

Student Engagement in the Lithuanian EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a qualitative and quantitative study that used an online questionnaire to research Lithuanian university EFL students' (N=34) self-perceived engagement. It assesses the role of engagement in the EFL classroom through the following research questions: 1) what engages students studying English as a foreign language? 2) what disengages students studying English as a foreign language? 3) how do students describe their own engagement while learning English as a foreign language? Using quantitative and thematic analysis, the findings suggest that the students are engaged by classroom activities (mostly speaking), long-term personal goals, classroom atmosphere, their own mood, and other factors that may differ from student to student. Disengagement is mostly caused by early lecture time, students' laziness, peers who are late or disturb the class, reading tasks, and homework tasks. The students also reflected on their own engagement while studying English, which helped to see the bigger picture regarding their (dis)engagement, as particular challenges, experienced outside the classroom, could also contribute significantly. The study suggests that in order to make teaching and learning more effective, some changes may be necessary, but it is impossible to implement them without understanding the current situation. Knowing what engages and disengages EFL students can help to meet students' needs, shape their learning behaviour, and adopt more multimodal classroom practices.

Keywords: *English as a foreign language (EFL), engagement, disengagement, Lithuanian university students.*

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Introduction

According to Gan (2021), students' academic engagement has received much attention from teachers and scholars for over two decades. Thus, it is not a new topic to research. However, despite the plethora of already existing studies, Dincer et al. (2019) note that little is known about engagement in language learning, for instance, English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, because it has been given relatively little attention so far. As a result, the existing literature includes little research on how learners (and their teachers) perceive their academic engagement in learning English (Dincer et al., 2019). The studies which have explored the topic usually focused on behavioural engagement without looking at its other dimensions, such as affective, cognitive, and agentic (Dincer et al., 2019), to name but a few. In addition, the terms "motivation" and "engagement" are sometimes treated as synonyms, while in fact they are very different. Even though both have effect on goal achievement, motivation is related to internal (intrinsic) enjoyment and external (extrinsic) rewards, while engagement is about one's individual investment (behavioural, affective, cognitive and agentic) in tasks in a particular context, such as classrooms (Radil et al., 2023). This paper focuses only on engagement as an important component in EFL teaching and learning that has been under-researched, especially in the Lithuanian context.

Academic engagement became an issue during the coronavirus pandemic (Susanti, 2020) and remained relevant even when the teachers and their students returned to live teaching in classrooms. All dimensions of engagement and the use of information and communication technologies (and recently AI-based and other tools) undoubtedly may have a positive effect on students' engagement and, consequently, achievement of study outcomes. Lithuanian university EFL students were presented with an online questionnaire in order to learn about their self-perceived engagement while learning English. The study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What engages students studying English as a foreign language?
2. What disengages students studying English as a foreign language?
3. How do students describe their own engagement while learning English as a foreign language?

The answers to these questions can help better understand students' experiences and perceptions of academic engagement in EFL classes and provide suggestions on how EFL courses could best foster such engagement.

Why Is Student Engagement Important?

It is not enough to be present and participate in the activities provided or initiated by the teacher to be considered an engaged learner (Dincer et al., 2019a). Scholars who have published on the topic agree that the term "engagement" is used to refer to a combination of the following components: students' interest, participation, special attention (Philp & Duchesne, 2016), active involvement in learning activities (Dincer et al., 2019; Liu, 2020) or the learning process in general (Oruç & Demirci, 2020), and learning enjoyment

(Rahayu, 2018). In the EFL context, these are, of course, related to learning English. Engagement is sometimes explained as “a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, behavioural, social, and emotional [(also referred to as affective)] dimensions [...] among second and foreign language learners in the classroom” (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 50). Further components sometimes include agentic engagement (Han, 2021) and cognitive engagement, which consists of mental efforts (Rahayu, 2018), being alert and concentrating on tasks or being autonomous in an EFL classroom (Bonner et al., 2022; Oruç & Demirci, 2020). Behavioural engagement refers to active participation in class activities, such as oral or written tasks (Bonner et al., 2022), or simply being “on-task” (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 57). Social engagement is related to student collaboration, peer feedback and similar activities (Bonner et al., 2022). Emotional engagement is reflected in students’ “affective reactions” (Dincer et al., 2019, p. 2), students’ interaction, feelings of connection, belonging (Bonner et al., 2022), and positive emotions while learning (Rahayu, 2018). These dimensions are usually based on student engagement criteria, including particular indicators and sub-indicators (Susanti, 2020). For instance, the emotional dimension may be evaluated based on students’ interest (indicator) and their eagerness to do EFL activities in the classroom (sub-indicator) (Susanti, 2020).

