



Enhancing Student Engagement in Language Classrooms: A Multifaceted Approach

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Abstract

Language teachers are bestowed with some responsibilities which are not limited to the teaching of the prescribed texts and grammar. They are to create an interactive and enjoyable learning experience for the students. As student engagement plays a pivotal role in effective language learning, the teacher tries to keep the students engaged in the classroom by using different methods and approaches of teaching. This study explores the factors that influence student engagement in language classrooms and focuses on teaching methods, classroom environment and the integration of audiovisual materials. By collecting data from both language learners and instructors, this study identifies a range of effective teaching-learning practices that augment student participation and motivation. The findings will provide practical insights for the teachers who are seeking to develop an interactive and immersive learning experience, ultimately enhancing language learning outcomes. Outcome is the key to learning motivation. Without any concrete outcome, students may become discouraged in learning a new language.

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Introduction

Engagement is particularly very much essential for language acquisition, as it facilitates interaction, enhances comprehension and strengthens memory span. As a result, student engagement is an important component of effective learning of any language. It includes behavioral, emotional as well as cognitive involvement in the learning process that influences the motivation and success of language learners. Engaged students tend to participate actively in classroom discussions, complete assignments diligently and show enthusiasm for acquiring new linguistic skills. They demonstrate better linguistic proficiency, improved communicative competence and greater confidence in using the target language (TL). Research in educational psychology consistently shows that meaningful learning requires active learner engagement rather than passive reception of information (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Prince, 2004). Fredricks et al. (2004) claim that learning cannot be effective without the active participation and engagement of learners. However, maintaining high levels of engagement in language classrooms remains a challenge for various factors, including instructional methods, classroom environment and the use of technology in the classroom. Therefore, understanding the factors that contribute to student engagement is essential for optimizing the overall language learning outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

A language class in Bangladesh represents a heterogeneous learning environment with students of varied backgrounds. The students are generally of different ages, different social statuses, different educational backgrounds as well as different capacity for understanding. In such a class, there needs to be some engaging methods of teaching a language so that all the students can understand in the same manner despite their age, social status, education and understanding. Although these methods are widely discussed in theory, only a limited number of educators actively implement them in their language classrooms. Besides, most of the methods used by the educators are often

insufficiently engaging to maintain student engagement for the full duration of the class. But for better learning and understanding of the language, it is very necessary that the students stay engaged in the classroom. Otherwise, learning will not take place in the desired manner. However, the body of research addressing this issue remains still limited. From this limitation in the field, this research focuses on more engaging methodologies and approaches of teaching a language so that the students stay engaged in the classroom and learn effectively.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the factors that contribute to student engagement in language classrooms and to identify effective strategies that enhance student participation and motivation. By examining the role of teaching methodologies and observing the classroom environment of different language classes, this research seeks to provide educators with some practical technics that can improve student engagement and overall language learning experience.

The significance of this study is rooted in its potential to inform language instructors, curriculum designers and educational policymakers about some effective practices that nurture a more engaging and interactive learning atmosphere. Keeping student engagement as a key determinant of language learning, understanding how to cultivate and sustain it can lead to improved academic performance and increased student satisfaction. Additionally, the findings can contribute to the development of innovative teaching approaches that integrate modern educational technologies to optimize learning outcomes and publish a list of effective instructional approaches to keep the students engaged in language classrooms. As a result, using these technics and approaches will empower the learners to be self-confident and express their opinions in the target language (TL) in a significantly appropriate manner.

Literature Review

1. Definitions and Theories of Student Engagement

Student engagement has been widely studied in educational research.

Various definitions and theoretical frameworks shape its understanding. According to Fredricks et al. (2004):

Engagement consists of behavioral, emotional and cognitive components. Behavioral engagement refers to participation in academic tasks; emotional engagement pertains to students' feelings toward learning and cognitive engagement involves investment in learning strategies.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory also emphasizes the role of social interaction in student engagement. It provided evidence that collaborative learning increases motivation and deeper understanding. Similarly, Schunk and Mullen (2012) define engagement as an active, constructive process that involves effort, persistence and self-regulation which are very essential in learning a second language.

