



A Road Map to Engage Online EFL and ESL Learners: A Book Review in Focus

Hamed Barjesteh¹ & *Hossein Isaei²

1. Associate Professor in TESOL, The Department of English Language and Literature, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran, ha_bar77@yahoo.com

2. Ph.D. Candidate in TESOL, The Department of English Language and Literature, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran, hossein_isaei@yahoo.com

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through interaction. Vygotsky (1981) believed that social interaction helped students learn from the viewpoints of others in order to build a more complex worldview. Bruner (1989) stated that “development is intrinsically bound up with interaction” (p. 13). In this regard, designing a well-rounded, attractive and effective curriculum is significant in the context of ELT; however, keeping students constantly motivated and engaged in the learning process is of even higher importance in order to meet the objectives of the curriculum and in order for learning to happen since in the field of online education, various scholars (e.g., Draves, 2009; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Moore & Kearsley, 2004) all maintained the same idea and believed that interaction and engagement would lead to an effective course.

Based on constructivism approach, Piaget (1969) emphasized that learning must be connected to the learner in order to be meaningful. He further described engaged learning as how we come to know our world, with knowledge built on prior experiences and affected by new experiences. Moreover, as literature claims, EFL and ESL teachers who adopt a student-centered approach to instruction, increase opportunities for student engagement, which in turn helps learners achieve the course objectives more successfully (O'Brien & Toms 2008). In fact, engaged learning is a collaborative learning process in which the teacher and student are partners in constructing knowledge and answering essential questions, in addition to meaningful involvement with materials or applications based on cognitive challenge and motivation (O'Brien & Toms 2008). This strategic approach includes setting goals, establishing timelines, and creating and assessing authentic products. In other words, engagement theory holds that students who are involved intellectually, socially, and behaviorally leads to enhanced learning (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). In addition, the engagement theory is a framework for

Abstract

It was the spring of 2020 when as a result of the Corona virus pandemic, language institutes, schools, and universities were all obliged to close down and move unexpectedly to online teaching and learning. So, English Language Teaching (ELT) instructors were unprecedentedly faced with the challenge of transforming overnight their face-to-face classes into virtual and online classes, and in order for learning to take place in such a mystifying context, keeping students constantly absorbed, motivated and engaged was of highly remarkable significance. Nonetheless, rather than merely taking into account the negative aspects of this paradigm shift in teaching practice, many scholars and experts tried to concentrate on the opportunities that online learning presents for language teaching and learning community. In effect, “Engaging Online Language Learners” is a practical book the authors of which have considered the sudden move online associated with COVID-19 as an opportunity to enhance the inclusivity of language learning meanwhile testifying that EFL/ESL learners’ engagement in online language learning should be an inevitable priority. Being well targeted to its ELT audience and deeply grounded in both principles of learning engagement and foreign language teaching theories, the book which is under review in this paper straightly targets language teachers, whether experienced ones or those who intend to teach online for the first time. It also bestows ELT teachers with a clear road map to discern what the next steps are for innovative practices in online teaching and learning context.

Key-terms: ELT, online teaching, online learning

I. Introduction

Prominent learning theorists such as Bruner, Vygotsky, and Piaget all embraced the philosophy that humans do not learn in a vacuum but rather



Guide” approaches the issue of engaging learners in the online context in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), and tries to introduce new techniques and strategies to help EFL/ESL instructors, teacher trainers and professors overcome the challenges they typically run into in both synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching in their English language course, with particular preference towards collaborative online learning. The main gap that ignited the idea and encouraged the authors to start writing the book was the rapid introduction of online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in many courses and teachers moving online for the first time. Besides, keeping students constantly motivated and actively engaged were the other sources of inspiration.

“Engaging Online Language Learners: A Practical Guide” uses a rational, page-turner-friendly, well-structured and easy-to-understand sectioning by categorizing its 10 chapters into four main sections which are briefly discussed in the following lines. In the first section, the book starts with a preface which endows readers with both a brief statement of the purpose of the book and an introduction to the upcoming 3 sections and their parts. The following three sections themselves consist of several chapters, introducing a substantive aspect of the topic, addressing the whys, ways, problems, solutions, and next steps in engaging students in online learning (Pawan et al., 2022).

In the second section of “Engaging Online Language Learners”, exists 3 chapters which addresses different ways to engage students online. Here, the authors present introductions to online language learning. Miscellaneous activities featured in this section are well structured, simple, and adaptable to learners at all levels of language proficiency and for all languages, making them very useful. One step further, the third section comprises of 4 technique-oriented chapters which are mainly structured around the different forms of learner presence (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010), and at last, the fourth section of the book enjoys 3 chapters where the authors turn to the question of the future and how online language teaching could be more fully developed and promulgated.