Bonner et al. (2022) point out that not much learning can take place without engagement, so teachers should aim to raise and maintain the level of learners’ engagement high. Higher engagement usually means higher grades as well (Han, 2021). Thus, learner engagement is often seen as a success indicator of teaching (Rahayu, 2018). As a result, there is a need to strengthen learner engagement from the very early stages of school education (Gidzijauskienė et al., 2022). According to Oruç and Demirci (2020), in the EFL context, even students’ reactions to feedback provided by teachers can be partly seen as student academic engagement. This means that there are plenty of activities helping to engage students in the learning process of any study subject, including foreign languages.

Suharti et al. (2021) claim that students quite often become disengaged when they are still at school, so it is not surprising that low levels of engagement are observed later at university level. The reasons for disengagement vary depending on the country, class and individual students. Philp and Duchesne (2016) point out the importance of contextual factors, including the setting, participants and tasks. For instance, students may lose interest because of repetitive teaching strategies (Suharti et al., 2021), other unmotivated students (Dincer et al., 2019), or EFL teachers, if students have negative feelings about them (Gan, 2021).

On the other hand, engaging students can be a great challenge for any teacher (Rahayu, 2018). One way to enhance and stimulate learning engagement is to provide students with a chance to discover and explore something by themselves (Suharti et al., 2021). In addition, technologies play an important role in engagement (Suharti et al., 2021; Gidzijauskienė et al., 2022). For example, in order to engage their students, EFL teachers use numerous ICT tools and online student response systems (such as *Padlet*, *Poll Everywhere*, *Mentimeter*, *Socrative*, etc.). During the coronavirus pandemic, they also helped the teachers observe students’ participation, as they provided them with feedback on the online class activities they did, and understanding of the content covered (Bonner et al.,

2022). Likewise, some students believe that their engagement is supported best through positive classroom atmosphere (Dincer et al., 2019) or teacher's praise (Firdaus, 2015). According to Self Determination Theory, students become more engaged when psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are met (Dincer et al., 2019). In fact, Li et al. (2016) showed that student empowerment and success are the factors that help to predict student engagement. In other words, these components, and probably many other, lead to academic engagement. Engagement, of course, is also related to motivation (Firdaus, 2015) and leads to effective learning (Dincer et al., 2019). This is the reason why it is important to study it, as it might help EFL teachers to adapt their teaching styles in such a way that they help their students learn by supporting their engagement.

Studies on EFL Student Engagement

Earlier studies on student engagement in the EFL setting report some interesting findings. For instance, the study by Dincer et al. (2019) revealed that cognitive engagement was related to fewer missed classes (more frequent class attendance), whereas higher emotional and agentic engagement was necessary in order to achieve higher grades. Emotional connection was more important to language students rather than participation in the activities provided by the language teacher, as the learners who felt their psychological needs were satisfied (because they had supportive classroom environment) were more engaged in all dimensions (behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic) (Dincer et al., 2019). When the teacher encouraged autonomous learning, it led to higher student satisfaction while studying, which in turn increased student engagement in their English classes, as they were more intrinsically motivated to study. This, however, may not be equally efficient in all contexts. For example, in the research by Liu (2020), the participants did agree that flipped classroom can motivate them to take part in activities related to English as a foreign language, but less than a half of them agreed that such an instructional strategy increased their engagement when it was implemented in their EFL classroom.

In their study, Oruç and Demirci (2020) revealed that there was a negative relationship between foreign language anxiety (a great issue in foreign, especially English, language education in the Turkish context) and English language achievement, as the former one affected the latter one, whereas engagement had a positive effect on foreign language (English) achievement in combination with other variables. Motivation and teacher support (Oruç & Demirci, 2020), and the teachers' teaching styles (Rahayu, 2018) could be some among those variables.

