


## Strategies to Foster Engagement among First-Year EFL Students: An Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study at a Vietnamese University

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** student engagement, EFL learners, freshman, learning strategies

The study focuses on identifying strategies to promote student engagement and applying them to the current context. The study has applied the explanatory mixed-method approach, combining a quantitative survey with 202 responses from the questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews with 4 students. Based on the reactions of the two collection processes and after analyzing the data, the results show that receiving feedback and the form of feedback given in different forms have positive impacts on promoting student engagement. In addition, the strategies not only help students actively participate in learning but also help them improve their language skills. However, psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence are also challenges especially for first-year students. Based on the feedback recorded, the study suggests that creating a stress-free learning environment can significantly motivate learners and, at the same time, reduce anxiety and lack of confidence in the learning process.

## Introduction

### *Background of the study*

One of the first difficulties that first-year students encounter in the university environment is adjusting to a completely new setting and meeting new relationship. Changing to a completely new environment leaves many students unprepared to adapt; this plays a key role in the learning process and academic outcomes, shaping students' experiences in this new environment (M. Li et al., 2023). Especially for first-year students entering the university environment, the transition can be challenging in terms of understanding, grasping, and adapting. Previous studies have shown that many learners struggle to adapt their learning habits to meet university requirements. As Alrashidi et al. (2016) stated, students sometimes find it difficult to adjust their learning habits, especially in terms of using English as the main communication tool, leaving many students with little time to adapt to the new learning environment, making them feel lost and unable to integrate with people around them because

of difficulties in using English in context. In addition, many first-year EFL students experience feelings of isolation, lack of confidence, and difficulty adapting to the learning style at the university level (Trang & Baldauf, 2007).

The challenges negatively affect students' motivation and engagement, which are closely related to learning outcomes, and also reduce students' interaction with their surroundings. Therefore, this study aims to identify and propose strategies to promote students' engagement and motivation as they adapt to a new learning environment.

### *Research objectives*

The main research subjects are first-year EFL students at Van Lang University, aged 18 to 23, who have just transitioned from high school to university without guidance or direction and do not know what to do. This study aims to identify the barriers that faced by first-year EFL students and examine and propose suitable strategies to boost learners' engagement with the new learning context. In addition to proposing suitable strategies, this study reviews engagement strategies from previous research and conducts a survey to evaluate learners' satisfaction, aiming to identify the most suitable and effective strategies for first-year EFL students at Van Lang University.

### *Significance of the study*

The purpose of this study is to explore strategies to encourage first-year EFL students when they have to adapt to university learning environments. To help these English majors better integrate into university life in the coming years, it is essential to first investigate their current levels of university engagement. By implementing strategies that promote learning and motivation. These strategies can enhance the psychological well-being and overall learning experiences of first-year students, thereby supporting their successful integration into the university community. Moreover, the findings can help the teacher design suitable approaches to boost their students' engagement.

## **Literature Review**

### *Theoretical Frameworks of Engagement*

Engagement is understood as a multidimensional concept that includes aspects such as cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social, and these aspects all contribute to the learning experience (Fredricks, Filsecker, & Lawson, 2016; Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

The study is based on multiple theoretical frameworks related to student engagement, including self-regulatory, affective and socio-constructivist perspectives, to explain the factors influencing EFL learners' engagement and motivation. Krashen (1982) pointed out that learners' anxiety hinders, while self-confidence and motivation facilitate, language acquisition (Zen & Apirana, 2015). Zimmerman (2002) described self-regulated learning as a process in which learners plan, execute, and reflect on the process. In addition, Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2012) emphasized autonomy, competence, and engagement, the interaction between learners and their environment as key psychological needs in promoting learner engagement. In addition to self-directed learning or self-regulation, social interaction

plays an important role throughout the learning process (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018), and productive collaboration helps promote learner motivation (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). In an educational context, Kuh (2001) and Pham and Le (2024) defined learner engagement as including learners' active investment in learning activities and learning support.

The above theoretical foundations are the guiding framework of this study, which is to identify strategies that promote EFL students' motivation and engagement at Van Lang University.