Student engagement is equally related to their level of motivation. If a student does not have any motivation for learning a language, he/she will certainly learn less compared to one who has higher motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) in their Self-Determination Theory argued:

Events that promote greater perceived competence will enhance intrinsic motivation, whereas those that diminish perceived competence will decrease it.

2. Previous Studies on Engagement in Language Classrooms

Several studies have been done on student engagement and its importance on the outcomes. Most of them have demonstrated that student engagement directly impacts proficiency outcomes. According to Brewster and Fager (2000), engaged learners are motivated by curiosity, interest and enjoyment. They show more enthusiasm and concentration on the behavioral level. It is also argued in studies that engaged students show higher academic achievement and persistence (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

In the context of language learning, Dörnyei (2001) talks about the role of motivation in sustaining engagement, while Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) argue that engagement is dynamic and influenced

by both internal and external factors. There is a correlation between engagement and academic achievement (Bulger, 2008). Taylor and Pearson (2004) state:

Student engagement has primarily and historically focused upon increasing achievement, positive behaviors and a sense of belonging in students so that they might remain in school.

Coates (2007) claims:

The engagement is seen to comprehend active and collaborative learning, participation in challenging activities formative communication, involvement in enriching educational experiences and feeling supported in the classroom practices.

Recent studies have examined digital tools, such as gamification and multimedia, as effective means to enhance engagement in language classrooms (Hodges et al., 2020).

3. The Role of Teaching Methods, Classroom Environment and Audiovisuals

Teaching Methods: Active learning approaches, such as task-based learning (TBL) and communicative language teaching (CLT), have been shown to increase student engagement (Ellis, 2003). Nunan (2014) mentioned, “Task-based curricula typically ask students to communicate by sharing answers at each stage of a lesson.”

Many teachers report that they often don't get enough time to go beyond just giving answers rather than engaging in meaningful interactions with their students. Interactive strategies, including peer collaboration, discussions and problem-solving activities, encourage active participation and deeper comprehension (Brown, 2007).

With the growth of student-centered classrooms, knowledge-based (grammar testing, for instance) objectives have been overtaken by more communicative objectives (Plews & Zhao, 2010). Saeed and Zyngier (2012) mention four criteria for better interaction and student engagement: (1) fun activities to reduce stress, (2) meaningful activities to solve problems, (3) interactive activities to use their L2 to

complete a shared task and (4) routine activities to help students better understand the tasks.

Creating and maintaining a comfortable and supportive classroom environment is an effective strategy teachers can apply. Al-Shalabi (2015) mentions, “Encouraging an open, non-threatening atmosphere allows students to ask questions and participate without any fear of making mistakes.” This kind of supportive environment encourages students to be good at using the language, which further enhances engagement. Teachers should listen attentively to each of the students’ responses so that they become encouraged to express their thoughts. It is a matter of showing respect for their viewpoints and nurtures a sense of equality. A teacher should always listen to the students’ response regardless of what they talk about and encourage them in a positive manner. When the students know that their teachers care about their success, they are more likely to invest in their learning.

A practical way to maintain engagement is by addressing the students individually by their names. It helps to build a personal connection and stimulates a sense of belonging between the teacher and the students. Jones (2008) says that when teachers take an interest in individual students, it encourages greater effort and participation in the classroom. By recognizing students by name, a teacher can convey respect and demonstrate that he/she values their presence and contributions in the classroom. It also helps to manage classroom discipline, as students are more likely to be attentive and respectful. This technic can indirectly help the teacher maintain a tranquil classroom environment, which creates less stress in the conduction of class.

Another effective way is to make eye contact with the students. Eye contact plays an important role in keeping students engaged in the class. Haataja et al. (2021) argue that teacher-student eye contacts reflect interpersonal engagement between them. It signals to the students that they are being observed and that their behavior matters. When teachers use eye contact effectively, it can communicate a range of messages, from encouragement to discipline. This non-verbal form

of communication keeps students focused and aware of the teacher's expectations. It also contributes to better classroom management, which leads to greater output and success.

Teachers can also move around the classroom and interact with students directly. This not only helps keep them on task but also provides an opportunity for the teacher to check their understanding and address any issues in real time. By engaging students in discussions and encouraging them to form opinions and justify their answers, teachers can help them stay actively involved in the learning process. Therefore, whenever students are given any creative classwork, the teacher can move around and observe their progress as well as help them by providing any assistance needed.