Susanti (2020) revealed interesting results in relation to an online EFL class, as more than fifty percent of the students admitted that sometimes they had stayed silent out of fear to make a mistake. This could probably apply to both online and face-to-face classes, but it is more difficult to remain disengaged in a physical classroom, as the teacher would tend to notice this more often than in an online class. On the other hand, the study revealed high student cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement in their online class, even though the students found it difficult to take part in collaborative activities and

express their ideas online (cognitive engagement), were anxious to make mistakes (emotional engagement) or had difficulty maintaining attention (behaviour engagement) (Susanti, 2020). In such situations, EFL teachers are recommended to provide more feedback and support student autonomy and self-confidence (Susanti, 2020). This study was carried out during the coronavirus pandemic. Another study conducted at that time showed that the use of online tools (referred to as “online learning systems”), such as *Zoom*, *Google Classroom* and others, increased student motivation to study, thereby enhancing EFL student engagement (Suharti et al., 2021). Akbari et al. (2016) pointed out that their findings suggested positive effect of collective learning on EFL students’ engagement through social network groups (e.g. on *Facebook*) and on their motivation in face-to-face groups (Akbari et al., 2016). Similarly, in another study, EFL students were more engaged in learning English through discussion forums and participated in them even if they were not obliged to (Peu Ebu et al., 2021). In general, the use of technologies engaged students and at the same time created a feeling that their learning outcomes were attainable (Huang, 2021). On the other hand, Isnani (2021) revealed that student engagement was affected negatively by technology-related issues and possibly slow internet connection during the coronavirus pandemic.

Bonner et al. (2022) measured student real time social, affective, and cognitive engagement in the Japanese EFL class. A web-based application called *Classmoto* (CM) was developed and used to measure student engagement and collect instant data about it. Through a survey, the study participants indicated that 55% of them “did not care about providing feedback,” 29% were worried how their teacher would take their feedback, while 14% felt pressure to provide insincere feedback (Bonner et al., 2022, p. 8). The rest of the examinees felt that when they needed to provide feedback, this activity interrupted their learning or they did not know what to provide feedback about, as there was not enough time to think about the completed task before moving to another one (Bonner et al., 2022). In other words, even though the study revealed high levels of student engagement, the students reacted because they were constantly reminded about giving feedback but were not deeply engaged in the activity itself, as the students seemed to be overwhelmed by the constant feedback they needed to provide. However, the findings revealed the students’ overall positive experience using the tool and indicated that it allowed them to communicate with their teacher more effectively. They also perceived the tool as something that allowed their teachers to understand their students but not to evaluate their own level of engagement or motivation or to do self-assessment.

Chen and Yang (2022) used *Zuvio* and *Socratic* as feedback tools (*Poll Everywhere* and *Plickers* are also mentioned), which they referred to as “online student response systems” (OSRS), in their study on EFL reading skills. The results indicated that when a question-and-answer format was used, the two tools helped improve and retain high student engagement in large classes because of anonymity and guaranteed personalised feedback (Chen and Yang, 2022). The teachers could also elicit information and see if the students understood the presented material or the completed activity (Chen and Yang, 2022). Thus, the students who participated in such active learning were more

engaged, had more responsibility and influence over their education than those who attended traditional (passive) classes (Chen and Yang, 2022). Of the two tools, *Socrative* turned out to be more effective, as it encouraged higher levels of engagement, improved students' reading skills and lexical competence. Yet, sometimes EFL teachers are afraid of "technological failure," so their insecurities prevent them from using the newest technological advances that encourage active learning, since they feel they do not have the skills or their students would be better at them than the teachers themselves (Chen and Yang, 2022).

In short, previous research has yielded different results, as they differed in their contexts, research methodology, student proficiency in English, their age groups, use of ICT tools for student engagement, and other aspects. However, it is possible to conclude that the most recent studies have focused on the relationship between EFL student academic engagement and technologies used to teach various language skills.

Data and Methodology

In order to make EFL teaching and learning more effective, some changes may be necessary, but it is impossible to implement them without understanding the current situation. The present study focuses on the analysis of self-perceived learner engagement in the EFL context. It intends to assess the role of engagement in the EFL classroom through the following research questions:

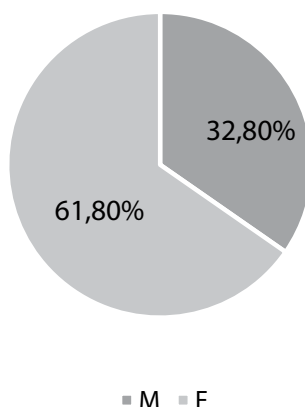
1. What engages students studying English as a foreign language?
2. What disengages students studying English as a foreign language?
3. How do students describe their own engagement while learning English as a foreign language?