### *Challenges Faced by EFL Students*

The transition from high school to university is particularly important in shaping students' attitudes to learning and decision-making abilities (Ketonen et al., 2016). Moreover, first-year EFL students often encounter problems when they are adapting to a new learning environment, namely learning styles and teaching methods that have not yet been adjusted (Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012), which leads to anxiety, and learners are often overwhelmed by the sudden change (Maulida & Sofi, 2023; Le & Ngo, 2025).

Krashen (1982) suggested that high levels of anxiety and stress can reduce motivation and be a major barrier to language acquisition, especially in first-year students (Van, 2024). In the EFL context, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework shows how teaching, cognition, and interactive social presence maintain engagement, aligning with Vygotsky's emphasis on the centrality of social interaction in learning (Yang, Zhang & Dixon, 2023). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012), these barriers can hinder the fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence in learning, and relatedness, leading to reduced student engagement. In contrast, student engagement is strongly influenced by self-confidence and the available supportive environment (Chemers et al., 2001), while language barriers are also one of the factors that limit student engagement (Alharbi, 2021).

### *Strategies to Enhance Engagement*

Zimmerman's (2002) study on self-regulated learning focuses on the active planning, implementation, and evaluation of the process. This series of actions helps show a close relationship with active learning engagement. In addition, learner engagement is enhanced when students have confidence in their own abilities (Wang, Patterson & Long, 2024). On the contrary, when learners feel a lack of confidence or anxiety, this reduces their spirit, initiative, or learning effectiveness (Listyani & Tananuraksakul, 2019). Hiromori (2021) also pointed out that balancing behavioral, emotional, and social interaction factors in the learning process affects learning ability and increases learner engagement.

In addition to studies showing that self-regulation and engagement are related to cognition, providing feedback to learners is also a strategy for promoting external engagement. Yang et al. (2023) pointed out that structured feedback helps learners understand the core, thereby enhancing learning awareness and enabling them to adjust appropriate learning plans. In addition, corrective feedback is also effective when students are interacted with and are guided after receiving comments from the feedback giver (Liu & Feng, 2023; Le & Ngo, 2025). This shows that feedback strategy is a powerful tool to promote learner participation and engagement in the learning environment.

In addition, the surrounding environment also plays a key role in promoting learner engagement. Meeuwisse, Severiens, and Born (2010) found that collaborative learning environments create a sense of belonging for learners, as they feel they are part of a group, and are more motivated to actively participate in contributing to learning activities, which is shown to be closely related to learners' motivation and engagement. Interaction with the surrounding environment is a central factor throughout the learning and development process (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). Moreover, Ye (2024) stated that classroom climate has a strong influence on students' engagement and motivation and also the interaction between teachers and learners plays a key role in shaping and forming students' engagement. When the classroom environment is comfortable and positive, it helps learners feel more engaged and proactive in contributing to learning (Ma et. al., 2024). Mehdinezhad (2011); Chong & Soo (2021); Han (2021); Zheng (2022) found that interactions between instructors and students are closely related to socio-emotional development and engagement. Zhao and Yang (2022), when students feel emotionally supported, interactions with the surrounding environment, students become more actively involved in the classroom.

These findings reinforce the urgency of the current study, with the aim of finding suitable environmental factors and teaching strategies to enhance engagement among first-year students at Van Lang University.

In addition, Morell (2020) and Nguyen (2026) stated that diversified teaching methods such as applying technology in teaching, which promotes engagement thanks to the application of technology combining visual and audio elements, which helps promote students' active learning incentive.

Accordingly, this study investigates the following research questions:

1. What are the key psychological, social, and environmental factors that influence first-year EFL students' engagement in university learning activities?
2. Which specific instructional strategies and support mechanisms are most effective in enhancing engagement among first-year EFL students in a university setting?

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

This study was conducted in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University. Participants included undergraduate students in years 1 to 4, as well as alumni, all aged 18 to 23. Participants include first-year students as the primary target group, alongside students from year 2 to year 4 and alumni, who were included to provide experience-based evaluations on their first-year learning journal. Of the total sample, 61.75% identified as female and 38.25% as male. The distribution comprised 87 freshmen (42.6%), 4 sophomores (2%), 74 juniors (37.2%), 15 seniors (7.4%), and 22 alumni (10.8%). Recruitment was carried out through classroom announcements and posts on the Faculty's official social media page.