It is unfair not mentioning that, as an additional resource, the book comes with a companion website with respective online resources. Furthermore, the book also provides particular ideas for tested activities which have been assembled from experienced online instructors that can go a long way to improving online learning. Overall, “Engaging Online Language Learners: A Practical Guide” offers the information and the tools required to:

technology-based teaching and learning the fundamental underlying idea of which is that students must be meaningfully engaged in learning activities through interaction with others and appropriate tasks (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1999). While in principle, such engagement could occur without the use of technology, Kearsley and Schneiderman (1999) believed that technology can definitely facilitate engagement in ways which are difficult to achieve otherwise.

While motivating and engaging students in the classroom has always been critical for students’ success, it is even more significant and challenging in the online learning environment. With proliferation of technology, the world is getting more condensed every day. EFL and ESL learners can easily log into their computer or smart cell phones to enter a desired classroom a continent away! In turn, the online classroom is far more diverse and different learning styles and expectations, individual’s background and cultural values, learning preferences, teachers’ professional development and the literacy needed to apply variant tools, software and applications are among the challenges the instructors have been confronting (Parrish & Van Berschot, 2010) and to top of all, “the involvement of the learner in the course, whether one calls it interaction, engagement, or building community, is critical if an online course is to be towards an objective” (Bruner, 1966, p. 67).

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, an unprecedented global push towards remote online language teaching was generated which made many courses and teachers shift online for the first time. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of this sudden paradigm shift in all educational systems worldwide (e.g., Cheong et al., 2021), the authors of the book “Engaging Online Language Learners: A Practical Guide” chose to focus on the opportunities that online learning presents for language teaching and learning. Having been authorized by Faridah Pawan, Sharon Daley, Xiaojing Kou and Curtis J. Bonk and published by TESOL Press (2022, Pp. 1-106) this practical guide provides English language teachers with a number of strategies and ready-to-use activities to help them engage and motivate their students for improved learner outcomes. The book under review in this paper also covers trends in online learning, engagement and motivation principles and competencies as well as ways administrators can support teachers’ professional development.

II. The Book Review

With the aim of enhancing the quality of online teaching in the technology era, the book “Engaging Online Language Learners: A Practical



for learners to learn in terms technology (Healey et al., 2008). The standards are designed to clarify appropriate users of technology and support best practices in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in diverse settings around the world. In spite of the growing use of technology in the field of language teaching and learning, there have not been clear guidelines on how to successfully implement technology to promote language learning and the TESOL Technology Standards attempts to fill this void (Healey et al., 2008). In other words, the online language teaching competencies set out in this chapter address the skills and knowledge teachers need to teach online effectively.

Chapter 4 sets out the core principles of teaching presence, including self-presentation, course design, and facilitation as the primary tools for student engagement (Pawan et al., 2022). Self-regulation, teaching presence and social presence have been found to be predictors of student engagement and persistence. Self-regulation is an important factor for learners' academic achievement in both synchronous and asynchronous online learning. It is crucial to pay more attention to self-regulation in the online and blended learning environment (Eggers, et al., 2021).

Chapter 5 presents the tools of cognitive presence including challenge and higher-order thinking. As the authors maintain, cognitive presence is the extent to which learners are able to construct meaning through sustained communication. Moreover, cognitive presence is the key element in critical thinking, a necessary element for higher levels of thinking and learning. Social presence, a second core element, is the ability of the learners to project their personal characteristics into the community. The importance of this element is to support cognitive presence through indirect facilitation of critical thinking carried on by the community of learners. In addition, teaching presence is comprised of two functions: the design of the educational experience and facilitation of the learning activities. This element reflects the creation, integration, and facilitation of both cognitive and social presence (Garrison, Ander-son, & Archer, 2000).

Chapter 6 introduces social presence (i.e., the extent of social involvement in the online classroom) as a factor in engagement. Establishing social connections is a basic human need and such need extends into online spaces. In fact, even when online, people "are not only looking for information; they are also looking for affiliation, support and affirmation" (Sproull & Faraj, 1997, p. 38). Similarly, online learning involves social aspects,

1. Convert conventional classroom to an online environment
2. Build up peer interaction via peer partnerships and group activities
3. Create authentic activities
4. implement games and simulations
5. Assess the learning that takes place as a result of engagement and collaborative activities
6. utilize activities that promote engagement among online learners

Considering the fact that the book under review in this paper straightforward targets ELT teachers and is deeply grounded in principles of learning engagement and foreign language teaching theories, the ten chapters of the book are briefly reviewed in the following lines:

Chapter 1 introduces online language learning trying to highlight the increasingly growing number of students engaged in remote language learning and changes in how languages are taught online. This chapter also introduces the concept of language learning motivation, which is integral to the book's theoretical framework of learning motivation and self-led learning since the involvement of the learner in the course, whether one calls it interaction, engagement, or building community, is critical if an online course is to be towards an objective (Bruner, 1966, p. 67).