In order to answer these questions, the study was conducted through an anonymous online questionnaire on *Google Forms*. It was deemed useful to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods to complement each other. Thus to obtain data, the questionnaire included 4 closed-ended and 4 open-ended questions (8 questions in total; each of which received 34 answers). It was hoped that the answers to the latter questions in particular would help to better understand students' experiences and perceptions of academic engagement in EFL classes and contribute to the field by providing suggestions on how EFL courses could best support their engagement. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the open-ended answers. It employed a systematic process of data coding and categorising (done by one researcher) while carefully reading the open-ended answers several times to identify the key words, to derive the main themes and categories; the answers were then grouped based on their themes which emerged based on specific questionnaire questions. These themes were interpreted with regard to the answers to the research questions. Microsoft Excel was used to process quantitative data and represent it.

34 Lithuanian students studying English as a foreign language at upper-intermediate level at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) in Kaunas, Lithuania, were involved in the study on a voluntary basis. Random sampling was used to approach two classes taught

by the same English teacher in the mornings. Both of the classes were taught face-to-face four times a week, and one day (Wednesday) was the so-called *Moodle* day when the students worked independently on *Moodle*. In other words, both classes were taught in a hybrid mode. As the figure below shows, a larger part of the participants included female students – 61.8%, while the rest of the sample was male students (38.2%).

Figure 1
Participants' Gender

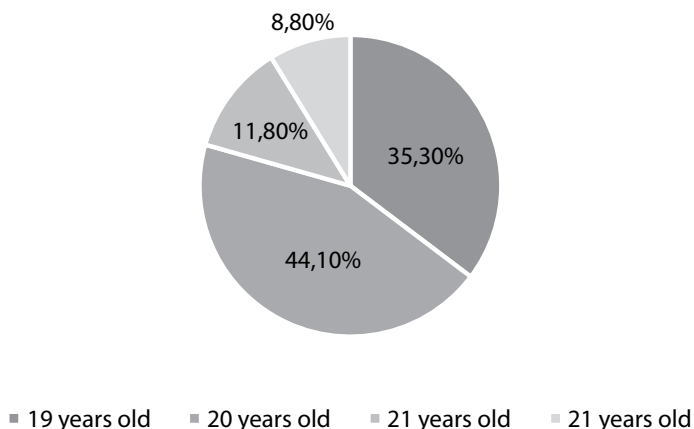


This gender imbalance is quite common at VMU, which is a liberal arts university, focusing on the humanities and social sciences, but it also has study programmes in “hard sciences”, agriculture and sports. Thus, depending on the study programme, gender proportions may differ slightly or greatly. In addition, upon their enrolment in the university, students take a placement test to determine their English proficiency so as to place them in the English class of an adequate level. The students form their own schedules: they choose when to study obligatory and elective courses (during the first two study years), and with the latter ones they can often choose their teachers and locations (as sometimes the same course may be taught by more than one teacher), at different times and various university buildings (as they are scattered throughout the city rather than in one campus). This is the case with foreign languages such as English, which is an obligatory study subject taught by a number of teachers. Students register to courses every semester until level C1/C2 proficiency is achieved, as VMU study regulations require. As the questionnaire was in English, it was believed that upper-intermediate level students would feel comfortable answering questions, especially the open-ended ones, in English. A link to the questionnaire was posted on *Moodle* during one of the students’ English classes, and they were allowed to use their laptop computers or cell phones to fill it out. No time limit was given, but it usually took around ten minutes to answer the questions.

The study participants were mostly 19-20 years old (19.7 years old on average), as the former ones constituted 35.3% and the latter ones 44.1% of the sample. Other participants were

older, which probably meant they either had started studying English at VMU at a very low level or they had failed this (upper-intermediate level) or some other English course before.

Figure 2
Participants' Age Composition



The majority of them (79.4%) were first year students (freshmen), 11.8% - second year, while the others were year 3, year 4, master's degree or PhD students, although usually English is studied only during the first two years of undergraduate studies.

Results and Discussion

For the open-ended questions, the respondents were asked to provide their opinions on what engages them in their EFL classes, disengages them in their EFL classes, and then what could be done differently in EFL classes to engage students, including themselves, more. Through thorough thematic analysis of students' responses, the indicated engagement factors can be divided into five thematic strands, namely *classroom activities (mostly speaking)* (explicitly mentioned by 16 students), *long-term personal goals* (mentioned by 4 students), *classroom atmosphere* (mentioned by 3 students), *students' mood* (mentioned by 2 students), and *miscellaneous* (as it was not possible to identify any one distinct theme connecting the provided comments). Some examples from different thematic strands can be found below (all 34 students answered in English but only some answers were selected to include in this part for representation purposes; the language is not corrected).

