hiver & Wu, 2023; Platt & Brooks, 2002). Teachers utilize creative ways of engaging their students in their instruction as they realize its significance as a mark of teaching and learning quality (Hiver et al., 2021). In addition, language educators increasingly acknowledge the difficulty of keeping students engaged and focused in their learning during this world of distractions (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Therefore, investigating engagement in language learning can greatly influence the progress of language education from both perspectives teaching and learning, and it can be essentially helpful to shape the appropriate learning environment in which meaningful involvement can be enhanced and long-term positive outcomes can be obtained (Fredricks et al., 2004; Svalberg, 2009).

1.5 Dimensions of Academic Engagement

According to the tremendous positive impact of academic engagement in language learning, it is highly significant to investigate how students manifest their engagement through a range of indicators (Thomas, 2012). In this regard, the multidimensionality of engagement needs to be accounted for and demonstrated. Such demonstration can be effectively useful for educators to observe and measure the extent of students' engagement. Therefore, the categorization of engagement by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) can be adopted. They have identified three types of engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Student engagement refers to a multidimensional construct that looks to theorize individual learning components as a determined focus on a task (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Furthermore, the interconnected dimensions of student engagement are significant to the progress of the learning process (Fredricks et al., 2016). These dimensions explain the way students think, feel and behave in foreign language classes (Reschly & Christenson, 2022). Therefore, being fully present in class which refers to as behavioral engagement can lead to practicing cognitive activities and having positive emotions.

In the field of language learning, another significant dimension has been proposed which is social dimension that refers to learners' interaction in language learning and their initiation and maintenance of their target language (Svalberg, 2009). Svalberg's work of engagement with language and language awareness (2009) can be considered as an eminent illustration of social engagement. In addition, Svalberg demonstrates that language learning as a social process is distinctly influenced by engagement and strongly interconnected with language awareness which is 'engender engagement with language and to be constructed through it' (Svalberg, 2007, 302). According to Svalberg (2009), there is a reciprocal relationship between social engagement and language awareness. To illustrate, being aware can facilitate learners' social engagement in instructional settings whilst learners' engagement with language can in turn reinforce their knowledge of language and enhance their language awareness. Moreover, social dimension of engagement can boost overall engagement in language learning. When language learners are socially engaged, they need to manifest action behaviorally, activate cognitive resources, and demonstrate

affective connection. Thus, language learning requires a combination of behavioral, affective, cognitive, and social aspects of engagement.

1.5.1 Behavioral Engagement. Behavior is considered the most common measurable and recognizable indicator of engagement. Students' body language and eye contact during classroom instruction are highly significant marks of engagement (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). This dimension of engagement requires a positive behavior of engaging in learning and participation in learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement can be observed also through students' academic undertakings such as doing the assigned tasks and following the given instructions. Furthermore, it can encompass participation in non-academic commitments (Fredricks et al., 2004). Indicators of behavioral engagement includes paying attention, listening to teachers and peers, completing learning tasks, having diversity of knowledge, and taking turns to participate in learning activities. These behaviors can be observed through duration of time invested and intensity of effort presented (Gettinger & Walter, 2012).

Behavioral engagement can be defined in term of action, it includes participation, determination, pursuance, and commitment with school structures. It is all about behaviorally engaged in classes (Jones, 2008). Dunleavy (2008) extends the definition of behavioral engagement to include the participation in non-academic school activities. Therefore, behavioral engagement is related to the effort student pay to be active when dealing with inside as well as outside classroom activities (Sang & Hiver, 2021). Certain behaviors of students such as asking questions across classroom, concluding homework, and attending course-related events appear to promote other aspects such as emotion and cognition. Thus, behavioral engagement can be considered as key step in the learning process (Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

