Manifestations, Dynamics and Influencing Factors of EFL Learners' Engagement in the Blended Learning Context

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Learner engagement in blended learning contexts has been a hot topic in educational research for decades. This study adopted the diary method to investigate the manifestations, dynamic changes and influencing factors of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' engagement in blended learning contexts with an aim to have a deeper understanding about the fundamental nature of engagement in language learning. A total of 42 pieces of diary entries by two participants within three weeks were collected and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings showed that learners' behavioral engagement was manifested by routine learning behaviors and learner autonomous behaviors; cognitive engagement indicated by cognitive learning strategies and self-regulation strategies and emotional engagement manifested by both positive emotions such as enjoyment and confidence and negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration. Learner engagement in blended contexts was featured with a layer technological color and with some native characteristics. Individual learner's engagement was varying with the day, showing non-linear changes. The trajectory of learner engagement stems from the dialectical interplay between individual factors and sociocultural environment. The findings have much pedagogical implications that teachers should take targeted measures to promote and sustain learner engagement.

Keywords: manifestations, dynamics, contextual factors, engagement level, dairy study, learner diaries

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, it is difficult and challenging for students to be fully engaged in academic learning due to the ubiquity of digital devices and internet access, even though this is something that all teachers are expected to see. After the COVID-19

pandemic, learning has been becoming increasingly "blended", combining face-to-face with technology-mediated instruction (Graham et al., 2013), especially for EFL (English for Foreign Language) learning which applies technologies to create authentic and meaningful learning activities. Many studies have found that blended learning provides great potential to promote learner engagement with various contextual facilitators (Schindler et al., 2017; Halverson & Graham, 2019; Bond et al., 2020). At the turn of the new millennium, Dörnyei and Kormos proposed that "active learner engagement is a key concern" for all instructed language learning (2000: 276). Engagement is referred as "the extent of a student's active involvement in a learning activity" (Reeve, 2012: 150) and its defining feature is action (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). The feature makes engagement distinguished from motivation which emphasizes on the intent while engagement is the subsequent action (Hiver et al., 2021).

The widely accepted definition of engagement is proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004), which describes engagement as the involvement and commitment to learning which consists of three dimensions of behavior, cognition and emotion. In the context of language learning, it is proposed that true engagement encompasses all the three components (Mercer, 2019). Svalberg (2009) proposes that engaged learners are those who actively construct their knowledge not only by mental processes but equally by social interactions and take initiative. Philp and Duchesne (2016: 51) define engagement as being 'a state of heightened attention and involvement, in which participation is reflected not only in the cognitive dimension, but in social, behavioral, and affective dimensions as well.' The exploration of defining engagement is the exploration of what manifestations or indicators are shown when learners are engaged. This is an important issue concerning the fundamental nature of engagement. Previous studies have been centered on the quantity, quality and forms of discourse and interaction being used by the learners (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Baralt et al., 2016). There are other possible manifestations of engagement given dimensions of cognition and emotion are inside and invisible (Hiver et al., 2021).

Moreover, engagement is situated and context-dependent (Mercer, 2019). The learning process in blended context is different from that in the classroom. Halverson and Graham (2019) have conceptualized engagement in blended learning with two dimensions: cognition and emotion. Cognitive engagement is indicated with attention, effort, time, cognitive strategies, absorption and curiosity. Emotional engagement is indicated with enjoyment, confidence, happiness, boredom, frustration and anxiety. This framework asserts that behavioral engagement is overlapped with the other two dimensions, which needs to be further tested. Blended learning is evolving with new technologies and there are various modes of combining online and offline learning, which make the blended learning context dynamic. What learners' engagement manifests is still a question to be answered.

Engagement is dynamic and malleable (Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Hiver et al., 2021). Engagement is changing in a continuum with high and low engagement at ends and learners may find themselves at various point (Hiver, Mercer & Al-Hoorie, 2021). It is currently unclear about how high or low engagement levels manifest, which is important for engagement measurement. The change of learner engagement is

interconnected with a complex system of individual and sociocultural factors. Previous studies have focused on the characteristics of engagement, while the dynamics of learner engagement is under investigated (Mercer, 2019; Aubrey et al., 2020).

