Exploring EFL undergraduates' views of the impact teachers have on their online learning engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: EFL, teacher roles, online learning engagement, higher education, Vietnam	The COVID-19 pandemic has forced education systems worldwide to switch all learning and teaching to the virtual platform since late 2019. This swift transition has a certain impact on students' engagement during their online classes. Studies propose that online learning engagement, as a multidimensional construct, is affected by online connectivity and peer or teacher support. However, little has been done, specifically in the context of higher education in Vietnam, to study the influence of each factor separately. In pursuit of filling this gap, four focus group discussions are conducted. The discussions firstly aim to comprehend the participants' general perceptions about the influence of EFL lecturers on their online engagement, while the main part is to investigate how the four specific roles of online lecturers, including their pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles, affect learning engagement. This explanatory study concludes that how effectively EFL lecturers can perform these roles has a substantial impact on their students' engagement in learning English online. From the findings, the paper suggests language teachers should be provided with more training that caters to enhancing their flexibility in creating autonomy-supportive online tasks as well as their digital competence.

Introduction

E-learning is more popular than ever because it is the mandatory means of education across the globe during the COVID-19 epidemic (Radha et al., 2020). In the context of higher education in Vietnam, the Vietnamese government has been implementing synchronous online learning for almost two years to sustain educational activities while protecting students and teachers from the threat of the virus (MOET, 2020). As expected, this learning mode has brought to the surface a range of challenges for learners and educators, one of which is the issue of making

students engaged in online classes. There have been works on discovering the degree to which students engage in English e-learning as well as exploring the determinants of online learning engagement (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Famularsih, 2020; Laili & Nashir, 2021). However, such attempts are unfortunately scarce, let alone a more in-depth examination of the magnitude of how each factor influences EFL student engagement in online tertiary education in Vietnam. This study, therefore, is deployed to explore how EFL non-English major college students perceive the roles lecturers have in their online learning engagement.

Literature review

This part of the study is to review a range of literature relating to learning engagement and teacher roles. As for the former, various definitions and classifications of engagement are mentioned. Regarding the latter, the study specifically reviews the roles of online teachers as well as the ways they influence learners' engagement.

A. *Student engagement*
1. *Definitions*

There are different ways to define student engagement. The term can be understood as the degree of investment in terms of time and energy students dedicate to learning, which is identical to the "involvement, participation and commitment to some set of activities" (Fredricks et al., 2004; Mahdikhani & Rezaei, 2015, p. 110). The importance of understanding engagement in learning in general as well as in foreign language learning has been confirmed by many researchers. Fredricks et al. (2004) and Mosher and MacGowan (1985) both argue that strong engagement can prevent students from dropping out due to boredom or demotivation and positively influences academic success. In the field of language learning, concentration on the forms and functions of a target language is argued to be highly vital to help learners master that language (Schmidt, 2001; Gass, 2003). Moreover, Svalberg (2009) suggests the awareness of how engagement works can cast light on the rationales in terms of behaviors or attitudes behind a successful language learner. Regarding the nature of learning engagement, there is a general agreement among many practitioners that it is a multidimensional construct that incorporates the behavior, cognition, affection, and sociality aspects of a student (Fredricks et al., 2004; Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Hiver et al., 2021; Lambert et al., 2016; Svalberg, 2009). These dimensions of student engagement will be examined next.

2. *Dimensions of student engagement*

Concerning behavioral engagement, as stated by Fredricks et al. (2004), it is related to how participative learners are in academic and non-academic activities. Adhering to school regulations, paying persistent attention to lessons, or joining extracurricular activities are examples of behaviorally engaged students (Fredricks et al., 2004). Philp and Duchesne (2016) point out that a language learner's behavioral engagement is shown by him volunteering for interactive tasks. As for cognitive engagement, it is also about students willingly making investments in learning, but such efforts are made mentally (Fredricks et al., 2004). In other words, students cognitively engage in learning by applying various strategies such as raising

questions, explaining, or giving feedback to their peers (Fredricks et al., 2004; Helme & Clarke, 2001; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). In her work, Svalberg (2009) points out several indicators of cognitively engaged language learners, including their notice, memory, reflection, or inference of features of a language. Emotional engagement, in general, is about how students feel about their schools, learning tasks, peers, or teachers (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Students can be considered positively and emotionally engaged when they are enthusiastic or interested in learning, while feeling worried, tired, or frustrated can disengage them from learning (Skinner et al., 2008). In language classrooms, indicators for emotionally engaged learners are their level of "willingness, purposefulness, and autonomy" in learning (Svalberg, 2009, p. 250). The final dimension, social engagement, is specifically relevant to the language learning context since it refers to learners' effort in whether they are willing to begin and prolong conversations (Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Storch, 2008; Svalberg, 2009). By reviewing the works on social engagement, Philp and Duchesne (2016) propose that this dimension can determine the success of learning a language since socially engaged learners often embark on activities such as exchanging ideas or providing peer feedback.