Chapter 2 turns to the principles in which self-regulation and self-efficacy lead to participation in the online learning environment. Studies have indicated that self-efficacy beliefs correlate positively with academic achievement and motivation (e.g., Pajares & Miller 1994; Bandura 1997; Pajares 2003), thus substantiating Bandura's (1997) contention that learners with higher self-efficacy participate more readily, work harder, pursue more challenging goals, spend more effort toward fulfilling identified goals, and persist longer in the face of difficulty. Moreover, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs have also been shown to be critical in effective teaching in the degree of personal commitment (Coladarci, 1992), and in enthusiasm in teaching (Allinder, 1994).

A part of chapter 2 has also been allocated to introducing and applying a small set of other helpful learning principles (i.e., TEC-VARIETY), and the eager teachers would have the chance to see the required explanations in Bonk & Khoo (2014) in detail.

Chapter 3 raises the question of online language teaching competencies, using the TESOL Technology Standards Framework (Healey et al., 2008) as a guide. The TESOL Technology Standards Framework (TTS) provides a basis for understanding concerning what is expected for teachers to teach and



countries take place in an instantaneous manner. According to Parrish & Linder (2010), to develop an inclusive multicultural online platform, the class instructor must understand the language learners' cultural backgrounds and learning preferences. A culturally responsive online class considers the cultural diversity represented among the learners. To create and sustain a culturally responsive course, the class must be mindful of design, resources, assessments, and facilitation methods.

As the final point in chapter 10, the authors provide a concrete example for an inclusive course design that addresses the problem through a teacher workshop. The free, online, self-paced workshop addresses the problem of implicit bias in teaching and how teachers can reduce these biases in order to teach effectively. The example of the culturally and linguistically inclusive online course in Chapter 10 is particularly effective, showcasing exactly how teachers could develop such a course and maximize the inclusion and reach of their courses (Pawan et al., 2022).

Advantages of the Book

"Engaging Online Language Learners" remains a practical, theoretically rigorous introduction to engagement for online learning (Pawan et al., 2022). Despite a few number of weaknesses, the book uses a well-structured, coherent sectioning system in which each chapter lays the suitable ground for the following one, forming a logical category under which all the chapters of the book reside. While engaging and motivating students in the classroom has always been critical for student success, it is even more important and challenging in the online learning environment. This practical guide provides English language educators with a number of discriminate and clear-cut strategies and ready-to-use activities to help them engage and motivate their students for improved learner outcomes. It also covers trends in online learning, engagement and motivation principles and competencies, as well as ways administrators can support teachers' professional development.

In addition, one of the most obvious strong points of this book is providing a concrete example for an inclusive course design that addresses the problem through a teacher workshop (i.e., chapter 10), which consequently leads to fortifying EFL/ESL teachers' knowledge with related methods and strategies. Another transparent advantage of this book is that it is highly probable to be useful for its core audience of novice and experienced online language teachers. It may also be of interest not only to curriculum developers who implement online

and social-interactions are at the heart of the learning process (Rovai, 2002; Sung & Mayer, 2012).

Chapter 7 discusses learner presence, with self-directed learning being the core of the chapter. In each of these chapters, a number of activities are presented that concretely illustrate how these forms of presence can be activated for engagement. The activities use a set template, including age ranges, description and purpose, suggested tool(s), and scaffolding, which allow teachers to use the activities in their course materials and lesson plans. Most of these lessons are suitable for all ages, although some are better designed for upper-level and adult learners (Pawan et al., 2022).

Chapter 8 demonstrates the exemplary and inspirational online teaching practices, which include practices like 'VOCAL' (i.e., visible, organized, compassionate, analytical, and leaders) and 'Guide on the Side'. These brief reviews provide more insight for teachers who want to expand their online teaching practice further. As Savery (2010) declares, online teaching is teaching, but your role is less of the "sage on the stage" and more the "guide on the side." Your main job in the online course is not to deliver content but to facilitate learning and engagement. Your presence in the online environment is very important. We want our students to know that they are not alone in this journey. We don't want them to feel like they are in a "correspondence course" or just learning from a textbook. They need someone on the other side of the screen who cares and is engaged in their learning and success (Savery, 2010).