Student engagement is commonly measured through questionnaires or surveys. It is usually a one-time report and fails to show the variations. A diary study which is a naturalistic inquiry of capturing learning experiences (Bolger et al., 2003) will be adopted in this research. It will help to gain more insights into manifestations of learner engagement which will emerge through their daily report. Dairies can also facilitate capturing the dynamics of learner engagement on a regular basis. With the complexity and dynamism of L2 learning system, although some individual factors or contextual factors of engagement were identified in relation with other variables (Järvelä & Renninger, 2014; Xu et al., 2020, Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2021), a synergy of factors contributing to the change of learner engagement should be investigated in greater depth. The objective of this research is to understand further about the dynamic nature of learner engagement and its underlying mechanisms. The research questions are the following:

1. What are the manifestations of EFL learners' behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement in blended learning context?

2. Does learners' engagement level change over time? In what ways?

3. What are the factors that influence learner engagement?

Literature Review

Conceptualization of Learner Engagement

Student engagement is defined as the active involvement in learning (Fredrick et al., 2004; Reeve, 2012; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Similar terms such as participation or involvement or commitment describes its key connotations. In the tripartite definition of learner engagement, Fredricks et al. (2004) elaborated engagement as a meta-construct. In the broad sense, behavioral engagement refers to learner's participation and efforts in learning activities. Cognitive engagement means the cognitive investment or mental effort in learning. Emotional engagement refers to the affective reactions to the activities or the persons in the learning context. Each dimension has its own indicators which are important for measurement.

In language learning, previous studies have found many manifestations of learner engagement. Behavioral engagement can be indicated by time allocated to learning, task completion, voluntary involvement in speaking and interactional initiative (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Gettinger & Walter, 2012; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Cognitive engagement is by its nature internal. Its manifestations or indicators can rely on the external evidence such as evaluating and elaborating ideas in conversations (Reschly & Christenson, 2012), and some internal evidences such as cognitive strategies applied in learning (Philp & Duchesne, 2016), alertness and attention in the task (Svalberg, 2009)

and focused attention of language form (Baralt et al., 2016). Emotional engagement is not only indicated by positive emotions including motivated involvement, enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment during learning activities but also negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and boredom (Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer, 2009). Other research identified willingness (Svalberg, 2009), purposefulness and autonomy as indicators of emotional engagement (Baralt, Gurzynski-Weiss & Kim, 2016). In the recent study, besides negative and positive emotions, learners' perceptions of their own task performance are added as an indicator of emotional engagement (Phung et al., 2021).

With discussions above, manifestations of learner engagement are evidences of how learners act, think and feel. They are centered on the key characteristic of learner engagement. But there are some inconsistency and ambiguity among these indicators. In some studies, persistent efforts on learning are categorized as manifestations of behavioral engagement (Martin, 2009; Pekrun et al., 2012) while in others persistence is an indicator of cognitive engagement (Swalberg, 2009). Besides, engagement is a construct that is highly dependent on contexts (Mercer, 2019). Therefore, indicators of learner engagement vary in different contexts. With technologies' profound influence on learning process, learner engagement in blended context will pick up new features and the concept will volve with new manifestations. It is an important issue to clarify field-specific manifestations of learner engagement.

A Sociocultural Theory Perspective of Engagement

Social cultural factors frame mental activity and functioning (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). The social cultural approach recognizes both the social factors and the individual experience in shaping learners' learning behaviors. In this research, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory underpins the study on the roles of social contexts and individual differences in learner engagement in language learning. This theory emphasizes that human' psychological development derives from material, external, and practical actions and thus takes practical activity as the unit for explaining and analyzing change and development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Roth, 2007).

It is believed that what students do, how they feel and what matters to them about engagement in language learning is socially and individually constructed. Engagement does not only occur in the classroom (which is usually defined as the classroom engagement), and it can also occur whenever and wherever learners are willing to engage themselves in language learning. Learner engagement in blended learning context is inherently a social activity which is intertwined with a complex system of factors from individual learners and social environment. Rather than being static or immutable, engagement is seen as a continuum of development, depending on how the given social context is reflected in individual learner' life to create his unique developmental context (Mao & Lee, 2021). These contextual factors might include classroom culture, peer interactions and online learning environments. In this research how learners' engagement changes and what factors contribute to the change will be investigated from the perspective of sociocultural theory.