It is worth mentioning that these dimensions of engagement are argued to influence each other (Fredricks et el., 2004; Hiver et al., 2021; Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Svalberg, 2009). For example, Philp and Duchesne (2016) and Hiver et al. (2021) suggest emotional engagement can affect other dimensions of engagement in the way students exert efforts as well as coming up with different strategies to complete a learning task. Svalberg (2009) also proposes that whether students are willing to interact with their peers is determined by their current feelings. In other words, social engagement is dependent on emotional engagement. The role of behavioral engagement in affecting the remaining dimensions is also confirmed in the work of Luan et al. (2020).

3. *Factors affecting student engagement*
• *The determinants of learning engagement*

As stated previously, student engagement is a multifaceted notion in which its different dimensions are "interrelated" with one another (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 61). To understand how such correlations take place, a range of studies about the determinants of learning engagement is examined.

One of the most cited works on student engagement, specifically the "antecedents of engagement," is by Fredricks et al. (2004, p. 73). There are four factors in their effort to summarize what influences learner engagement. Firstly, how an institution is organized, including its size or rules, can determine its students' behavioral engagement. Secondly, what is taking place inside a classroom is held accountable for the level of learning engagement. Precisely, whether peer support exists in a classroom can predict how engaged students are. While being accepted by other classmates can help a student grow more interested in their school, he or she can demonstrate poor manners when experiencing rejection or distrust from their peers (Fredricks et al., 2004; Svalberg, 2009). In their attempt to study the roles peer support plays in learning engagement, Dao and McDonough (2018) discover that EFL learners

are more socially and cognitively engaged when paired with those with higher proficiency. The explanation for this is that the formers are supported linguistically by the latter, which allows them to gradually perform better and become more active in a given task (Dao & McDonough, 2018). In addition, academically and personally, teacher support is argued to influence the three dimensions of engagement. For instance, when students know they are cared for by their teachers, they are willing to pay attention and adjust their attitudes more positively. Fredricks et al. (2004) also point out that by creating an environment where students know they are respected and supported, teachers are more likely to make students "more strategic about learning," which means they become more cognitively engaged (p. 75). This is furthered by Svalberg (2009) when she states language teachers can make their learners more emotionally engaged by providing clear instructions or informing students of the rationales behind what they must do. The next classroom-relevant context is about how the class itself is run. In their findings, Fredricks et al. (2004) conclude that a classroom with its norms being efficiently executed is bound to result in "higher time on task and fewer disciplinary problems" (p. 77).

In other words, behavioral engagement is increased. Whether students can be autonomous in learning is the last factor belonging to the classroom context category. In particular, learners tend to be more strategic as well as persistent when allowed to make choices in terms of tasks, which are signs of cognitive and behavioral engagement. The third indicator of learning engagement is the nature of a learning task. By reviewing the work of Newmann (1991, 1992) and Guthrie and Wigfield (1999, 2000), Fredricks et al. (2004) discover the five traits of an engagement-stimulating task. In particular, a task should be realistic and encourage all sorts of talents and skills from students to complete it. In addition, a good task should aim to generate learners' autonomy, collaboration, and joy. Some of these characteristics are identical to what Svalberg (2009) proposes about the kinds of language tasks that foster engagement. First of all, a task should be designed in a way it can provide a competitive yet enjoyable environment. Furthermore, high relevance in terms of a task topic and how it is performed must be considered. The fourth indicator refers to the relationship between students' needs and their learning engagement. According to Fredricks et al.'s findings (2004), students are more engaged when their needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence are satisfied. Regarding the first type, it is about feelings of belonging. Fredricks et al. (2004) argue that if students find their classroom safe and supportive, they are more willing to engage in learning, which is clearly a sign of strong emotional engagement. As for the needs for autonomy, they are met when students are allowed to make choices or decisions regarding the types of learning activities. This, as a result, leads to them being more participative and interested in their schoolwork, which is related to increased behavioral and emotional engagement. Needs for competence refers to the belief that students can be in control of what they should do to thrive in class. This need can be achieved when students find themselves in a well-managed classroom where the input they receive is sufficient to help them learn successfully.