First-year students are the primary focus of this study, providing direct insight into their current difficulties and their self-reported engagement levels. Meanwhile, responses from

sophomores to alumni are used as retrospective reflections to evaluate and validate the effectiveness of different engagement strategies. These combined perspectives enrich the data by integrating real-time experiences and retrospective evaluations, thereby supporting the identification of effective strategies to foster first-year students' engagement.

### *Design of the Study*

This study combines quantitative and qualitative methods, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. Applying this approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these strategies that enhance EFL students' engagement. This study builds on previous literature on strategies and their effectiveness in increasing student engagement.

From previous studies on the effectiveness of strategies to increase student engagement, quantitative data were collected via questionnaires administered through convenience sampling to approximately 200 participants. The research subjects were students in years 2 to 4 at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University.

Qualitative data were collected through four to five interviews with students in their first to fourth years and alumni. The interviews were designed with questions that did not follow the interview questionnaire, as in the qualitative part, using a semi-structured format. Additional open-ended questions in the qualitative phase will help the study obtain practical data and understand more factors related to students' feelings, attitudes, and opinions. The purposeful selection of research subjects from the second year onwards was intended to help the research team survey students' views and experiences regarding the effectiveness of the strategies mentioned in the questionnaire, enabling the team to conclude which strategies were suitable for students and the context at Van Lang University.

### *Data collection & analysis*

The questionnaire was designed on the online platform Google Forms, which was also the main tool the research team used for the quantitative survey. The questionnaire consisted of 49 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, including 5 levels ("Totally disagree" (TD) – 1 to "Totally agree" (TA) – 5), and was adapted from related articles related to students' engagement namely (Lam et al., 2014), (Hart, Stewart, & Jimerson, 2011) and (Sun, 2016), edited to suit the context of students at the school. The survey form was distributed to students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University. The questionnaire consists of 6 sections, and the data are presented as percentages.

The study used an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. In the quantitative data collection phase, the research team used a questionnaire designed on the Google Forms platform. In the qualitative phase, the research continued with semi-structured interviews, during which questions were asked to clarify and further explore the learners' perspectives.

### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data after being collected by a survey questionnaire using the Google Form platform, which was analyzed by descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. To base trends on data from participants' responses.

The data recorded from the semi-structured interviews will be coded thematically. This coding process follows the steps of Clarke and Braun (2016). The data is coded using the following standard steps: reading all responses, identifying the main content, classifying responses into content with similar ideas, and drawing out common trends. The data will be analyzed using content analysis to capture learners' perspectives, experiences, and suggestions. The results of the interviews will be compared with participants' responses to summarize similar content. The responses are checked and summarized into items with similar content to ensure accuracy and strengthen reliability. Typical quotes are presented in the results and discussion section of the study.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Before participating in the survey, all participants were clearly informed of the study's purpose. The study was approved by the Scientific Council of Van Lang University. Participants' identities were kept confidential during questionnaire responses, and participation was completely voluntary. The data collected was only used for this study. Consent was obtained transparently before participants began answering the survey.

To ensure confidentiality, no personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were anonymized. The data collected was stored securely and used only for the purpose of this study. Participants' identities and personal information were kept completely confidential throughout the study.

## Results/Findings

### *The Effectiveness of Receiving Feedback*

**Table 1**

The impact of feedback on motivation and confidence

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
1	Feedback from teachers motivates me to participate more actively in class.	7.4% (15)	2.5% (5)	24.3% (49)	29.2% (59)	36.6% (74)
2	Receiving positive feedback helps me feel more confident in speaking the target language.	5.9 % (12)	3% (6)	14.4% (29)	25.2% (51)	51.5% (104)
3	Constructive criticism helps me identify areas for improvement and participate more actively.	5% (10)	6.4% (13)	17.3% (35)	34.2% (69)	37.1% (75)
4	Regular feedback throughout the course kept me feeling progressed and motivated.	5% (10)	5.9 % (12)	18.3% (37)	33.2% (67)	37.6% (76)

Table 1 shows a strong positive trend in students' perceptions of feedback. Approximately 75% of students agree, indicating that positive feedback plays an important role in building students' confidence.