Previous Studies on the Dynamism of Learner Engagement

Engagement changes cross contexts and timescales (Fredricks et al., 2004; Mercer, 2019; Hiver et al., 2021). The level of engagement represents the intensity and duration of engagement which can be measured at the quantity level and the quality level. The quantity-level of engagement can be measured through the numbers of indicators of engagement. The quality-level of engagement can be described through manifestations of engagement. Fredricks et. al (2004) has proposed that behavioral engagement can range from simply doing the work and following the rules to participating in the student council. Emotional engagement can range from simple liking to deep valuing of, or identification with, the institution. Cognitive engagement can range from simple memorization to the use of self-regulated learning strategies that promote deep understanding and expertise. In the current study, this framework with several adaptations is adopted to measure the qualitative differences of learners' engagement. In the domain of language learning, the level of behavioral engagement is displayed ranging from simply doing the work to autonomy participation, or self-directed academic behaviors (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Buhs & Ladd, 2001). The quality of cognitive engagement is defined as the same. Emotional engagement ranges from simple liking to motivated flow that represents high emotional involvement or investment. Flow is a subjective state of complete involvement, whereby individuals are so involved in an activity that they lose awareness of time and space (Csikzentmihalyi, 1988).

How learners' engagement level changes should be measured through the indicators. Aubrey et al. (2020) has leveraged four manifestations of learner engagement (focus, desire to speak, anxiety, confidence) to measure engagement ratings and found engagement is highly variable, and the changes are shaped by learner factors, task factors and school factors. Dao & Sato (2021) explored the dynamic change of emotional engagement by measuring learners' enjoyment and interest through a questionnaire during speaking tasks, and findings reveal the dynamism of emotional engagement. In the wiki-enhanced writing course, Kim & Kim (2020) tracked the changes of learner engagement and its relationship with writing performance, in which behavioral engagement is measured through student interaction, cognitive engagement indicated by revisions and emotional engagement manifested by intrinsic motivation, enjoyment and shame.

Previous researches have proved the trajectories of learners' engagement through assessing the numbers of various indicators and manifestations. There is scant study on the dynamics of learner engagement in blended context which involves a synergy of contextual and individual factors. The current study will go further to explore the changes of learner engagement through measuring the number of manifestations reported from diaries. Finding how learner engagement varies and its influencing factors provide possibilities for teaching interventions. These aspects are indispensable and closely related to the sustainable development of learner engagement.

Diary Study

Engagement in language learning in the research is considered as a dynamic process involving with how learners think, act and feel. To capture the characteristics of such a broad construct, one-time survey is not adequate. Diary study is a paradigm of naturalistic inquiry. It can be used to examine ongoing experiences, offering opportunities to investigate the social, psychological and even the physiological processes within everyday situations (Bolger et al., 2003). Diaries could capture learners' thoughts, feelings and behaviors shortly after the occurrence of events, thus providing a more reliable record of learner experience. Therefore, diaries are helpful to capture the fluctuations of learner engagement over time. Diary study asking students to report experiences every day minimizes the occurrence of errors in the retrospective reporting of events (Bolger et al., 2003). Diaries provide information over a longer period of time rather than a temporary, as for example surveys do, which increases the reliability of the instrument (Carp & Carp, 1981; Fuligni & Masten, 2010). The use of the daily-diary method will provide a more accurate measurement of the dynamics of engagement than traditional questionnaire measures.

METHOD

In this study, a diary method was adopted to investigate EFL learners' engagement in the blended context. The qualitative research is chosen to allow an in-depth investigation of the dynamic nature of engagement and its influencing factors.

The Blended Learning Context

Although college English is a compulsory course which is relevant to their academic and job prospects for millions of students in China, many of them are not motivated and less engaged in their English learning. This study involves undergraduate students from the university where the course of College English has taken a method of blended learning combining online learning and offline learning. For the online learning, a teaching platform is used by the teacher to share related learning materials, slides, mini-lectures for students to preview or review besides traditional classroom learning. The university uses *Rain Classroom*, a popular smart classroom solution which features instant interaction through smartphones such as submitting homework, sitting in a specified exam, and scanning learning slides. Social media has also been used by the teacher to keep communication with students such as releasing homework and learning notice. The online learning part usually takes place outside classroom. According to teacher's assignment, they attend to the learning activities with various frequency during the week. For the offline learning, lectures are conducted twice a week, in the traditional classroom equipped with multimedia facilitators such as computers, projectors, and internet access.