- *Studies about the factors influencing student engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the application of online learning on a global scale has exposed schools to many challenges, one of which is the problem of poor learning engagement (Aboagye et al., 2021; Mseleku, 2020). In the context of teaching and learning English in universities in Asia, there have been several efforts to investigate the causes of this phenomenon. The quantitative investigation by Susanti (2020) suggests that undergraduates' behavioral engagement is relatively high, which is shown by their attempts to pay attention to online lessons and submit their assignments on time. However, these learners' cognitive and emotional engagement are unstable. As for the former, though the claim is they can understand the lessons, they experience difficulties in expressing their ideas when having to perform a task online. Similarly, fears of mistakes exist among the participants, which results in their silence during an online lesson, despite the fact their interest in the lesson remains high. While cognitive engagement is reported to be relatively positive due to the students being able to use Google Classroom efficiently, the work by Simbolon (2021) confirms that "the lack of familiarity" in using the application can be an impeding factor to their engagement (p. 167). Furthermore, Simbolon (2021) also argues an online task in terms of its design and characteristics is related to their engagement in performing it, which reflects what Fredricks et al. (2004) and Svalberg (2009) suggest what an engaging task should be. In their understanding of tertiary students' views about their e-learning experience, Laili and Nashir (2021) also discover that students tend to have heightened attention to online lectures regardless of them occasionally experiencing technical issues such as unstable Internet connection. This is also demonstrated by their effort in handing assignments prior to their deadlines. Nevertheless, these undergraduates are poorly engaged in terms of their emotions and interaction. 75% of the responses reveal that communication breakdown tends to take place in an online lecture if the Internet connection is disrupted. Another reason for such breakdowns is the students are unable to express themselves via their device screen fully. This, as a result, leads to boredom in learning, which indicates a decrease in emotional engagement. Also, trying to study engagement from students' perspectives, Luan et al. (2020) point out the major role that behavioral engagement in fostering or hampering how tertiary EFL learners are socially, cognitively, and effectively engaged in their online lessons. Furthermore, the level of behavioral engagement is determined by the degree of teacher support they receive during the e-learning process (Luan et al., 2020). This is identical to what Laili and Nashir (2021) argue about the role of online teachers in keeping their students engaged in interacting with each other. Aboagye et al. (2021), while studying the challenges college students face in a virtual class, also propose that teachers with inadequate training in online teaching can negatively impact the degree of learning engagement.

The above literature is of vast significance in pointing out two arguments. Firstly, student engagement is a multidimensional concept that can be studied and understood differently depending on the context in which it is investigated (Christenson et al., 2012; Janosz, 2012).

Secondly, though many factors might determine online learning engagement, teachers are always among the most influential antecedents in helping students experience "less boredom and engaging more" in learning (Wang et al., 2017, p. 9). Therefore, the roles of teachers have been the center of attention in a number of studies (Alvarez et al., 2009; Baran et al., 2011; Franklin & Harrington, 2019; Maor, 2010). Such roles are challenged even more during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the developing countries of Southeast Asia, where teachers may not be sufficiently equipped with the essential skills to teach online effectively, thus leading to poor learning engagement (Ulla & Perales, 2021). Consequently, the final part of the literature is dedicated to reviewing teacher roles in an online classroom and how this factor influences student engagement.

B. *The roles of online teachers and their effects on student engagement*

According to Berge (1995), for teachers to foster an effective virtual learning environment, there are four roles they must fulfill, which are "pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical" (p. 2). While the first role refers to teachers working as a facilitator who helps students comprehend a lesson, the second role is about creating a close-knit online classroom where classmates are respected and, therefore, willing to interact with each other. Regarding the managerial role it is about the ability of teachers to organize the flow of discussions in an online lesson, which includes introducing and applying rules or procedures for the sake of effective interactions among students. The final role requires online teachers to familiarize students with any online systems or software implemented for their online classroom. Berge (1995) emphasizes that this role must be carried out properly, which allows students to focus on a learning task comfortably. Such claims regarding the roles of online teachers can be argued to be the foundation for the later attempts to identify what teachers are expected to do to establish an engaging online lesson (Aydin, 2005; Anderson et al., 2001; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Goodyear et al., 2001). These roles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1- The roles of an online teacher

Researchers	Online teacher roles
Berge (1995)	Pedagogical, social, managerial, technical
Anderson et al. (2001)	Organizer, discourse facilitator, direct instructor
Goodyear et al. (2001)	Content facilitator, technologist, designer, administrator, process facilitator, adviser, assessor, researcher
Aydin (2005)	Content expert, process facilitator, instructional designer, adviser, technologist, assessor, material producer, administrator
Bawane and Spector (2009)	Professional, pedagogical, social, evaluator, administrator, technologist, adviser, researcher