Linking lesson content to students' prior experiences is also an effective approach. When students can relate new knowledge to their own lives and real-world situations, learning becomes more engaging and meaningful. Studies by Claxton (2007) and Jones (2008) show that connecting classroom activities to students' backgrounds increases engagement by making the learning process more relevant. This connection allows students to comprehend and retain information more effectively.

For instance, Bangladeshi Army personnels and Police officers learn French to join United Nations' Peace-Keeping Missions. Learning French makes it easier to avail this opportunity. As they go for interpretation, they need to be fluent in spoken French. So, lesson content related to speaking practice or to their relevant field will certainly attract them and make them more engaged in the classroom. Same thing happens with the learners of Arabic who want to learn the language to go to Hajj and communicate in Arabic. In a similar way, various professionals learn different foreign languages to have greater facilities in their professional career. As a result, if their study plan relates to their own profession or any other needs, they become more attached and motivated, resulting in a good outcome at the end.

Using varieties of instructional strategies is another approach to prevent boredom and sustain interest among the students. Jones

(2008) suggests that using different methods of instruction increases engagement by maintaining students' attention and catering to different learning styles. Teachers can incorporate various resources, including multimedia, role-playing and discussions, to keep lessons dynamic and stimulating. This approach aligns with a learner-centered method that emphasizes the needs and preferences of students.

Learner-centered methods are very important for the development of four different linguistic competences. For the language classes, a teacher should focus on the learner and exploit their capacities to get the best out of them. Especially for productive skills like speaking and writing, teachers should use different methods and activities so that the students get involved and work together to do that activity.

Activities like role-playing (at the restaurant, at the market, etc.), find someone who (students move around the class asking questions with a worksheet prompts), picture description, small group discussion (on interesting topics), linguistic speed-dating (with some interesting questions, students will have quick conversations with many classmates), storytelling with prompts, guessing game (describe or act something, others will say what it is), etc. are useful for speaking practice. Teachers can use these different activities one after another so that the students never get bored in any classes and stay active and engaged.

Finally, connecting lesson content to students' future careers can significantly enhance engagement. When students see the practical value of what they are learning, they become more motivated to participate. Bransford and Schwartz (1999) suggest that learners are more motivated when they can recognize the relevance of their education to their future. Students who see a direct link between their education and future career growth are more likely to stay engaged and focused on their studies.

Classroom Environment: A supportive classroom, where students feel comfortable and encouraged in various activities, plays an important role in raising engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

According to Shernoff et al. (2016), student-centered classrooms create opportunities for second language (L2) learners to have consistent and meaningful interactions. It's a two-way exchange of ideas using the TL. Factors such as teacher-student relationship, classroom layout and inclusivity contribute to students' willingness to participate (Tinto, 1997).

Audiovisuals in Engagement: The integration of audiovisual materials, including videos, podcasts and interactive media, has been recognized as an effective way to enhance student engagement (Mayer, 2009). Classroom experience of educators who use multimedia resources proves that it improves language proficiency by providing contextualized input and engaging multiple sensory modalities. According to Vanderplank (2016), the use of subtitles, animated visuals and interactive tasks further supports comprehension and motivation.

Research Rational

This study explored a range of innovative and effective language-teaching methods to keep the students engaged in the classroom. Although some studies have addressed this issue, the existing research remains insufficient to answer the question: "Which methods can the foreign language educators use to keep the students engaged in the classroom?" Existing research has largely focused on different methods of teaching a language, motivation and loss of motivation of the students in learning a foreign language or classroom practices. In contrast, this study seeks to explore effective methods and instructional approaches by consulting the students and teachers, as well as observing the language classes for finding the best practices of keeping the students engaged and motivated in the language classroom. The outcome of this research may contribute to the design of curriculum, choosing the materials and activities so that the students get the best education and the educators can exploit the best out of them.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the key factors of student engagement in a language classroom. It will focus on the role of teaching

methodologies, the classroom environment and the integration of audiovisual materials. The research questions, guiding this study, are:

1. In what ways does motivation affect students' behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement in language classrooms?
2. What are the different strategies that enhance student engagement and active participation in language classrooms?
3. How do students perceive classroom practices that impact on student engagement and motivation?