Participants

Two participants in this study were purposefully chosen since the purpose of the study was exploratory, aiming for in-depth insights into individual experiences rather than generalizability. Both students were taking English learning seriously as observed by

the teacher, such as attending the blended classes regularly, and submitting homework on time. They were 19-year-old undergraduates in the first semester majoring in financial management in the key provincial university. They were admitted to the university through National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), which indicated they had the intermediate English proficiency with a repertoire of around 4000 vocabularies as NCEE required. They were voluntary to take part in the experiment and signed up the consent form for research. They were also rewarded with small gifts after completing the task.

Instruments

Participants kept a diary for three weeks. They wrote the diary through *Youdao Notes* which is a cloud note-taking application developed by NetEase *Youdao* Company. They could record notes anytime and anywhere within the day through their mobile phones or laptops. Participants were given prompts (see Appendix A) in order to know what to write in the diary. The instructions are written in both English and Chinese (their mother tongue) in order to help participants to get a better and accurate understanding.

According to the theory of learner engagement, prompts were formulated and checked by both researchers. There are three prompted questions concerning about learners' behavioral engagement; four prompts about learners' feelings and attitudes; three prompts about learners' mental and cognitive efforts in learning; and three prompts are relating to the factors learners perceived influencing their engagement. The following are some examples: *What efforts did you put on English learning no matter it is online or offline learning? (英语学习过程中不管是线上还是线，你做出了哪些努力?) How did you find your English learning today? (今天觉得英语学习怎么样?)Were there any strategies that you apply when you were learning English? (英语学习过程中是否使用了一些学习策略?).* These prompts are very general for the purpose of leaving enough space for learners to report. Participants are allowed to write the diary in Chinese in order to avoid their incompetence of expressing in English adequately. They were encouraged to record their learning process as detailed and clear as possible.

Data Collection and Analysis

Two participants have written dairies everyday within three weeks. A total of 42 pieces of diary entries were collected. Every diary text was translated from Chinese into English by the researcher. Because diary texts were recording student's daily experience, the language was easy to understand and translate.

The data was analyzed with thematic analysis method by Clarke and Braun (2017), which undergoes deductive and inductive reasoning in an iterative and cyclical process aiming to obtain more accurate data. At the first stage, learners' diary manuscripts were read carefully to be familiarized and fully understood. At the second stage the researcher wrote initial codes with two or three words such as "completing homework" for "*doing exercises*" and "*preparing class presentation assigned by teacher*"; "evaluating learning efficiency" for "*I put less time on English learning and that's why my English was poor*" and "confidence" for "*Today I made a good class presentation*". Examples are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Thematic analysis processes

Original Texts	Initial Coding	Sub-theme	Theme
"I learned some new words through Shanbei App because I had no classes this afternoon. I reviewed the words I didn't remember before."	reciting new words; reviewing words	after-class learning	autonomous learning
"At today's English class I didn't fall asleep and took down notes."	attending classes; taking notes	at-class learning	routine learning
"I had difficulties in remembering new words, so I should often review."	recognition of difficulties	evaluating and planning	self-regulation strategies
"Perhaps I was more interested in this way, and I felt much better about learning with my favorite APP."	being interest	enjoyment	positive emotions

The initial coding was double-checked by another expert researcher in qualitative study. At the theme searching stage, bearing the research purpose in mind the researcher matched the observed data with the conceptualization of engagement. From coding to searching themes it is a cyclic deducting and inducting movement. Then these themes were defined, categorized and aggregated. Following the same process, the two participants' dairy entries were analyzed and coded with themes. The same code was categorized into the same theme. Some themes reoccurred in different diary entries. Themes that occurred were grouped and aggregated according to frequency. All the themes of student engagement in the dairy entries are presented with accounted frequency.