Several studies have acknowledged the significance of online educators in fostering or hindering their learners' engagement. The findings from Gray and DiLoreto (2016) suggest an effective online classroom can be defined as how a teacher works as a technological strategist by coming up with different online activities or tools to encourage student engagement. Almarghani and Mijatovic (2017) further this by arguing teachers with sufficient online teaching techniques but being passive in using them are unlikely to engage their learners. On the other hand, by taking an active role, online lecturers are bound to increase the level of student engagement in group discussions, presentations, or debates (Almarghani & Mijatovic, 2017). More recently, the instant shift from offline learning into virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic has driven more practitioners to investigate how this transition affects the ways online instructors engage or disengage their students. Thornberg et al. (2020) categorize "teacher doing" and "teacher being" as the substantial determinant of online learning engagement (p. 1). The former refers to how lecturers apply various methods to teaching virtually and their ability to manage online classrooms. In other words, a teacher's pedagogical and managerial are paramount. The latter term is related to a range of traits that students expect their teachers to possess in a virtual classroom. These characteristics include kindness, consideration, helpfulness, skillfulness, fun, and fairness. Such qualities are argued to resemble the social role suggested by Berge (1995). However, suppose teachers are unable to perform such roles. In that case, namely the technical role, their students are likely to demonstrate poor participation or boredom in online lessons, which are identified as declined behavioral and emotional engagement (Ulla & Perales, 2021).

Research Questions

This study, therefore, aims to answer a research question:

How do non-English major undergraduates in Vietnam perceive the influence of online teachers on their English learning engagement?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Although universities across Vietnam have recently been able to resume on-campus teaching, the struggles that both lecturers and students faced in the period between 2019 and 2021, when online education was the only viable means, are worth examining to better equip educators with the capability to deliver proper online lessons whenever necessary. To answer the research question, the study aims to collect data from non-English major undergraduates at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry. The rationale for choosing such participants is they are the ones who are directly affected by the pandemic. In other words, it is students who are capable of "accurately recalling and reporting their engagement" (Hofkens & Ruzek, 2019, p. 315). Moreover, the fact the participants come from different classes is likely to increase how dynamic their responses are to the issues relevant to engagement, which reflects the

multifaceted and contextual-dependent nature of learning engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Christenson et al., 2012; Janosz, 2012; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Furthermore, it is crucial to point out all the participants in this context attended their online English class via Zoom once a week during the most recent semester, which lasted 15 weeks. During the term, they had two lecturers, a Vietnamese and a foreign one, teach them English on an odd and even weekly basis. In addition, on the days when a foreign lecturer was in charge, a Vietnamese teacher still had a duty to stay in the Zoom class to provide any assistance if needed. With regards to how the respondents are chosen, the author sent his colleagues a Google Form link in which the study is introduced along with the call for participants. The colleagues then shared this link on social media. After two weeks, there was a total of 40 students responded to the link and 25 of them claimed they were available to attend the research. However, only 20 respondents could join the discussions, while the remaining could not due to their personal reasons.

Design of the Study

This study is exploratory in its nature. First of all, this design is applied to "scope out" the significance of a phenomenon or behavior. This is identical to the study's aim, which is to examine how influential teachers are in affecting online learning engagement (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 6). Second of all, the characteristic of exploratory work is it does not primarily try to discover any particular solutions to a research problem but rather serves as a call for "more in-depth" attempts, which is in line with the scope of this study (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 6).

Data collection & analysis

Focus-group discussion is applied to collect the participants' perceptions. The interest in this instrument has been growing over the previous decades as it is "effective" and "economical" (Morgan, 1996; Birmingham & Wilkinson, 2003, p. 90). It can be defined as the activity when individuals are grouped and interact with each other to discuss a given subject (Powell & Single, 1996). It is the interactive nature of focus groups that helps distinguish them from group interviews where all group members are interviewed simultaneously (Gibbs, 1996; Morgan, 1996). Birmingham and Wilkinson (2003) also add that successful focus-group discussion allows participants to not only freely express their views but also comment on others', through which "richer, deeper and more honest" responses are likely to be obtained (p. 92). This also explains why a focus group discussion is chosen for this study since the participants may find it more comfortable to interact with each other rather than directly with the interviewer, thus contributing to the higher quality of the data collected. Regarding the participants, the author chooses them by basing on the criterion of forming focus groups. Specifically, they are non-English major students coming from different English classes with different experiences in studying the subject online as well as "strong opinions" about the topic of this research that they are eager to share (Birmingham & Wilkinson, 2003, p. 98). As for the interviewer, though he does not seem to take an active role in the discussions, his part is still crucial in planning the meetings with great care in terms of seeking appropriate participants, forming questions, and analyzing the data (Birmingham & Wilkinson, 2003). Moreover, he needs to be an effective facilitator who probes questions, encourages everyone to contribute, and at the same time

"keeps the session focused" (Gibbs, 1996, p. 5). There is a total of four groups with five members in each, which is an ideal condition concerning group size and the likelihood of good quality responses emerging (Birmingham & Wilkinson, 2003; Morgan, 1996).