Chapter 9 turns to the role of administration in online language teaching. This chapter argues that online language teacher education (OLTE) should make five considerations in reconceptualizing curricula and provides examples of learning activities that address each. First it should acknowledge that online digital language use differs considerably from in-person language equivalents, and second, that technology knowledge includes not only how to teach online but what digital language use is. Third, it should recognize that learners and teachers have modern techno-identities developed not only in their academic but their everyday lives as well. Fourth, it should leverage the power of the Internet to develop translanguacultural awareness and fifth, recognize that social presence is key to socio-collaborative learning, both in-person and online.

Chapter 10, the last chapter, discusses the challenge of inclusion in the online environment, particularly cultural and linguistic inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds. As globalization increases, both social and professional communication between people from different



should focus on various cultures and contexts, including the Iranian EFL context.

III. Conclusion

In the past two decade, more knowledge about the characteristics of online classes and the value of engaged learning in an online environment has emerged (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000; Salmon, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Woo & Reeves, 2007; Thorpe, 2008), which was magnificently intensified by the pandemic caused by Corona virus in 2020 and the unprecedented paradigm shift in educational system worldwide. According to Barjesteh et al. (2021), COVID-19's attack on the system of education left the learning of many students in limbo. As a challenging result, in an online context, it is imperative for the learners to be active knowledge-generators who assume responsibility for constructing and managing their own learning experience. In a learner-centered environment, the traditional instructor responsibilities such as generating resources and leading discussion, shifts to the learners. Success in an online learning environment depends on the use of instructional strategies that support the shift in roles and the development of self-direction (Weimer, 2002). According to Kearsley (2000, p.78), the most important role of the instructor in online classes is to ensure a high degree of interactivity and participation. This means designing and conducting learning activities that result in engagement with the subject matter and with fellow students. Learners cannot be passive knowledge-absorbers who rely on the instructor to feed information to them. Therefore, "Engaging Online Language Learners" is the leading practical book in the field as a theoretically rigorous introduction to engagement for online learning which is firmly based on the principles of language methodology.

Overall, this practical guide book provides English language educators with a number of strategies and ready-to-use activities to help them engage and motivate their students for improved learner outcomes. It also covers trends in online learning, engagement and motivation principles and competencies, as well as ways administrators can support teachers' professional development, and is strongly prescribed for ELT material developers, teachers, teacher trainers, professors, university students and EFL/ESL learners who can benefit from the instructions given for the enhancement of online learning and learner engagement. This book is undoubtedly a must-read for both ELT instructors and EFL/ESL learners to elevate their competencies

courses but also to academia and intelligentsia who are seeking insight into online teaching practice. Furthermore, any reader can refer to the authors' theoretical framework to better understand the engagement activities and develop their own, since the authors ground their work firmly in foreign language teaching theory and principles of learning since the book is accompanied by a website an additional resource.

At last, considering technology-enhanced instruction, distant education system, home-schooling, the pandemic of COVID-19 which caused a paradigm shift in educational system throughout the Globe and the dire need of the teaching and learning community to enhance their internet literacy and technological skills (Isaee, & Barjesteh, 2022), the book under review is a helpful asset for EFL learners and teachers.

Shortcomings of the Book

There are a few minor weaknesses that the authors of this paper suggest and ought to be considered, although these shortcomings do not hinder the usefulness of "Engaging Online Language Learners" for its audience. The activities are somewhat generic and may need significant adaptation and elaboration for use in online courses (Pawan et al., 2022). While the activities should not be hard to adapt, teachers may need additional resources. This adaptability does mean that the activities are very flexible and can be applied to different types of language courses. The authors also pay relatively little attention to structural factors in student engagement, such as adequate technological resources and administrative policies that address these limitations. To some extent this makes sense, as the book is targeted to course management practices and these structural factors are outside the authors' control. A potential theoretical problem lies in their adoption of learner presence, a controversial inclusion to the community of inquiry (COI) framework, and one of which the originator of the COI framework has questioned the necessity (Garrison, 2016).

Another eye-catching disadvantage is that the content of the whole chapters could be influential and practical merely for native speakers of English. In other words, some parts might sound vague for speakers of any other languages of the world. Furthermore, it would be more informative to include studies and examples conducted in more diverse contexts, including the Middle East or Iranian EFL context, for it to be plausible in a broader range of contexts and cultures. So, it is respectively recommended that further work in this area of study



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especially in the time of emergencies such as COVID-19.

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Bio-profile:

Hamed Barjesteh is an Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics. His areas of interest include critical pedagogy and critical thinking. He teaches TESOL courses at the Language Department of Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran.

Hossein Isaei, a Ph.D. candidate in TESOL, is an English instructor, author and researcher. His research interests include material development and evaluation. He is trying to enhance the quality of language teaching/learning in his country Iran.