Behavioral engagement happens when students focus, participate, extend effort and persist during instructional tasks. In foreign language research, behavioral engagement has been operationalized by various measurements such as word counts and turn taking (Bygate & Samuda, 2009; Dornyei & Kormos, 2000). Moreover, interactional initiative and voluntary involvement in speaking activities can be indicators of behavioral engagement in language learning. In addition, being behaviorally engaged has been linked to the time and participation of students' involvement in doing tasks (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). It is difficult to separate behavioral engagement from the other dimensions of engagement as they entail active participation and involvement to be maintained. Therefore, behavioral engagement can be described as the amount of deliberate effort to be engaged in learning whilst the other dimensions capture the accurate nature of engagement (Hiver et al., 2021). The more precise indicators of behavioral engagement in language learning during language use can comprise the semantic content in learners' production, learners' persistence to complete learning tasks, and learning strategies that learners utilize to develop their interlanguages (Liu & Feng, 2023). It has been argued that adopting learner-generated content in language learning tasks reinforces behavioral engagement of students regarding the contributions they present to be actively involved in tasks performance. It is worth noting that behavioral engagement plays an eminent role in predicting the extent of the other dimensions of learning engagement (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Thus, observing the process of learners' engagement commences with their behaviors in classes as the other parts of the process including cognition and emotion come as a result of the initial behavior on the part of the learner to be engaged.

1.5.2 Cognitive Engagement. Cognitive engagement has been defined as a psychological process in which students expend their attention, interest, exploitation, and mental effort in the work of learning (Hiver et al., 2021; Marks, 2000). Furthermore, cognitive academic engagement includes promoting mastering knowledge, skills, or crafts which is an objective of academic work (Reeve, 2012; Svalberg, 2009). Thus, Fredricks et al. (2004) suggest that questions, how voluntary they are to answer the given questions and take a part in the presented discussions (Baralt et al., 2016; Lambert et al., 2017; Svalberg, 2018). Moreover, learners' attempts to make sense of learning through non-verbal communication and exploratory talk are evidently indicators of their cognitive engagement (Hiver et al., 2021). Learner's collaboration and interaction during classroom instruction through varied patterns and styles can be used as evidences of cognitive engagement in language learning such as offering help, explaining ideas, negotiating meanings, exchanging information (Helme & Clarke, 2001). Another evidence to demonstrate learners' cognitive engagement is learner's private speech (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). In addition to these obvious signals of the learners' cognitive engagement, Fredricks and McColskey (2012) consider facial expressions, eye contact, and body language and positioning to indicate the extent of engagement in language learning cognitively.

Unlike behavior and emotion, cognition is too complex to measure and observe directly (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). It cannot be reliable to consider certain indicators of cognitive engagement. The most noticeable sign of cognitively engaged learner is being focused and aware during learning tasks (Svalberg, 2012). However, being alert while learning cannot be observed explicitly. Learners have their own learning strategies to notice and process what they are exposed to during learning (Svalberg & Askham, 2014). Cognitive engagement can be described as active thought that leads to knowledge construction and reflection (Willingham, 2009). What learners think about and remember, they learn and reflect on during their overall experiences. An

approximating and generating of assumptions regarding the degree of cognitive involvement in learning tasks can be used to measure cognitive engagement of learners. Therefore, observing the quality of what students produce can be a source of predicting the extent of their mental effort to be engaged (Winne & Nesbit, 2010). It is highly significant to emphasize the prominent role of teachers' instructional practices to reach and discover the black box of cognitive processes in which learners are involved in to be engaged (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Teachers can employ different strategies during classroom instruction to promote their student's cognitive engagement such as providing clear feedback and guidelines, engaging learners' emotion and behavior, and freeing learners from time constraints while doing tasks (Winne & Nesbit, 2010). Learners' desire to go beyond the basic requirements and endeavor to overcome intellectual challenges can be greatly considered in the discussion of cognitive engagement measurement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Thus, learning environments that support autonomy of learners to select their own challenges and create their own strategies have been argued to be a source of enhancing cognitive engagement (Moreira & Lee, 2020).