Results/Findings and discussion

Table 2: Focus-group questions

No.	Question
1.	What do you think about the roles of lecturers in your online learning engagement?
2.	In your experience, how can the pedagogical role of a lecturer affect your online learning engagement?
3.	In your experience, how can the social role of a lecturer affect your online learning engagement?
4.	In your experience, how can the managerial role of a lecturer affect your online learning engagement?
5.	In your experience, how can the technical role of a lecturer affect your online learning engagement?

As can be seen from Table 2, each discussion contains a set of five items designed to capture the members' perceptions. For the convenience of every group member in terms of time and language, the discussions are carried out and recorded in Vietnamese using Google Meet after school. All the recorded responses are then translated and transcribed in English prior to being thematically analyzed. It is also worth acknowledging the moderator briefly defines the four roles and gives examples for each before starting a discussion to make the participants know clearly about the topic, through which richer responses for questions 2 to 5 can be attained.

1. The general belief regarding lecturers and online learning engagement

The undisputed role of lecturers is acknowledged by all the groups though there is a difference in terms of how much it affects engagement. Specifically, while one group agrees that EFL teachers can be quite influential, the remaining three groups confirm a larger degree of effect teachers have on their engagement. The typical replies to this question are below.

> *I believe what teachers do in an online classroom can affect student engagement to a certain degree.* (Group 4 – Member 2)

> *Indeed, for me, lecturers can greatly impact my engagement in studying English online.* (Group 1 – Member 1)

2. EFL teachers' pedagogical role and online learning engagement

The discussions can let emerge the two themes related to how teachers can pedagogically influence the online engagement of EFL students. Firstly, a dictatorial lecturer who always forces things upon his learners is likely to hinder their engagement.

> *My lecturer rarely listens to what we have to say. He always wants to be the one controlling everything in our online lessons. This is really frustrating.* (Group 1 – Member 5 – declined emotional engagement)

> *He gives us a task and asks for our responses. In return, we do try to answer but never get a chance to speak freely since he never lets us finish our parts. I feel really discouraged because I have been preparing for the task so well*. (Group 2 – Member 5- declined emotional engagement)

> *My lecturer never explains why an answer is right or wrong while we need to understand it.* (Group 3 – Member 1 – declined cognitive engagement)

> *My lecturer always gives us a list of correct answers to our exercises without explaining them. We don't have an opportunity to comprehend a lesson fully because of this.* (Group 4 – Member 3 – declined cognitive engagement)

The second theme, which is also the most discussed one among the participants, refers to the flexibility in teaching English online. This quality of online lecturers, according to the focus groups, can be shown through their constant variation of the kinds of activities, especially the interactive ones, assigned to students.

> *I can understand a lesson more easily since my lecturer often links what he's teaching with reality.* (Group 1 – Member 4 – increased cognitive engagement)

> *The different activities my lecturer assigns us to do, give us a chance to interact with each other, which makes a lesson less boring.* (Group 2 – Member 2 – increased social/emotional engagement)

> *Knowing my lecturer always invests a lot in his teaching, I am willing to ask questions about the lesson.* (Group 2 – Member 4 – increased cognitive engagement)

> *My lecturer can make very funny and realistic examples about a grammar point she's teaching. I find that very interesting.* (Group 3 – Member 4 - increased emotional engagement)

> *I agree; my lecturer usually has an activity at the end of a unit to help us reflect on what we have learned.* (Group 3 – Member 5 – increased cognitive engagement)

> *I usually feel fun when joining my online class because my lecturer has many activities for my friends and me to talk to each other. Not just that, thanks to these exercises, I can review my previous knowledge.* (Group 4 – Member 2 – increased emotional/cognitive engagement)

I like it when my lecturer put us in pairs in a break-out room. It's more comfortable for us to communicate and brainstorm ideas for a given task. (Group 4 – Member 1 – increased social/cognitive engagement)

My foreign lecturer gave us a lot of speaking tasks which encouraged us to stay focused to interact properly. (Group 2 – Member 2 – increased behavioral/social engagement)

3. EFL teachers' social role and online learning engagement

The responses to this question suggest that a lecturer's characteristics can influence the degree of online engagement. In this context, it is the friendliness and enthusiasm of the lecturers that make the online environment more positive, which fosters positive feelings among the students. As a result, these students are more engaged in communicating with each other.