Research Theoretical Framework

The current study is grounded on a theoretical framework that incorporates several theories explaining why and how students engage in language learning. The framework integrates perspectives from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), multidimensional model of engagement by Fredricks et al. (2004) and Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory to provide a more detailed and holistic understanding of student engagement in learning languages.

According to SDT of Deci and Ryan (1985):

Human motivation is guided by the fulfillment of three innate psychological needs: (1) autonomy (a sense of volition and choice), (2) competence (feeling effective and capable) and (3) relatedness (feeling connected to others).

In a language classroom, if the students experience autonomy in learning tasks, feel competent in achieving linguistic goals and skills as well as maintain positive relationships with their peers and teachers, their intrinsic motivation is enhanced. Intrinsic motivation encourages active participation and sustained engagement in classroom practices.

Fredricks et al. (2004) argue engagement as a multidimensional construct including: (1) behavioral engagement (students' effort, persistence and participation in academic activities.), (2) emotional engagement (positive affect, interest and enthusiasm in learning) and (3) cognitive engagement (strategic thinking and self-regulation in learning).

This model argues that enhancing engagement requires attention to participation, emotional involvement and cognitive investment.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory stresses on the role of social interaction in learning process. In a language classroom, peer collaboration, group discussions and teacher's guidance help a learner to operate within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that helps to sustain their engagement. The more engaged the learners are, the more effective the learning process becomes. Socially mediated learning experiences can strengthen motivation and lead the learners to more meaningful engagement with language activities.

Research Methodology

Methodology and Data Collection

This study uses a mixed-method research design for a well-rounded understanding of how students remain engaged in language classrooms. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches allows for an in-depth exploration of engagement factors and their impact on learning outcomes. It is a dominant quantitative design. It helps to incorporate data from the learners and the educators and holistically understand their perspective and beliefs. Data was collected through surveys and classroom observations to ensure a holistic analysis.

Survey questionnaires were distributed to language learners and instructors of French, Chinese, Japanese and English in Bangladesh to assess their perspectives on engagement strategies and challenges. Additionally, classroom observations were conducted to examine real-time student participation, teacher-student interactions and the effectiveness of audiovisual materials in keeping the students engaged. The findings from both methods were triangulated to derive meaningful conclusions and recommendations for enhancing student engagement in language learning environments.

Participants

The participants were 100 (one hundred) students enrolled in undergraduate program and certificate courses of different languages

at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka. The students were aged between 18 to 25 years. Apart from the students, eight (08) instructors were also in the participants list, who teach different foreign languages in different institutions. Data was collected from the students and the teachers to have a comprehensive report on the best practices of engaging students in a language classroom.

Discussion

The collected data from surveys and classroom observations indicate varying levels of student engagement across different language classrooms. Quantitative results reveal trends in participation rates, while qualitative responses provide insights into students' attitudes toward engagement strategies. From the surveyed students, 63% of them are female and the rest 37% are male students. The ratio is uneven because the number of female students admitted in different languages courses in recent years is larger than that of male. Their level of proficiency is shown in the pie chart (figure 1). From these different groups of students, about 57% of students agreed to always actively participate in different interactive activities (e.g. discussions, group tasks, etc.). About 27% of them often participate in those activities. The rest participate sometimes or rarely.

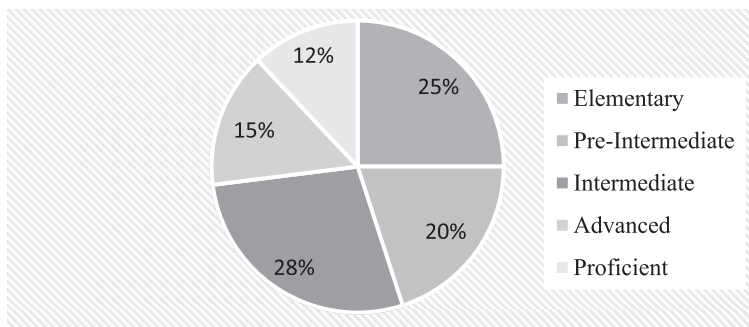


Figure 1: Proficiency level of the students

Data shows that 40% of the students feel very motivated to learn the target language. The reasons behind their motivation are active participation and interest in learning that grows from different

motivational factors. An interesting fact is that almost the same number of students feel very engaged in the classroom activities. So, the level of engagement is related to the level of motivation the students have. About 38% of the students feel somewhat motivated, which is almost the same number as the number of very motivated students. Others responded to being neutral or not very motivated.