FINDINGS

The Manifestations of EFL Learners' Behavioral, Cognitive and Emotional Engagement in Blended Learning Context

Table 2
Manifestations of student engagement

	MoBE	Freq.	MoCE	Freq.	MoEE	Freq.
S 1	doing exercises	2	English learning strategies	10	enjoyment	10
	listening to English songs	6	self-monitoring	2	anxiety	3
	preparing class presentation	1	evaluating learning effects	5	confidence	2
	writing a composition	1	reasoning	4	interest	3
	practice English listening online	7	self-reflection	2	frustration	2
	reading English materials	2	self-motivating	2		
	online platform learning	3				
	attending English classes	6				
	review the textbook	2				
	reciting new words through *APP*	3				
	watching movies	4				
S 2	doing exercises of the textbook	1	English learning strategies	7	enjoyment	2
	taking notes	1	self-monitoring	1	interest	5
	attending English classes	6	evaluating learning effects	1	confidence	1
	online platform learning	3	reasoning	2	frustration	7
	practice English listening online	1	self-reflection	1		
	listening to English songs	3	self-motivating	2		
	preparing for CET 4	1				
	reciting new words through *APP*	10				
	watching movies	3				
	learning English through *Tiktok*	2				
	post English text to *Wechat* social platform	1				

Notes:

S1 & S2: Student 1 & Student 2;

MoBE: Manifestations of Behavioral Engagement;

MoCE: Manifestations of Cognitive Engagement;

MoEE: Manifestations of Emotional Engagement.

Behavioral Engagement

Table 2 shows manifestations of learner engagement. Behavioral engagement manifests learners' efforts in learning English. From learner' diaries, two major themes of behavioral engagement emerged: routine learning and autonomous activities.

Routine learning. It includes attending classes, participating class activities, finishing online or offline assignments, which are all academically related and based on teaching practice or course syllabus requirement. As is shown in the dairies:

"This afternoon, I did English homework on the platform, listened to the text, and learned some vocabulary in the textbook." (S2)

Autonomous learning. These behaviors are usually self-directed but with enjoyment and flexibility. For example, S1 prefers watching English movies to maintain her interest and relax herself while training her English listening skills and picking up some new vocabularies. S2 prefers learning English through *APPs* such as *Baicizhan* and *Shanbei* which are self-learning *APPs* in the smartphones. She also tends to learn English through watching online videos delivered by *TikTok* which is a popular short video social platform. Watching movies and listening to English songs are also her favorable ways to immerse into the English language. As is shown in their diary entries.

"Today, I still browsed *TikTok* to find English videos for listening practice. Maybe I was more interested in this way, and I felt more comfortable when learning with my favorite *APP*." (S1)

"From 10:40 to 11:40 in the evening I watched the English movie '*The Legend of 1900*'. There were really a lot of spoken English. I could understand, and I also remembered a lot of words! Great experience!" (S2)

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement entails learners' mental effort, which are manifested in the diaries through students' cognitive learning strategies and self-regulation strategies.

Cognitive learning strategies. English learning strategies are major part of both learners' cognitive engagement. S1 was very aware of her learning methods as was reported in her diary. Learners also monitor their learning process such as evaluating effects and finding out reasons. Learners also reflected on the difficulties they encountered in the learning process and then tried to find solutions. As is shown in their diary entries:

"I paid more attention to the pronunciation when I used *APP* to practice English listening". (S1)

"It was a better way to remember English vocabulary through writing". (S1)

"The translation exercise in the textbook was too difficult for me. When I was writing I felt that I was lack of vocabulary to put my thoughts into words. Therefore, I should accumulate more words." (S1)

Among learning strategies, the kind of deep cognitive involvement was reported. S1 mentions that she was fascinated by English movies which trigger her to think deeper about the meaning of life and values. These philosophical thoughts represent her deeper cognitive process in English learning. She was also aware of her English proficiency when watching movies. As is shown in the diary:

"I watched an English movie this evening which set me think about the meaning of life. I could learn some words at the same time but I could not understand it without scripts." (S1)

Self-regulation strategies. S1 also reported that she reflected on her difficulties in English learning while she also encouraged herself to work harder. S2 also pays attention to reflect on the reasons behind her performance. Both students motivate themselves when facing difficulties. Making positive statements and rewarding oneself

are examples of self-regulation strategies in language learning. Learners take charge of their own thoughts and actions, thereby developing self-awareness, self-determination, and self-motivation. As is shown in their diary entries.