These figures indicate that students not only expect to be praised but also want to receive feedback, as it helps them self-reflect on their shortcomings and areas for improvement.

**Table 2**

Characteristics of feedback affecting student engagement

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
5	I feel more motivated when feedback is given immediately rather than delayed.	5.4% (11)	3% (6)	20.3% (41)	28.2% (57)	43.1% (87)
6	When feedback is specific and detailed, I tend to be more focused and engaged.	5.4% (11)	2.5% (5)	18.8% (38)	25.2% (51)	48.1% (97)
7	Targeted feedback and follow-up instructions help me stay engaged.	5.4% (11)	3.5% (7)	17.8% (36)	31.7% (64)	41.6% (84)

From the data in Table 2, demonstrate the effectiveness of feedback forms with specific characteristics such as time, detail, goals, and the impact of the characteristics of these feedback on student engagement.

The above results suggest that not only receiving feedback but also considering factors such as the timing, manner, purpose, and content of feedback play an important role in enhancing student engagement.

**Table 3**

Feedback formats that affect learner engagement

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
8	Feedback from friends helps me participate more in group activities and discussions.	6.4% (13)	3.5% (7)	24.8% (50)	29.2% (59)	36.1% (73)
9	Giving feedback privately instead of in front of the whole class had a positive impact on my participation.	5.4% (11)	6.4% (13)	20.8% (42)	24.3% (49)	43.1% (87)

The findings highlight differences in how feedback sources and formats affect students' engagement.

It is noteworthy that the positive feedback in item 9 has a consensus rate of 67.4% (levels 4 and 5). This preference may be linked to students' fear of embarrassment, highlighting the tendency of students to like to receive feedback privately, because this makes them feel safe,

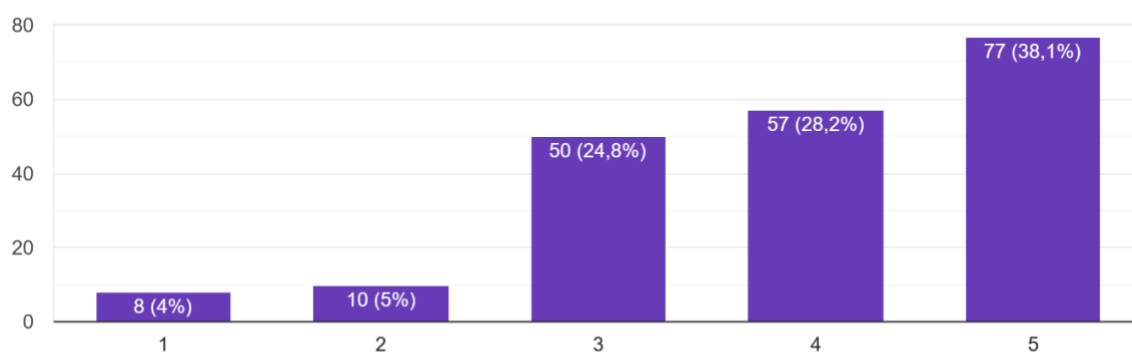
not too reserved, and have to pay attention to their surroundings, thereby helping them reduce psychological pressure and increase participation.

Overall, the form of feedback also plays a key role in increasing student engagement, such as personalized, private or public feedback from peers or teachers. Those above feedback methods are all shown by students to have a positive tendency to agree with the effectiveness and impact of feedback on increasing student engagement.

### Figure 1 (Item 10)

Different feedback methods affect learner engagement

Tôi có xu hướng tham gia nhiều hơn khi giáo viên sử dụng nhiều phương thức phản hồi khác nhau (viết, nói, từ bạn bè). (I am more likely to participate in a variety of feedback methods (e.g., written, oral, peer).  
202 câu trả lời



The data showed that when teachers are flexible in how they provide feedback, this can stimulate interest and increase student engagement in learning activities.

The positive feedback trend indicated that providing personalized feedback and varying teaching methods simultaneously better meet learners' learning needs. Similarly, Serrano, Dea-Ayuela, Gonzalez-Burgos, Serrano-Gil, and Lalatsa (2019) noted that students rated the effectiveness of personalized feedback highly. Therefore, based on this evidence, teachers are encouraged to be flexible in using a combination of feedback forms, which is considered an effective strategy to promote learner engagement.