Sadly, I feel like my lecturer does not care about us. She just goes through everything from the book without having us communicate. I find her online lessons very boring. (Group 1 – Member 3 – declined emotional engagement)

My lecturer is very friendly. This helps her create a very relaxing learning engagement though we are doing it online. (Group 2 – Member 4 – increased emotional engagement)

Thanks to my lecturer's enthusiastic attitude in instructing us, I grow more confident in communicating with my peer. (Group 3 – Member 3 – increased emotional/social engagement)

Because my foreign lecturer cannot pronounce our names precisely, it is hard for us to actually know if he's calling us, so we hesitate to answer his question. Unfortunately, my Vietnamese lecturer did nothing about it, so the environment was very confusing. (Group 4 – Member 3 – declined behavioral/social engagement)

4. EFL teachers' managerial role and online learning engagement

With regard to the management role of English lecturers, it all comes down to the degree of online classroom discipline they are willing to execute. In particular, the following comments demonstrate how different degrees of discipline can determine student engagement.

My lecturer is ready to award us with bonus points if we show him that we want to learn. Meanwhile, he can be very strict with those who lack attention to the lesson. This really pushes me to stay concentrated when learning with him. (Group 1 – Member 2 – increased behavioral engagement)

My lecturer often tends to invite those students who don't raise their hand during a Zoom lesson. This drives everyone to stay alert in learning. (Group 3 – Member 4 – increased behavioral engagement)

Though I like the fact my lecturer allows us to join a break-out room to talk to each other, I must admit he may not be able to manage every room effectively since there are too many of them. Some of my friends can just sit in front of their screens and do nothing, and that often goes unnoticed. (Group 2 – Member 3 – declined behavioral engagement)

> *It is always weird for my foreign teacher to check attendance, we have no idea which name he is pronouncing, and my Vietnamese lecturer does not seem to care about it. I mean, I still see her online in Zoom, but she does nothing. As a result, some of us are thought to be absent, which is not really fair.* (Group 1 - Member 3 – declined behavioral engagement)

5. EFL teachers' technical role and online learning engagement

The more familiar and flexible an EFL lecturer is in using different applications or websites is bound to nurture online engagement in learning English. Specifically, an attractive Powerpoint presentation enables lecturers to draw their students' attention. In addition, students feel they are being cared for since their instructor creates online group chats to help them with a lesson. They also benefit from the several English learning websites sent by their teachers through which they can recap recently taught grammar or vocabulary.

> *The well-designed Powerpoint slides by my lecturer really caught our attention to what is being presented.* (Group 1 – Member 4 – increased behavioral engagement)

> *While my foreign lecturer is in charge, my Vietnamese lecturer usually supports us via a chat app if she finds us struggling with our tasks. I really like and appreciate it.* (Group 1 – Member 2 – increased emotional engagement)

> *When my lecturer experienced an issue with Zoom, she quickly changed to using Google Meet. Our focus on the lesson is rarely affected, thanks to this.* (Group 2 – Member 4 – increased behavioral engagement)

> *My lecturer often ends a lesson with an online game that aims at helping us review the lesson.* (Group 3 - Member 5 – increased cognitive engagement)

> *My lecturer not only introduces a range of English learning applications to us, but he also guides us to use them. I feel very secure in his class, which helps me be more willing to respond to him.* (Group 4 – Member 2 – increased emotional/social engagement)

Interpretation of the results

The responses above are among the most typical comments that confirm the significance of every role of a lecturer in encouraging or diminishing learning engagement. Aside from that, the interrelationship among the dimensions of engagement is also shown through some responses. Firstly, regarding the pedagogical role, lecturers may risk causing students to experience negative emotions such as frustration and demotivation if they keep dictating what the students do in an online classroom. Furthermore, it is this behavior of lecturers that is likely to influence how they provide feedback on any performance from the students. Specifically, some respondents claim that their chances to process the rationales for the answers to a particular exercise are taken away as their lecturers merely provide the answers without explaining anything. In other words, these participants are unable to engage cognitively.