"My pronunciation was not standard. I would practice more"! (S1)

"I had to say that I am not good at English learning. I was trying to improve myself but only to find that English is hard to learn." (S2)

"I would practice more. I must work harder". (S1)

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement is a major part reflected in learners' diary entries. It generally refers to learners' affective responses to teachers, classmates, and schools. From Table 2, both positive emotions and negative emotions are found in both students. Positive emotions include enjoyment and confidence; while negative emotions include anxiety and frustration.

Enjoyment. Enjoyment which means the pleasant feelings is a major component of learners' positive emotions in language learning. It is acclaimed that positive emotions are contributed to learning outcome (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Positive emotions could promote resilience and hardness during difficult times (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). S1 expressed more enjoyment than S2 in their diary entries. It shows S1 had more positive emotions towards English learning. S1 wrote in her diary:

"The movie was wonderful!" (S1)

"I almost finished my homework, so happy!" (S1)

Interest is often associated with enjoyment in learner emotions. When learners show interest in the activity or learning task. They enjoy the learning process. It is shown in the diary:

Perhaps I was more interested in this way, and I felt much better about learning with my favorite APP." (S1)

Confidence. S1 also expressed her confidence in English learning when she achieved progress. Learners' confidence is strengthened when they made progress in learning. And confidence will motivate learners to engage into learning because they know they have the competence to succeed (Arroyo et al., 2009; Greene, 2015). For example, S1 wrote:

"I practiced English listening from the platform named U-learning, I finished all the listening task in unit 2. I felt more confident with my English"! (S1)

Anxiety. Anxiety is one of the most common negative emotions in foreign language learning and most studies on anxiety have reported negative influence on language learning because it affects learners' willingness and motivation (Horwitz, 2001; Arnold, 2011). When facing up learning difficulties, both students have reported anxiety in their diary entries:

"I have to admit that I am not suitable for learning English, but I have been trying to learn it well. English is really difficult." (S2)

"At English class, we have done listening exercises. I felt it very difficult and made many mistakes." (S1)

Frustration. Frustration is another kind of frequently mentioned negative emotion. The frustrated student is found less likely to use learning resources, leading to less engagement in learning (Baker et al., 2010). Frustration usually came when confronting with difficult materials or failures (Skinner et al., 2009). As is shown in the diaries:

"Today I got up so early to read English but I felt sleepy and tired. I didn't do any learning. Really frustrated"! (S1)

"I enjoyed listening to English songs but felt difficult to sing along. As a Chinese, it is really headache to learn English." (S2)

The Change of Learners' Engagement Level

Differences of learner engagement is examined both at the quantity level and at the quality level. Firstly, the quantity of learner engagement is counted through the frequencies occurred in the dairy. Each sub-dimension of engagement might be reported only once in participants' diary. For each participant, the total sum of manifestations of behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement was calculated which could better indicate engagement level on the reporting day. Then the number of the manifestations of each learner's engagement reported on each day are aggregated.

As is shown in Figure 1, both S1 and S2 engagement changed significantly over three weeks. The changes of learner engagement followed a complex, nonlinear trajectory. Learners' engagement level is dispersed and varied within the same person. There are off-days when S1 did not engage himself in learning at all and there are days when S1 put great efforts in English learning. She did homework, prepared slides, recited words and listened to English materials for practicing listening skills. Generally speaking, S2 had a higher level of engagement than S1. The change of both students' engagement level is non-linear, but the lines go in almost the same tendency.
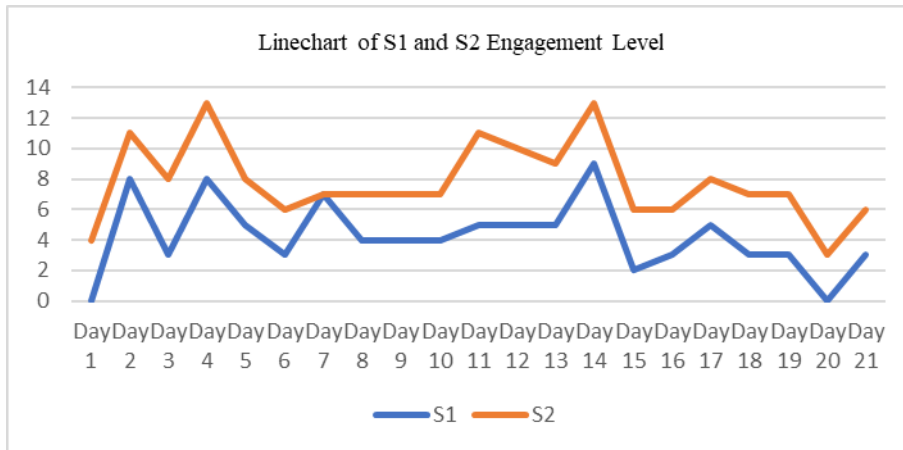
Figure 1
Change of learner engagement