These findings directly address the research question 1, indicating that both the quality, or its characteristics and form of feedback, significantly influence and foster students' engagement. At the same time, the results address Research Question 2, indicating that specific feedback strategies (timely, detailed, and private) are particularly effective at enhancing engagement.

*Communication Channels and Digital Platforms***Table 4**

The Effectiveness of communication platforms with learners' engagement

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
12	School emails keep me updated on academic and extracurricular activities.	6.4% (13)	6.9% (14)	23.3% (47)	30.7% (62)	32.7% (66)
13	Social networks (FB, Instagram...) help me connect with school information.	6.9% (14)	5.4% (11)	20.8% (42)	30.2% (61)	36.6% (74)
14	The school's mobile app provides relevant and timely information to students.	5.9% (12)	7.4% (15)	30.2% (61)	22.8% (46)	33.7% (68)
15	Personal email notifications help me get more involved in school activities.	6.4% (13)	8.9% (18)	28.7% (58)	28.7% (58)	27.2% (55)

The student communication channels also play a key role in fostering an environment for student interaction. Notably, the effectiveness of personal email notification (item 15) had the lowest consensus rate, at 55.9%, while the neutral rate was 28.7%. These two figures showed that the effectiveness has not really had a strong impact on student participation. The results suggest that combining multiple communication channels improves student participation and retention. Therefore, these online platforms play a crucial role in helping the university environment to reach, maintain, and strengthen the connection between the learning environment and the increasingly connected learners.

**Table 5**

Impact of digital tools and platforms supporting learning

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
16	The learning management system (e-learning) helps me engage in learning activities.	4.5% (9)	3% (6)	15.8% (32)	35.1% (71)	41.6% (84)
17	Receiving regular feedback from instructors via digital platforms helps me participate more actively.	3% (6)	5% (10)	23.3% (47)	35.1% (71)	33.7% (68)
18	Discussion boards and online collaboration tools help me interact better academically.	6.4% (13)	6.4% (13)	25.2% (51)	32.7% (66)	29.2% (59)

This group involves digital tools and platforms that support learning and instructor feedback. Across the three items (16, 17, and 18), it is noteworthy that, regarding the effectiveness of the learning management system (item 16), up to 76.7% agreed on the impact of the E-learning platform. This data trend suggests that structured digital environments provide clarity and accessibility, which foster learners' engagement. Items 17 and 18 with 68.8% and 61.9%, respectively. Showing that the effectiveness of E-learning plays an important role in helping to increase student performance and participation.

Similarly, in the above survey questionnaires, the learning platform and its combination with digital feedback had significant positive impacts on student engagement and motivation, while there were still a few significant differences for the affirmative feedback group.

**Table 6**

Peer Communication and Collaboration

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
19	Student communication through forums or chat groups helps me get more involved.	6.4% (13)	7.4% (15)	33.7% (68)	21.3% (43)	31.2% (63)
20	Having access to multiple channels of information helps me feel more connected to the university.	4.5% (9)	8.4% (17)	26.2% (53)	29.7% (60)	31.2% (63)

Students were quite in agreement with item 20, with 60.9% acknowledging the effectiveness of receiving information channels that help learners feel more connected to the university. However, the neutral level of 26.2% showed that this approach was not really effective for more than half of the students.

Overall, the effectiveness of using online platforms to create contexts for students to interact with each other still has a positive response trend, but the productivity is not as clear as in previous questionnaires. The data also show that student communication and diversity in information channels play a significant role, but there are still some aspects that need further exploration to increase the effectiveness of online platforms in helping to increase student engagement.