Another aspect relating to the pedagogical role is the degree to which lecturers try to vary their teaching techniques. Specifically, lecturers' flexibility in terms of varying teaching activities is reported to greatly impact a specific dimension of engagement which then influences the others. Secondly, if lecturers can fulfill their role in creating a friendly and caring online learning environment, they are likely to raise their students' social engagement. On the contrary, by reacting indifferently to the students' struggles, lecturers will gradually reduce the attention of the students, thus making them less willing to engage socially. Thirdly, by applying different strategies to maintain online attention, such as giving additional points to a student who shows active participation or constantly calling different students to respond to a task, lecturers can help increase the learners' behavioral engagement. Finally, similar to how the other roles have affected online learning engagement, the technical role of lecturers can also trigger a chain reaction in terms of learning engagement in students. Some respondents state that by introducing students to a certain English learning application along with guiding them on how to use it properly, a lecturer can make these learners feel they are well cared for in his online class. This, as a result, pushes the learners to be more ready to interact with the lecturer. In other words, the learners become more socially engaged.

Discussion

The above findings echo what has been known about teacher roles and student engagement in e-learning. Besides, the study manages to bring to light the factor of having a foreign lecturer co-teach an online class with a Vietnamese counterpart, which will be discussed at the end of this section. Albeit not being the sole source of influence on student engagement in e-learning, EFL lecturers are perceived among the four focus groups as a highly impactful force that can determine their engagement. How the pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles of online teachers specifically affect the members of each focus group aligns with what has been found from an array of studies.

The findings relevant to the first role suggest that an online lecturer's dictatorship and flexibility are certain to influence different dimensions of his learners' engagement. This is, in fact, similar to what Fredricks et al. (2004), Franklin and Harrington (2019), and Aladsani (2022) argue about teachers should encourage learner autonomy by giving them choices to make through which they can freely think more strategies to handle a task. In addition, Svalberg (2009) recommends that language teachers should create a task or stimulate a classroom where learners can experience a sense of joy. Unfortunately, some participants of the study must experience an online English lesson with a lecturer dictating everything they do, consequently negating their cognitive and emotional engagement. The last and also the most frequent theme relating to the pedagogical role in this study is the significance of teachers' flexibility in nurturing online learning engagement. Such a finding also surfaces from the previous works attempting to identify how teachers affect learner engagement. Specifically, the students in these contexts admit their boredom in learning declines, and they are more eager to interact with each other if teachers manage to raise "the level of variation" or "employ many efficient strategies" in

teaching (Thornberg et al., 2020, p. 10; Aladsani, 2022, p. 178). In the context of language learning, such variations can be done by teachers creating topical and collaboration-stimulating tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004; Svalberg, 2009; Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Pham et al., 2021).

The findings referring to the effects the social role of teachers has on the participants' engagement reveal that online teachers' friendliness or enthusiasm can result in an emotionally safe online environment where student engagement flourishes. Franklin and Harrington (2019) share the same view by stating that friendly or kind teachers can serve as a model which "promotes higher levels of classroom participation" (p. 3). Moreover, the idea that teachers' sociability or enthusiasm can benefit learning engagement is proposed by Thornberg et al. (2020). Their theory of "teacher being" portray such qualities of teachers as one of the elements contributing to "students' academic engagement" (pp. 11-12).

With regards to how lecturers' ability to manage an online classroom influences the participants' behavioral engagement, the study also reflects what Fredricks et al. (2004) claim about teachers being able to establish the kind of classroom norms that leads to students paying more attention to a given task. Furthermore, Franklin and Harrington (2019) point out it is of utmost importance for teachers to formulate the kind of expectations they wish to see when students communicate together to foster mutual respect, which safeguards their positive behaviors. In other words, students are to demonstrate "great compliance" with their learning because they receive support and respect from their teachers and classmates (Luan et al., 2020, p. 8).

Most of the comments about the technical role of English lecturers in this study suggest that teachers who are digitally competent and willing to make flexible use of such competence are sure to engage their students in English e-learning. This is in line with Laili and Nashir's findings (2021) which state students' learning remains least interrupted in the face of unstable connection since their teacher has posted the learning materials on their Whatsapp group. However, Simbolon (2021) states that some of his undergraduates possess "limited familiarity" with their online learning platform, which disengages them from interacting effectively with their teacher (p. 167). Likewise, the undergraduates in Luu's investigation (2022) admit they have to face many challenges when studying English online because of their lecturer's "incompetence" in performing his technical role (p. 221). These results demonstrate the importance of teachers in "utilizing a variety of technology tools" for the sake of fostering engagement in an online classroom (Aladsani, 2022, p. 178).