The theme of *classroom activities (mostly speaking)* was indicated the most frequently and reveals that students feel mostly engaged through speaking activities in their English classroom:

"Discussions, not being judged for a wrong answer." (Student 1, subsequently S1)

"Speaking activities and discussions." (S2)

"Speaking activities." (S3)

"Talking with others in class." (S9)

"I'm motivated by speaking activities, I have been learning English since I was 5 years old, so I like tasks that are challenging [...]." (S27)

"Speaking activities, grammar, new words." (S20)

"Speaking activities." (S23)

"Writing and speaking activities." (S26)

"Use of various interactive tools and speaking activities." (S28)

"My motivation to be engaged in EFL classes would be using face to face dialogues with other students." (S25)

As the examples suggest, some study participants are engaged by specific speaking activities or tasks, such as dialogues or role-plays, while others provided a list of several or multimodal activities (e.g. grammar, vocabulary or tasks involving interactive tools), among which speaking was included as well. As noted in the introduction of this paper, engagement and motivation are two different concepts. However, through thematic analysis it is possible to see that some students explicitly mention speaking activities as engaging and motivating (e.g., S2, S3, S16, S23, and S28). In addition, several students (e.g., S1, S9, and S25) highlight the importance of participating in discussions as engaging activities, which means that not every speaking activity for them is an engaging activity. Moreover, speaking activities should be playful in order to be engaging (e.g., S24, S28).

Some students have *long-term personal goals* related to the English language and thus feel engaged in their EFL classes, as having such goals can be seen as their driving force making them invest in learning. For example:

"I had to choose English classes because of my schedule in my University, but right now I see the results of practicing grammar and speaking. In addition, I want to pass the IELTS exam in this summer, so it's a good opportunity to get more knowledge." (S7)

"To become better in English." (S4)

"English language skills." (S19)

"English knowledge." (S22)

Such students are not engaged by one particular activity but rather by themselves seeing their goal being achieved. In this case, personal and academic growth seem to be two sides of the same coin.

The *classroom atmosphere* (including the teacher) was also indicated by some EFL students. It seems that if the atmosphere in the classroom is right, the activities themselves are not very important as all activities then seem to be engaging.

"Good atmosphere." (S11)

"My professors, group projects." (S12)

"I really like my EFL classes, because it is a lot different than in high school. My school teacher was really rude and mean to students, while in university I didn't cross any lecturer that will be similar to my previous teacher." (S14)

The student in the last example even compared the classroom atmosphere in high school and VMU. EFL teachers are seen as the main creators of positive classroom atmosphere, and the university experience was identified as the opposite of the one at school

(in a good sense). In general, students' responses demonstrate that students' engagement and even attitude towards learning English are influenced by the classroom atmosphere and their teacher is an integral part of the classroom and its atmosphere. The importance of positive classroom atmosphere in student engagement has been reported by some previous studies, for instance, Dincer et al. (2019).

Students' *mood* was also seen as an engagement factor. However, it means that particular engagement features may vary from time to time.

"It depends on the mood." (S5)

"Its depends on the mood." (S6)

Other engagement factors (*miscellaneous*) were different for individual students:

"Motivation to learn." (S8)

"When I know the topic a little bit from the past. I feel more confident answering teachers' questions." (S10)

"English lesson motivates me to wake up at the morning." (S18)

"What motivates me to be engaged in EFL classes are interactive tools like quizzes, multimedia presentations, and speaking activities that promote participation and active learning." (S27)

"Useful grammar tasks." (S30)

"Learning new vocabulary and grammar structures engages me the most in my EFL classes." (S31)

Thus, individual students are engaged by vocabulary or grammar activities, interactive tools, and other factors. Nevertheless, while commenting on engagement factors, three students indicated (intrinsic) motivation. As previous studies suggest, engagement is indeed related to motivation (Firdaus, 2015), which in turn may lead to effective learning (Dincer et al., 2019). However, as mentioned above, engagement and motivation are different, even though both of them can be related and may or may not influence one another. (This study did not focus on the relationship between the two).

The disengagement factors can be grouped into six thematic strands as follows: *lecture time* (mentioned by 3 students), *laziness* (mentioned by 2 students), *reading tasks* (mentioned by 2 students), *homework tasks* (mentioned by 2 students), *peers who are late or disturb the class* (mentioned by 5 students), and *miscellaneous* (the rest of the sample). Below are some examples of each category.