Table 3 shows the total number of each student' behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement. For S2, the total sum of engagements is 86, which is higher than that that of S1. It is concluded that S2 is more actively involved in the learning process. Specifically, S2 exhibits more behavioral engagement than S1, which reflects that she took more actions in English learning. On the other hand, S2 shows more cognitive engagement, which shows she leveraged more cognitive energy on English learning. S2 is slightly more emotional engaged than S1. Therefore, their engagement pattern is different.

Table 3
The number of each student's engagement

Variables	S1	S2
Behavioral Engagement	34	41
Cognitive Engagement	14	25
Emotional Engagement	13	20
Total Sum	61	86

The quality level of learner engagement in language learning is displayed from various manifestations. As is shown from Table 2, S1 had shown a majority of routine learning such as attending classes and finishing various assignments. S2 reported more autonomous learning behaviors, employing digital devices and social media to immerse in language. In cognitive engagement, both learners reported using cognitive learning strategies and self-regulation strategies. These cognitive efforts show a high level of cognitive engagement, which is helpful to promote expertise and sustain their persistence in learning. Among learners' emotional engagement, they all expressed interest in learning but there is no report of flow which represents top level of emotional engagement.

Factors Influencing Learner Engagement

Table 4
Factors Reported in the Diary Entries

S1		S2	
Factors	Frequency	Factors	Frequency
a heavy burden of courses	1	English learning *APP*	4
online learning platform	2	teacher instructions	3
teacher instructions	1	physical condition	1
		online learning platform	1
		peer influence	1
		Tiktok	3

Through thematic analysis of learners' diary entries, some online and offline factors are reported to influence learner engagement, as is illustrated in Table 4. For example, S1 mentioned the online learning platform facilitated her learning process, as is written in the diary:

"I practice English listening on U campus (online learning platform) which allows me to speak as well and feeds back with a score. This is cool! I made a difference!" (S1)

S2 emphasized the influence of *APPs* for her English learning. She frequently uses the applications to remember vocabulary and practice listening by watching short videos through *Tiktok*. As is reported in her diary:

"Recently I browsed *Tiktok* frequently. I listened to the lived broadcast of English programs. The anchor plays the program for the first time. And for the second time I started dictating sentences." (S2)

Besides, teachers and their teaching methods are important factors. Thus, the teacher's teaching method and organization of class activities will have a direct influence on learner engagement. As S1wrote in the diary:

"I didn't know how to improve my writing ability, although I have written some short essays. It would be better If only the teacher could have corrected them and given us some feedback". "I felt more confident after I have participated in the class presentation". (S1)

DISCUSSIONS

Through analysis of learners' behavioral engagement, it is found that EFL learners in blended contexts are characterized by digital nativeness. They rely greatly on digital devices when they learn English. They use *APPs* for memorizing new words, or listening to English materials, which provide more opportunities for language learning. They are reliant on images and videos for being immersed in the language. The positive effects of images and videos on L2 learning are also supported by several studies (Chai & Erlam, 2008). Online English learning provides students with opportunities to get access to videos. English learning is afforded by authentic communication contexts or situations, which accounts for the attraction of video resources to students. Students

prefer native video resources, which are more likely to bring about positive emotions, resulting in more behavioral and cognitive engagement in learning activities. Therefore, the abundant online English learning resources have a positive impact on EFL learners' engagement.