It is worth stating that a teacher's capability in terms of his positive personality and pedagogical, managerial, and technological competence is of no value if he does not have an intention to act on it (Almarghani & Mijatovic, 2017). This is true to the context of the study. Though the majority of the participants possess quite an ideal degree of engagement due to their lecturers being able to perform their different roles effectively, those with a less positive experience should not be ignored. Specifically, some respondents do not receive sufficient support from their lecturers when it comes to correcting exercises and studying with a foreign lecturer. The first issue is likely caused by lecturers being unable to fulfill their pedagogical role, which has been discussed previously. Meanwhile, the second is considered quite a unique issue. The

degree of assistance the Vietnamese lecturers are willing to give to their expatriate colleagues can also manipulate the participants' online engagement. This paper considers this a unique discovery because every previous work mentioned in this study does not examine the interrelationship among native English teachers, non-native English teachers, and student engagement in e-learning.

Conclusion

The four group discussions confirm the relationship between EFL lecturers and online student engagement. Specifically, how efficient lecturers are in performing their pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles is proportional to how engaged their students are in learning English online. According to this study, the presence of a teacher's dictatorship in a classroom leads to a decline in students' cognitive engagement since they are not allowed to generate their own thoughts. As a result, this causes their frustration to rise, which is a sign of negative emotional engagement. Instead, when teachers strive to vary online learning activities, especially the ones in which students can freely interact with their peers, they are expected to raise students' interest in communication. In other words, students become more affectively and socially engaged. Secondly, caring teachers are likely to develop an online classroom where students feel safer and more confident to engage as they know they are respected. Thirdly, the matter of respect is, at the same time, achieved when lecturers prove their competence in managing the class with appropriate discipline. Finally, the participants are more ready to maintain their focus and invest more in learning English if they are carefully guided by the lecturers who possess great familiarity and flexibility in operating technological tools such as PowerPoint, applications, or websites. To put it in another way, students become more behaviorally and cognitively engaged if their teacher is a competent technologist. These findings confirm the multifaceted nature of student engagement which means the dimensions of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement co-exist within a student, and they are connected with one another (Fredricks et al., 2004; Christenson et al., 2012; Hiver et al., 2021). Furthermore, it can be said that the EFL lecturers with high digital competence are often the ones with constant variations in terms of designing online tasks. In addition, several participants state not only do their lecturers provide them with different English learning applications or websites, but these lecturers also instruct them on how to use such tools effectively. This is consequently an indication of the technical and social role being properly performed. On the other hand, the context of this study shows that pedagogically, socially, and technically competent online teachers may not guarantee their efficiency in managing an online class which can put students' behavioral engagement at risk. Furthermore, the fact that there is a native English teacher and a non-native English teacher working simultaneously in an e-learning classroom and how the latter supports the former can also influence student engagement.

It can be concluded from the above summary that EFL lecturers need to be more prepared to deliver the kind of virtual lessons which strengthen online engagement in learning English.

Specifically, this study recommends that more in-depth training should be provided to EFL teachers to serve multiple purposes. Firstly, they must aim to raise the awareness of lecturers regarding how different online classes are from the face-to-face ones since the sudden transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to mandatory e-learning may put many lecturers in a confusing stage of how to teach effectively (Daniel, 2020). Secondly, these training sessions should emphasize the importance of English teacher flexibility in teaching an online lesson that contains a range of autonomy-stimulating tasks as students are more engaged when offered choices relating to their learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Svalberg, 2009; Hiver et al., 2021). Thirdly, EFL lecturers should be trained on how to harness the usefulness of technological-related tools as well as the online world to attract and maintain students' attention. Most significantly, stakeholders must find an appropriate way to encourage lecturers to actually apply what they have attained from such training to teaching English online, as only the teachers with an "activating influence" are the ones who can foster their learners' engagement (Almarghani & Mijatovic, 2017, p. 11).

Two existing gaps can be identified in this study. Firstly, it is only conducted within one higher institution, especially in Ho Chi Minh city. This means its degree of generalizability may be low as student engagement could be understood more thoroughly if it is examined in many contexts (Janosz, 2012). Therefore, the results this paper yields may not be generalized, but such findings are expected to create "a holistic understanding" of the magnitude of EFL lecturers' roles in learners' online engagement from which larger-scale attempts can be made across universities to better understand the issue (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 40; Birmingham & Wilkinson, 2003). Secondly, the participants stated they are not so engaged in an online English lesson because of the problems related to their foreign lecturer. This is argued to be another gap in the study because it is not primarily designed to capture any matters regarding the roles of native English teachers, which should have been investigated separately due to their distinctive characteristics compared to Vietnamese EFL teachers. Another direction that future studies can take up is to identify whether there is a correlation between how supportive native and Vietnamese lecturers are of each other and online learning engagement.

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