1.5.3 Emotional Engagement. The third dimension of students' engagement is emotional engagement which is embodied in students' reactions, feelings, and attitudes (Hiver et al., 2021). According to Tyler and Boelter (2008), being emotionally engaged augments the usefulness of tasks given on hand. This type of engagement focuses on the psychological sides of the students and pertains to varied aspects such as cohesion, belonging, mutual respect, and requires support from the teacher to achieve social affiliation (Patrick et al., 2007). Emotional engagement can be described in terms of satisfaction, enjoyment, belonging, and positive attitude (Mercer, 2019; Reeve, 2012; Svalberg, 2009). It comprises learners' various reactions to the members of their academic societies including teachers, peers, and educators (Mahatmya et al., 2012). These feelings and attitudes determine the extent of involvement during learning and influence inclination towards completing the given tasks. Experiencing feelings of delight, interest, anxiety, and frustration can be indicators of emotional engagement (Mercer, 2019).

It has been debated that emotions are evidently influential in language learning (Dewaele & Li, 2022; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). Like behavior, teachers can recognize their students' emotional reactions such as happiness, enjoyment, boredom, or uninterest. By developing positive relationships with students, teachers can successfully observe these affectional states during classroom instruction (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Emotional engagement has been argued as a crucial construct to activate positive emotion and deactivate negative emotions (Reeve, 2016). According to the positive psychology in foreign language learning, negative emotions should be considered and investigated along with its effects as hindering factors (Shao et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). A strong correlation has been found between behavioral and emotional engagement as it seems that learning activities by which behavioral engagement is promoted can be used effectively to reinforce positive emotions in language classroom (Marsh et al., 2018; Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Reeve, 2012). Since language learning requires different patterns of interaction between teachers and students (Ellis, 2015), teacher-related factors are of a great value to be linked to the enhancement of emotional engagement (Li, 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Defining emotional engagement varies according to the research purpose and context. According to Yazzie-Mintz (2009), emotional engagement is related to how students see themselves as part of the academic institution and how much they feel connected or disconnected from their academic society. Moreover, it has been described as learners' positively motivated participation in classroom activities (Skinner et al., 2009). Students' positive relationships with their teachers, peers, and academic society can be a demonstration of emotional engagement (Mercer, 2019). In language learning settings, learners' attitude towards the target language and the context of learning has been proposed as substantial factors that can affect emotional engagement (Svalberg, 2009). Emotional engagement has been discussed as a salient indicator of the interconnection between the dimensions of academic engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016), as it has been reported that learners can develop their behavioral and cognitive engagement whenever they feel positive emotions and experience motivating interactions with the members of their academic societies (Baralt et al., 2016). However, negative emotions and frustrating experiences during the process of learning can lead to behavioral and cognitive disengagement. Therefore, emotions can be a crucial intrinsic operator that can activate or deactivate engagement (Dao, 2019; Henry & Thorsen, 2020; Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012).

1.5.4 Social Engagement. Being socially engaged can have a radical impact in language learning (Philp & Duchesne, 2008; van Lier, 2004). Social engagement can be used to describe all the social forms of involvement and activity including social belonging and fruitful interactions with interlocutors (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2011; Mercer, 2019). Moreover, the social aspect of engagement is distinguished that it is distinctly relational and based on interaction with and support of others (Hiver et al. 2021). Furthermore, social engagement is concerned with learner' connections with each other, their affiliation to the members in the communities of their learning, and their willingness and desire to take a part and have their turns in classroom tasks including cooperative activities (Lambert et al., 2017). In addition, the social dimension of engagement in language learning is associated with reciprocity and mutuality that can be manifested in various empathetic forms such as the way learners listen to their peers and the extent of being attentive to teacher talk (Storch, 2008). Therefore, social engagement in language learning portrays the nature of learners' connection to and social relations with their learning societies (Järvelä & Renninger, 2014).

Learners can be considered as socially engaged when they interact, collaborate, and participate in different interactive activities and varied forms of group work. Furthermore, social engagement occurs when learners listen carefully to classroom discussions, enjoy doing collaborative activities, explain their own ideas, and provide support for each other (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). According to Svalberg (2009), initiating interaction and participating in scaffolding can be indicators of social engagement. Moreover, social engagement can be described as a socio-motivational process that can produce an ideal environment in which learners support and understand each other (Murphey et al., 2014). For instance, students who distinctly try to understand each other's ideas, mutually exchange feedback, and actively listen to their peers' opinions can be easily described as socially engaged learners. Indeed, it has to be indicated that teachers can have an impact on engaging language learners socially by utilizing different techniques including providing effective feedback, respecting learners' opinions, and stimulating students' input (Gettinger & Walter, 2012).