In language learning, audiovisual materials are the most appreciated by the students. From the participants of this study, 83% of the students responded the audiovisuals to be very helpful for their progress in learning the language. Other 12% find it somewhat helpful and the rest stayed neutral. So, it can be said that using audiovisual materials has a significantly positive effect on learning. About half of the participants find the teaching methods to contribute significantly to keeping them engaged in the classroom and the same group of students find their classroom environment to be inclusive and supportive.

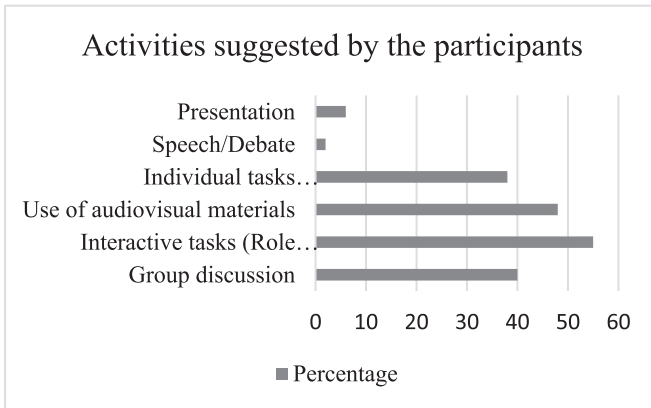


Figure 2: Classroom activities suggested by the participants

Lastly, the participants suggested some classroom activities that they find best to enhance their engagement in the classroom. More than 50% of the students suggested interactive tasks like role playing or problem-solving. They have also suggested the use of audiovisual materials and group discussions to be engaging and helpful to their learning. Nearly 40% of them suggested the individual tasks to be more helpful for the development of reading and writing skills.

On the other hand, some strategies to enhance student engagement in language classrooms are mentioned (in the survey response) and performed (in the classroom) by the language teachers. Engaging students consistently in a classroom can be challenging, particularly when attempting to maintain their focus and motivation. At times, students may drift off, leading to disengagement, which not only affects their learning but can also influence others in the class. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to develop a variety of strategies to keep students engaged, eliminate downtime and refocus their attention.

Thorough lesson preparation is a fundamental instructional strategy. By planning lessons with clear objectives, a teacher can encourage students to stay attentive and engaged. They stick to the different objectives mentioned in the lesson plan. Moalosi (2012) emphasizes that teachers who plan with intention are more likely to promote student engagement and improve learning outcomes. Students should be encouraged to ask questions when they have difficulty understanding, pay attention to pronunciation and take notes on sentence structures. Lectures should be delivered slowly and clearly, which will help students to process information and take notes effectively. Students are to be reminded that they can always ask for clarification on any aspect of the lesson they find challenging.

Creating a comfortable and supportive classroom is very necessary for maintaining student engagement in the classroom. Kassab et al. (2024) argued that student's perceptions of their learning environment influence their emotional, cognitive and behavioral engagement in learning. Listening attentively to every student is another good strategy to keep them engaged because in this way they feel valued and feel attached to the teacher. Calling the students by names is another strategy to keep them emotionally attached and engaged in the classroom.

Another effective way to keep the students engaged is to minimize criticism of their mistakes and give them positive reinforcement to maintain their motivation. From a behaviorist perspective, minimizing criticism and providing positive reinforcement encourages active

participation and sustained engagement, as reinforced behaviors are more likely to be repeated in classroom settings (Skinner, 1953). By focusing on correcting a few key errors and encouraging students to learn from their mistakes, the teacher can help them regain confidence and maintain their motivation. When they feel their efforts being appreciated, they are more likely to participate and share their thoughts. This strategy helps to build curiosity and a willingness to improve their skills.