To begin with, the respondents are disengaged by the *lecture time*. For many years, the university has adopted the policy that divides undergraduate degree lecture time into different slots. The morning one, 8-11 am, is for foreign languages, including English. The next slot is reserved for speciality study subjects, and the afternoon, from approximately 4pm, is for various elective courses. Sometimes the classes from these last two slots may overlap. Very rarely (for instance, for students in particular study programmes) EFL classes are offered in the evenings. As for most EFL students their English classes take place in the morning, they are not happy about them, because they have to get up early, which makes them feel disengaged. This is what the respondents reported when asked about the factors that disengage them:

"Early lecture time." (S1)

"Early time." (S6)

"Early lessons." (S20)

Time as an important factor to Lithuanian university students in relation to English classes has been explored before (Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė, 2021). However, sometimes students seem to be disengaged by their own *behaviour*, as they are not eager to study or simply are *lazy*:

"Lack of motivation." (S22)

"Laziness." (S23)

In this case, a couple of students seem to relate motivation and engagement again. Certain classroom activities seem to be disengaging, too. For example, such disengaging tasks are *readings tasks*:

"Reading in the classroom." (S9)

"Reading tasks." (S10)

Meanwhile some other students perceive *homework tasks* to be disengaging, no matter what exactly such tasks involve:

"Checking homework if it's necessary." (S33)

"Mostly homework, but only because I don't have much time for it, so it's my problem." (S14)

The tasks themselves may not be disengaging, but the very fact that the students need to do them outside the classroom and then check in class is disengaging, especially when the students do not have the time to do them. These findings are in line with previous findings by Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė (2024) that showed that Lithuanian university EFL students find their EFL homework tasks useful and engaging only when linguistic skills are developed together with 21st century skills, such as creativity, critical thinking, and others.

On the other hand, the most frequently pointed out factor that disengages students is *peers who are late or disturb the class*:

"Unmotivated students." (S4)

"Students who are late, lazy students." (S16)

"Students who are late, came to class in the middle." (S17)

"Students who are late, students who talk every minute" (S13)

"Mostly, unmotivated students and people who are talking during the class." (S24)

"Disruptions, or when students arrive late consistently, disrupting the flow of the lesson." (S25)

"I am disengaged in EFL classes when there is a lack of participation from students [...]. So maybe this is where my brain stops during lessons." (S26)

It is evident that there are students who are late to class/ are lazy/ unmotivated/ talk when they are not supposed to/ disturb the classwork or have a combination of some of or all of these traits and thus are seen as the main reasons causing disengagement in the EFL classroom. Such student behaviour should be discouraged and changed in order to

raise student engagement levels. Indeed such findings are reported in other studies as well (e.g., Dincer et al., 2019).

Other (*miscellaneous*) disengaging factors are as follows:

"No group work." (S5)

"A lot of work from other lectures." (S15)

"It depends on the mood." (S7)

"When I don't know the topic we are talking about very much." (S11)

"Sometimes speaking activities, because I don't feel very self-confident." (S12)

"To learn English in class maybe because all I do at my job is speak in English." (S18)

"Short lecture and you need to go 4 times a week." (S19)

"Not interesting language." (S21)

"Mostly my belief that I can reach success without any hard work." (S27)

"Boring activities". (S28)

Even though these comments appear to be unrelated in any way (based on what they explicitly state), still common ground could be found. Two students have negative feelings towards certain class activities that disengage them (S5, S12), lack interest (S21, S28) or there are external factors (S15, S19) that disengage them while learning English.

The respondents' suggestions on how to engage students in their EFL classes were not numerous. Only six possible changes were indicated:

"Less grammar." (S2)

"More group discussions." (4)

"I have problems with listening, so maybe I would like to have more exercises with this type of tasks." (S7)

"Group or in pairs talking." (S8)

"Enthusiasm." (S9)

"Engaging students in EFL learning could be improved by including more interactive tasks, utilizing multimedia resources, and offering opportunities." (S10)

These reflect the fact that students differ in their preferences. Thus, what could engage them more differs from student to student. However, the common idea behind the preferences is that in order to make EFL classes more engaging (less disengaging), their teachers could include more interactive and communicative activities, which students are likely to find interesting or relevant to them.

The students were then given a list of 26 statements to choose from in order to reflect on their overall engagement while learning English as a foreign language. The dimensions of engagement are drawn from the literature review done for the study: Bonner et al., 2022; Dincer et al., 2019; Liu, 2020; Oruç and Demirci, 2020; Philp and Duchesne, 2016; Rahayu, 2018; Susanti, 2020. The dimensions of engagement (behaviour, cognitive, social, emotional, and absenteeism) were not provided with the statements indicated in the questionnaire and are indicated in Table 1 for discussion purposes. The percentage in each case indicates how many students chose the statement, as the respondents were able to choose as many as possible to reflect on their overall experience in terms of engagement in the EFL context.