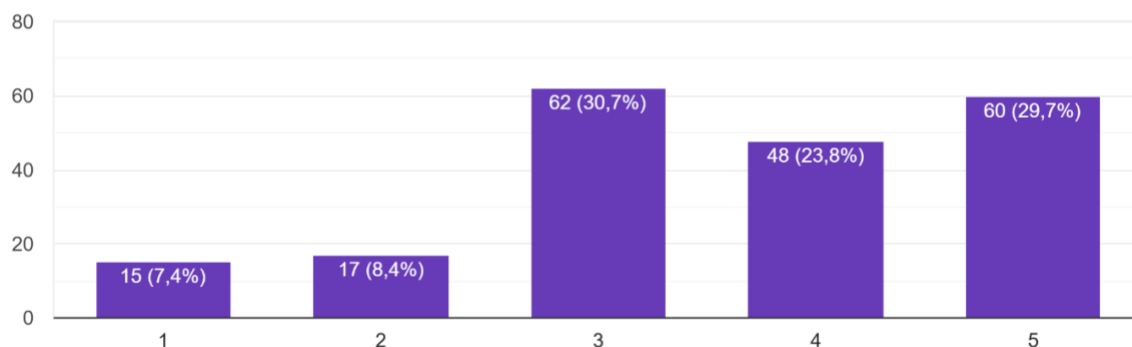
These findings from items 12 to 20 directly answer the research question by showing that digital communication channels and platforms are instrumental in fostering engagement, although their effectiveness varies among students. By highlighting the role of environmental factors, suggesting that integrating multiple communication tools and digital learning systems is an effective strategy to support student engagement.

**Figure 2 (Item 21)**

Online events and workshops encourage me to participate in school activities.

Sự kiện trực tuyến và hội thảo khuyến khích tôi tham gia vào các hoạt động của trường. (Virtual events and webinars encourage my active participation in university activities.)

202 câu trả lời



These data suggest that to increase participation, universities should focus more on designing interactive online events tailored to students' needs and interests. This indicates that passive formats may not be sufficient, and more interactive, student-centered designs are needed to increase engagement. Yorke (2006) argues that students approach their learning environment in different ways, that learning environments should recognize and organize activities based on these approaches, and that students need a balance between learning and enjoyment, so that programs and workshops should include practical content appropriate to students' needs.

Overall, online events play an important role in maintaining student engagement, especially in the current flexible learning landscape that combines online and in-person learning.

### *Student Perceptions of Participation*

**Table 7**

Students' perceptions of participation activities in English classes

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
22	I can concentrate when I attend live English classes.	4% (8)	5% (10)	19.8% (40)	29.7% (60)	41.6% (84)
23	I finished my homework on time.	3.5% (7)	5.4% (11)	18.8% (38)	28.2% (57)	44.1% (89)
24	I obey the classroom rules and regulations.	3.5% (7)	3% (6)	13.4% (27)	23.8% (48)	56.4% (114)
25	I monitor my study schedule and make adjustments as needed to improve my learning.	4.5% (9)	3.5% (7)	21.3% (43)	32.7% (66)	38.1% (77)

In item 25, 70.8% recorded quite positive feedback, indicating that many students actively manage their study schedules. This showed that most students are quite proactive in managing their study plans and are proactive in self-studying to improve their performance. However, it is still lower than items 23 and 24, with the highest neutral feedback in table 7, which illustrates that a group of students is still facing obstacles in self-studying and adapting to the new learning environment.

Overall, Table 7 shows that students have a high level of awareness regarding classroom participation, particularly regarding compliance with classroom rules and completing assignments on time. However, as they are transitioning to a new learning environment, most students are aware of self-study and are proactive in managing their study plans, but with a high neutral response in item 25, this shows that a small group of students are still vague about self-study and self-regulation.

**Table 8**

Students' perceptions of learning motivation and learning goals

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
26	I find ways to overcome difficulties and persevere in learning English.	3% (6)	3% (6)	22.3% (45)	30.2% (61)	41.6% (84)
27	I set clear goals to improve my English skills and adjust my learning strategies.	5.4% (11)	3.5% (7)	24.8% (50)	29.7% (60)	36.6% (74)
28	I learn how to become a better learner.	4% (8)	3.5% (7)	20.3% (41)	30.7% (62)	41.6% (84)
29	I find ways to make learning English fun for me.	3.5% (7)	5.4% (11)	22.8% (46)	26.7% (54)	41.6% (84)

The responses in Table 8 showed that students show relatively strong motivation and goal-oriented learning objectives, and are proactive in increasing their participation in classes, especially in English classes. However, in terms of organization and setting detailed goals, learning plans, or long-term goals, they demonstrate uncertainty, responding neutrally to item 27.