Besides, responses from the questionnaire suggest that students tend to be more engaged when teachers adopt simple yet interactive classroom practices, which may include calling students by their names, maintaining eye contact and moving around the classroom to interact more closely with learners. Participants also noted that lessons become more engaging when teachers connect the content to students' needs and interests and incorporate interactive activities such as role-playing, linguistic speed-dating, group discussion, etc. Notably, these practices are consistent with strategies discussed in the literature review on learner engagement. According to the respondents, the use of such approaches helps create a supportive classroom atmosphere, encourages participation and maintains learners' focus during language lessons.

During the observation of other teachers' classes, it is seen that the teachers who did a thorough lesson preparation and conducted the class accordingly had been able to keep their classroom environment more engaged. The class gets more effective when the teacher uses slides as an instrument of teaching. As the students are more habituated to screens nowadays, they become more comfortable when the teachers use screens with interactive slides. Using a variety of activities also keeps the students focused on the classroom.

In summary, student engagement can be strengthened through a variety of strategies, including well-prepared lessons, a supportive classroom environment, minimizing criticism, connecting content to students' experiences and using a range of other instructional methods. These approaches not only keep students engaged but also

positively enhance their language learning experience, making them more motivated and successful.

Results and Findings of the research

In the discussion above, a lot of different approaches and strategies are mentioned which help to increase engagement in the classroom. It is found that most of the students stay engaged and actively participate in the interactive activities. They mostly appreciate the audiovisual activities. Some other factors of student participation and engagement are presented below:

Key Factors Influencing Engagement: Discussion shows that teaching methodologies, classroom environment and the use of audiovisual materials significantly influence engagement levels. Interactive activities, a supportive learning atmosphere and multimodal instructional materials are key contributors to higher engagement. Besides, many other different strategies like thorough lesson plans, minimal criticism, supportive classroom environment, calling students by names, contacting eye to eye, interacting students during activities, linking lessons to students' prior experiences and professional goals, etc. are some vital factors that may highly influence engagement.

Role of Audiovisual Materials in Student Participation: Findings highlight that the integration of audiovisual materials increases motivation and enhances comprehension. Students show higher levels of interest when exposed to videos, animations and interactive content. The more organs are involved, the more effective it should be in the long run.

Best Practices for Increasing Engagement: Effective approaches include task-based learning, collaborative activities with multimedia integration, communicative method, silent method, etc. The need for dynamic lesson structures, personalized feedback and student-centered teaching approaches is very necessary.

Recommendation

Language instructors should incorporate dynamic and interactive teaching methods, such as task-based and communicative language

teaching. In these methods, students participate actively and learn better. They engage in different situations and communicate with others, thus developing their skill.

Classroom environments should be designed to promote inclusivity and student participation. All the students in a classroom should be engaged with the teacher. Fear of asking questions should be totally vanished from the class. Teachers should create such a supportive environment that the students feel eager to ask anything they want without any hesitation.

Audiovisual materials should be integrated strategically to enhance comprehension and motivation. Integration of audiovisuals should be initiated by the institution and proper training should be given to the language teachers so that they can effectively use audiovisuals in their classroom.

Further research should explore more engagement strategies across different cultural and linguistic contexts to develop more tailored pedagogical approaches and add something newer to the existing body of knowledge.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that student engagement is the key to effective learning. Through a comprehensive mixed-method approach with quantitative surveys and qualitative classroom observations, the study identifies that interactive teaching methods and students' active participation contribute to enhanced engagement and result in better language acquisition outcomes. The findings underline the importance of a supportive classroom environment where strategies such as task-based learning, collaborative group activities and thoughtful integration of audiovisuals successfully capture students' attention as well as assist them to deep comprehension of the TL.

A well-prepared lesson plan, coupled with ongoing formative assessment contributes to students' engagement. Teachers giving clear and explicit instruction, providing timely feedback create a learning

atmosphere where the students feel safe to ask questions and actively participate in the discussions. The study also reveals that engagement is not a static attribute of task-based activity or group discussion, but a dynamic interplay of various factors like supportive environment, technological integration, sensory connections, relation to the real-world scenarios, etc.

Lastly, the implication of this study for language educators is to create an interactive and student-centered classroom through engaging instructional practices for effective language learning. The effective implementation of the above-mentioned strategies can create a motivating and dynamic classroom environment that will enhance students' learning and nurture a deeper passion for language acquisition. Future studies should explore longitudinal effects of these strategies and investigate how they can be adapted across different cultural and educational contexts.

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