Table 1
Statement on overall student engagement while learning English

Statement	%	frequency of choice	Dimension of engagement
I study English on a regular basis.	55.9%	19	behaviour
I read EFL notes provided by the teacher (e.g., slides, wordlists, etc.) regularly.	38.2%	13	behaviour
I use English outside the classroom as much as I can.	55.9%	19	behaviour
I participate in my English classes actively.	52.9%	18	behaviour
I am passive in my English classes.	20.6%	7	behaviour
I don't take notes in my English class.	35.3%	12	behaviour
I am alert and concentrated on tasks in my EFL classes.	35.3%	12	cognitive
I am not alert or concentrated in my EFL classes.	11.8%	4	cognitive
I am autonomous in my EFL classes.	17.6%	6	cognitive
I am not autonomous in my EFL classes.	5.9%	2	cognitive
I do extra work for my EFL class that could help me learn.	17.6%	6	cognitive
I feel well when I do tests in my EFL class.	44.1%	1	cognitive
I don't feel well when I do tests in my EFL class.	14.7%	5	cognitive
I like collaborative tasks in my EFL classes.	35.3%	12	social
I do not like collaborative tasks in my EFL classes.	14.7%	5	social
I do not like to get peer feedback in my EFL classes.	14.7%	5	social
I like to get peer feedback in my EFL classes.	35.3%	12	social
I feel like I belong in my EFL class.	38.2%	13	emotional
I feel like I do not belong in my EFL class.	2.9%	1	emotional
I feel positive emotions while learning English.	76.5%	26	emotional
I feel negative emotions while learning English.	2.9%	1	emotional
I am interested in my EFL class and activities in it.	55.9%	19	emotional
I feel connected with other students and/or the teacher in my EFL class.	20.6%	7	emotional
I do not feel connected with other students and/or teachers in my EFL class.	25.5%	9	emotional
I attend most of the EFL classes.	61.8%	21	absenteeism
I miss most of the EFL classes.	17.6%	6	absenteeism

It appears that the respondents are quite engaged emotionally (emotional engagement) while studying English. Almost eight in ten students (76.5%) feel positive emotions and 55.9% are interested in their English classes and activities in them. Only 2.9% feel negative emotions while learning English and the same amount feel they do not belong in their English class. Such low results may be related to the fact that students feel positive classroom atmosphere, as discussed in terms of engagement factors above.

The level of behavioural engagement is quite high as well, as 55.9% study English on a regular basis and almost as many use English outside the classroom as much as they can. In addition, 52.9% participate in their English classes actively. However, in order to participate, students need to attend. Thus, it is not surprising that 61.8% admitted to attending most of their classes.

The results for social engagement are not as high, as, for instance, collaborative tasks and peer feedback do not significantly enhance student engagement. In addition, in terms of cognitive engagement, 44.1% indicated feeling well while doing tests in their EFL classes. Thus, these areas of engagement could benefit from more support.

As the choice of the statements reveals, there are certain areas of academic engagement while learning English that could be significantly improved. For instance, only 17.6% of the students do extra work for their EFL class (cognitive engagement) that could help them learn. Their EFL teachers could contribute in shaping student behaviour, since usually students do more extra work when they actually believe this can be useful to them. Moreover, they can be encouraged to read their notes or materials provided by the teachers (behavioural engagement), as only 38.2% said they were doing so. Furthermore, student concentration (cognitive engagement) can be enhanced, as 35.3% feel alert and concentrated on tasks in their EFL classes and 11.8% feel just the opposite. Others may be in the middle.

At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were also asked to reflect on their own engagement in EFL classes. An example could be the following:

"In my English classes, I like when we use different fun ways to learn, like games and talking exercises. They make learning more interesting for me. But when students are always late or don't join in, it can make me lose interest in the class." (S21)

Some other students reflected on how their English learning is a struggle to manage several activities in their lives:

"I try to attend and engage as much as I can, I'm a busy person that takes a lot of classes and has 4 different jobs on daily basis, so sometimes it's hard, but nowadays I try my best and I attend, I enjoy taking this class, I enjoy learning new stuff." (S22)

"I don't feel very motivated then learning English in class, but I'm working on improving my motivation. I missed a lot of English classes because of my work schedule but I hope soon I will be able to attend all my English classes. While missing English classes, I'm trying to work extra hard to improve my English skills." (S23)