**Table 9**

Self-Reflection and Improvement

30	I recognize my mistakes in English and use them to improve myself.	3.4% (7)	3.4% (7)	20.7% (42)	27.7% (56)	44.8% (89)
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Item 30 indicated that students' ability to self-reflect and self-regulate their learning is strong, with approximately 78% of students recognizing and correcting their own shortcomings. This positive feedback rate demonstrated that students have been able to equip themselves with appropriate learning strategies.

**Table 10**

Interaction between learners

<b>31</b>	I work in groups with other students on projects	5% (10)	3% (6)	22.8% (46)	30.2% (61)	39.1% (79)
<b>32</b>	I contribute to class discussions	5% (10)	5% (10)	26.2% (53)	33.7% (68)	30.2% (61)
<b>33</b>	I seek out the opinions of teachers and students through discussions	4% (8)	3% (6)	24.3% (49)	36.1% (73)	32.7% (66)
<b>34</b>	I regularly post on discussion boards	21.3% (43)	14.9% (30)	25.2% (51)	16.3% (33)	22.3% (45)
<b>35</b>	I help friends improve their English skills (reading, writing, pronunciation)	6.4% (13)	7.4% (15)	31.7% (64)	24.8% (50)	29.7% (60)

Table 10 illustrates that students are often proactive in collaboration, discussion, and group work. In addition, participation in contributions or interactions on online platforms such as forums, discussion sections, or peer support that are not part of the learning task may require additional instruction and promotional support to increase students' active participation.

### *Language Anxiety and Participation Strategies*

**Table 11**

Students' anxiety in English classes

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
<b>36</b>	I tremble when I know I will be called on to speak in English class	15.8% (32)	10.9% (22)	24.3% (49)	23.8% (48)	25.2% (51)
<b>37</b>	I still feel nervous when I study English, even though I am well prepared	13.4% (27)	8.4% (17)	23.8% (48)	25.2% (51)	29.2% (59)
<b>38</b>	I feel nervous and anxious when I know I will be called on to speak in English class	13.4% (27)	10.9% (22)	26.2% (53)	20.3% (41)	29.2% (59)
<b>39</b>	I feel anxious when the English teacher asks me a question that I have not prepared for	5.9% (12)	10.9% (22)	25.2% (51)	24.8% (50)	33.2% (67)
<b>40</b>	I feel anxious when participating in group discussions in class	13.9% (28)	12.9% (26)	30.7% (62)	21.8% (44)	20.8% (42)
<b>41</b>	I feel more stressed and anxious in English classes than in other classes	21.3% (43)	14.4% (29)	23.8% (48)	19.3% (39)	21.3% (43)

The most prominent findings were in items 36, 37, and 38, with 49%, 54.4%, and 49.5% agreeing, respectively. The highest agreement response was in item 37, which showed that

students still felt nervous when they had to speak English in class, even though they had prepared in advance. A notable finding was that although students responded that they were somewhat nervous when participating in English classes, when comparing English classes with other subjects, it showed a fairly even assessment, with 35.7% disagreeing and 40.6% agreeing respectively. This gave the information that students have quite diverse views, with no clear trend of being more or less stressed than other subjects.

From Table 11, it has been shown that about half of the students often experience nervousness and anxiety when being called on to answer questions in English classes, despite having prepared in advance. These responses show the importance of creating a comfortable learning environment to help learners feel less pressure when called on to answer questions.

**Table 12**

Participation in extracurricular activities

Item	Questionnaire	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
42	I participate in sports activities	11.4% (23)	7.9% (16)	27.7% (56)	22.8% (46)	30.2% (61)
43	I participate in conferences/seminars organized by the school	14.9% (30)	13.9% (28)	33.7% (68)	16.3% (33)	21.3% (43)
44	I participate in various artistic activities	14.4% (29)	12.4% (25)	27.7% (56)	18.8% (38)	26.7% (54)
45	I collaborate with lecturers to carry out various activities	5.9% (12)	8.9% (18)	30.7% (62)	28.2% (57)	26.2% (53)
46	I participate in cultural events	14.9% (30)	11.9% (24)	32.2% (65)	16.8% (34)	24.3% (49)

The overall response to extracurricular activities showed that students are most interested in collaborative activities with their lecturers (item 45), with the highest positive response at 54.4%. This demonstrated that students show relatively higher engagement in academic activities and working with lecturers. In addition, students responded positively to sports-related extracurricular activities, accounting for 53% (item 42), higher than the remaining activities, indicating that such activities are of interest to most students.