Social engagement has been the focus of research in the field of language learning in the past five years as an essential aspect of getting engaged in foreign language classrooms. Research has shown that student engagement can be manifested not only in paying effort of behavior but also in demonstrating emotional and social connection to the learning environment (Philp and Duchesne 2016). In addition, social engagement has been viewed as a dynamic and malleable dimension of student engagement as it is obviously affected by varied factors including socioemotional and sociocultural factors (Noels et al. 2019, Zhou et al. 2023). Furthermore, this vital aspect of engagement in language learning can be accounted for as reciprocity-based. Therefore, foreign language classrooms should be rich of affordances for language learners to demonstrate and develop their interactive skills. Such mutual interaction can have a dramatic impact on maintaining the relationships in learning communities (Fredricks et al., 2016).

1.6 Investigating Learner Engagement in the Saudi EFL Context

There is a paucity of research addressing learner engagement as a construct in the Saudi EFL context. However, it has been investigated recently in a considerable body of research in relation to the effects of the use of online learning (Aldaghri & Oraif, 2022; Aldossari & Altalhab, 2022; Alghamdi & Shah, 2018; Alied et al., 2022; Alsowat, 2016; Oraif & Elyas, 2021; Sarhandi et al., 2017). In these studies, researchers are trying to explore the effects of online learning on student engagement in the Saudi EFL context. Integrating online platforms in learning English as a foreign language enhances student engagement according to these investigations.

A high level of engagement among EFL Saudi learners has been reported through the use of online learning during the pandemic of Covid 19 (Oraif & Elyas, 2021; Aldaghri & Oraif, 2022). It has been proposed that teachers should consider and incorporate their students' engagement as a multidimensional construct in classroom instruction not only during traditional learning but also through online tasks (Alsowat, 2016). Using specific facilities in online learning has been found to be effective in motivating EFL Saudi learners which accordingly enhances their engagement (AlBogami & Elyas, 2020; Aldossari & Altalhab, 2022). In the same vein, some of these studies have focused on discussing the effectiveness of mobile applications on engaging EFL Saudi students in classroom instruction in different levels (Alghamdi & Shah, 2018; Alied et al., 2022) According to Sarhandi et al. (2017), utilizing smartphones-based activities in learning English as a foreign language can assist learners to overcome the barriers of engagement.

An interesting investigation of learner engagement in the Saudi EFL context has been conducted recently by Alqarni (2023). In this research, the relationship between language learning strategies and learner engagement has been discussed. It has been argued that the use of specific language learning strategies such as metacognitive, compensation, social, and memory strategies can positively affect behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of learner engagement. In addition, it has been asserted that this positive relation between language learning strategies and learner engagement should be maintained through classroom instruction as it apparently predicts language learning achievement (Alqarni, 2023).

Emotional engagement as one dimension of learner engagement has been discussed in a recent and inspiring research in the Saudi EFL context (Al-Amri, 2020). In this research, identity styles and social support from peers have been investigated as factors that influence emotional EFL classroom engagement. According to Al-Amri (2020), social support that students receive from peers can enhance identity styles by which emotional engagement in EFL classroom can be reinforced. To illustrate, social support from peers can mediate the relationship between identity styles of EFL students and their emotional engagement in the classroom. The more students receive social support from peers the more they engage emotionally in EFL classroom.

In a more recent study, Alqarni (2025) has presented empirical findings concerning the interplay between psychological constructs, instructional variables, and learning engagement. The results demonstrate a robust positive correlation between optimism and overall engagement, with the strongest association observed in behavioral engagement, followed by cognitive and emotional dimensions. Furthermore, it has been confirmed that both optimism and pessimism are statistically significant

predictors of learning engagement (Alqarni, 2025). Moreover, significant positive correlations among motivation, engagement, and academic achievement have been demonstrated (Shehata, 2026). Instructional factors, including teacher support, content relevance, and learner autonomy have been identified as significant predictors of engagement (Shehata, 2026).

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