Despite of the (dis)engagement factors discussed above, it appears that EFL student engagement can be very much affected by other factors that are not directly related to their English classes as such, since they have lives outside of the classroom and the university in general, which may prevent them from being engaged in their learning of English (as well as other study subjects). Philp and Duchesne (2016) emphasize the contribution of various contextual factors to student engagement, but they are more related to the classroom environment, materials and participants. As the present study reveals, contextual factors outside the classroom may be just as important or even more important. As a result, EFL teachers should not feel self-perceived guilt when despite their best efforts, they fail to engage their students. Sometimes students may be disengaged and this would have nothing to do with EFL teachers or English courses they teach, their methods, tasks, etc.

Conclusions

The study revealed that students' academic engagement is positively affected by such engagement factors as classroom activities (mostly speaking), long-term personal goals, positive classroom atmosphere, their own mood, and others that may vary from student to student. However, their levels of engagement are negatively affected by early lecture time, which may be at some point from 7:45am to 11am, students' laziness, peer behaviour related to being late and/ or disturbing the classroom order and flow, reading tasks (which may seem tedious), homework tasks (that are later checked in class), and other factors. In addition, the students' reflections on their own engagement while studying English were eye-opening, as they helped to see the bigger picture that was not revealed by asking the students to indicate what engages or disengages them. In other words, contextual factors related to students' lives outside the classroom and different challenges they experience may also contribute to their disengagement levels.

The study is limited in the number of participants and questions it involved, so the results cannot be very generalizable or widely applicable. Nevertheless, they can be useful in numerous ways. The findings of this study help to understand how some Lithuanian EFL students learn and may be beneficial in making EFL learning more effective by implementing necessary changes in the teaching and learning process. More of the activities that are seen as engaging could be included (e.g., speaking tasks), while those that are less favourable (e.g., reading or homework activities) could be modified or substituted with some others. ICT and other interactive tools and technologies or more multimodal teaching practices in general may be used to change the students' perception of such assignments as well. Students' behaviour may also be shaped so that it does not disengage their peers. Students need to be aware that their peers feel disengaged when they disrupt their classroom activities by turning up late and attempting to join a learning process that is already underway. In fact, EFL students may find the results interesting, as they could see some evidence that engagement is important and may directly affect their study outcomes. This, in turn, may raise their motivation to study.

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Angažovanje studenata u nastavi engleskog kao stranog jezika u Litvaniji

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Apstrakt

U radu su predstavljene rezultati kvalitativne i kvantitativne studije koja je koristila online upitnik za istraživanje percepcije litvanskih studenata o angažovanju u nastavi engleskog kao stranog jezika (EFL) na univerzitetu. U istraživanju se procenjuje uloga angažovanja u nastavi engleskog kao stranog jezika kroz sledeća istraživačka pitanja: 1) šta angažuje studente koji uče engleski kao strani jezik? 2) šta demotivira studente koji uče engleski kao strani jezik? 3) kako studenti opisuju sopstveno angažovanje tokom učenja engleskog kao stranog jezika? Kvantitativnom i tematskom analizom dobijenih podataka ustanovljeno je da su studenti angažovani kroz aktivnosti u učionici (uglavnom kroz govorne vežbe), dugoročne lične ciljeve, atmosferu u učionici, sopstveno raspoloženje i druge faktore koji mogu varirati od studenta do studenta. Neangažovanost je uglavnom uzrokovana vremenom održavanja predavanja (rani jutarnji termini), lenjošću studenata, drugim studentima koji kasne ili ometaju čas, zadacima čitanja ili domaćim zadacima. Studenti su se osvrnuli i na sopstveno angažovanje tokom učenja engleskog jezika, što je pomoglo da se sagleda šira slika o njihovom (ne)angažovanju, kojem takođe mogu da doprinesu pojedini izazovi izvan učionice. Sprovedeno istraživanje sugerira da su za poboljšanje efikasnosti nastave i učenja neophodne određene promene, koje je nemoguće sprovesti bez razumevanja trenutne situacije u kojoj se studenti nalaze. Poznavanje onoga što angažuje studente i onoga što ih odvraća od angažovanja u nastavi engleskog kao stranog jezika može pomoći da se zadovolje potrebe studenata, oblikuje njihovo ponašanje u učenju i usvoji više multimodalnih praksi u učionici.

Ključne reči: engleski kao strani jezik (EFL), angažovanost, neangažovanost, studenti litvanskog univerziteta.