Both learners' cognitive and emotional engagement pattern are different. These two dimensions are classified as individual internal processes and considered as primary for behavioral engagement (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Differences of leaner engagement are mainly relating to individual characteristics. Leaners' mindset, personality and previous knowledge are considered greatly influencing how they engage in learning (Mao & Li, 2021). In this study, S1 tended to reflect on her self-regulation strategies because she reported much more scenarios of self-monitoring, evaluating, and reasoning in the learning process. S2 tended to find various learning strategies. When she met difficulties in remembering new words, she searched for strategies such as reviewing and repetition learning. Learners' emotions are easily aroused in the diary writing process. Emotional engagement affects other dimensions of engagement because learners' subjective attitudes or perceptions plays a decisive role.

Both participants were positioned in the similar learning context but exhibited different engagement pattern. According to the sociocultural theory, learners interact with the factors in the sociocultural environment, and these factors might facilitate or discourage learning process depending on learners' agency (Mao & Li, 2021). Learners do not passively respond to classroom instruction but rather they exercise their agency by individualizing, developing, refining, or questioning teachers' classroom instruction (Mercer 2012). Learner engagement is a manifestation of their agency (Larsen-Freeman 2019). Learners have some degree of control what they do and how they respond, leading to the autonomy of learning (Reeve, 2012). From the quality perspective, autonomous learning is a high-level behavioral engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). They engage with learning activities on their own terms and with individual characteristics. They decide what to learn and what resources to mediate their learning.

The dialectic relationship between learner characteristics and elements in the blended learning context is decisive for the change of learner engagement level. Learners are mediated by tools such as online platforms, *APPs* and dictionaries to achieve their English learning goals when they are engaged. In the blended learning, individual learner's engagement behavior, cognition and emotion are closely related to the mediators in the surroundings. Learners are bound by school rules and the atmosphere created by teachers, peers and staff in the community. The change of learner engagement is facilitated by the dynamic interaction between individuals and elements in the complex blended learning system. Therefore, teachers, teaching content, certain classroom conventions, and social culture in the broad sense can all have an impact on student engagement. It shows that learner engagement is socially and individually constructed.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has made an in-depth analysis of EFL learner' engagement in the blended context through two learners' diaries. From discussions above, the manifestations of

learner engagement reflect many native characteristics of foreign language teaching in China, representing many common behaviors, cognition and affect among college students. Learner engagement in blended learning is featured with a layer of technological color because these learners referred as the millennial generation are considered to be digital native. Though it is a study based on only two learners' diary entries which may not readily be generalized to every EFL learner, it is important to note that detailed descriptions of individual characteristics and contextual factors offer valuable insights into the multifaceted structure of engagement that encompasses major part of learning experience. Engagement is crucial for successful language learning.

More importantly, this study proves that learner engagement is a dynamic construct that varies with different learning situations and among learners, while the differences in the degree of engagement are attributed to the interplay between individual learners and sociocultural elements in the environment. Therefore, learner engagement is individually and socially constructed. Teachers should take some measures to maintain learner engagement in order to help them develop sustainably, which might include providing more chances for individualized learning with online resources and creating a better blended learning context.

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APPENDIX A

Diary Prompts

Your dairy should cover the following questions:

(1) What efforts did you put on English learning no matter it is online or offline learning? Did you take part in the learning activities? What tasks have you finished? 不管是线上还是线下，你是怎样学习英语的？你是否参加英语学习活动？完成了那些英语学习任务？

(2) How did you find your English learning today? What is your feeling when you are doing activities? Were you happy with your learning today? Did you feel frustrated or confident with English learning? 在学习过程中，你的心情是怎样的？是愉悦的还是烦躁的？是积极的还是消极的？你对英语学习充满信心还是挫败呢？

(3) Were there any strategies that you apply when you were learning? Were you concentrated or not? Did you have a goal or purpose when you are learning? How did you comment on your learning process? 在学习过程中，你的学习状态是怎样的？是否集中注意力？是否全身心投入？是否采用一些学习策略？你如何评价自己的学习过程呢？

(4) Are there any factors that influence your learning process? What are they? 在学习过程中有哪些影响因素？