In contrast, activities such as workshops, arts, or cultural activities received less positive responses than items 42 and 45. Approximately 27% of students chose “Neutral,” suggesting that these activities have a relatively high level of interest.

These findings contribute to Research Question 2 by suggesting that lecturer-supported, structured activities are more effective at promoting engagement.

### Figure 3 (Item 47)

Types of feedback that affect students' motivation to learn a foreign language

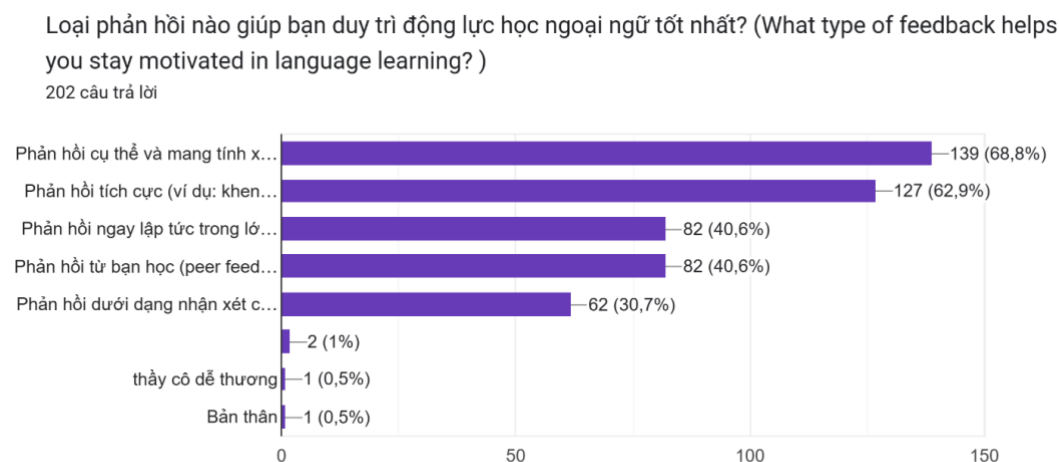


Figure 3 showed that more than 60% prefer to receive specific and constructive feedback from the lecturer such as pointing out mistakes and guiding how to correct.

In addition, the timing of receiving feedback and who the feedback is from also play an important role in maintaining learners' motivation. With 40.6% of respondents choosing these two items, it shows that receiving immediate feedback and receiving feedback from peers also have a certain influence on learners' motivation.

### Figure 4 (Item 48)

The Impact of Feedback Situations on Learning Participation

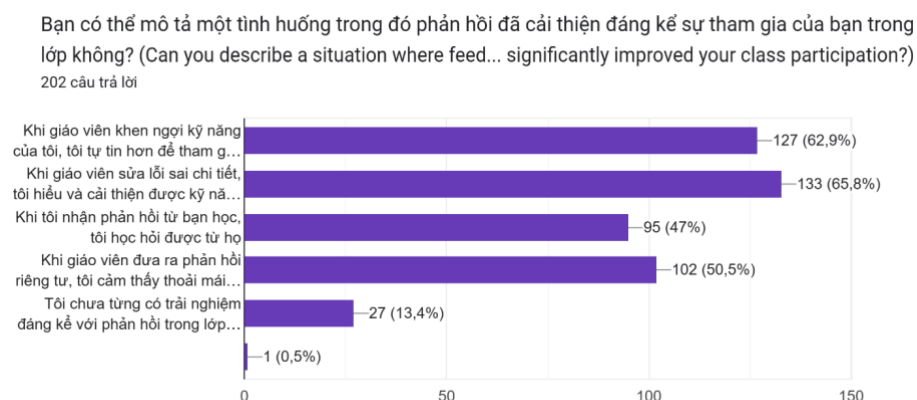
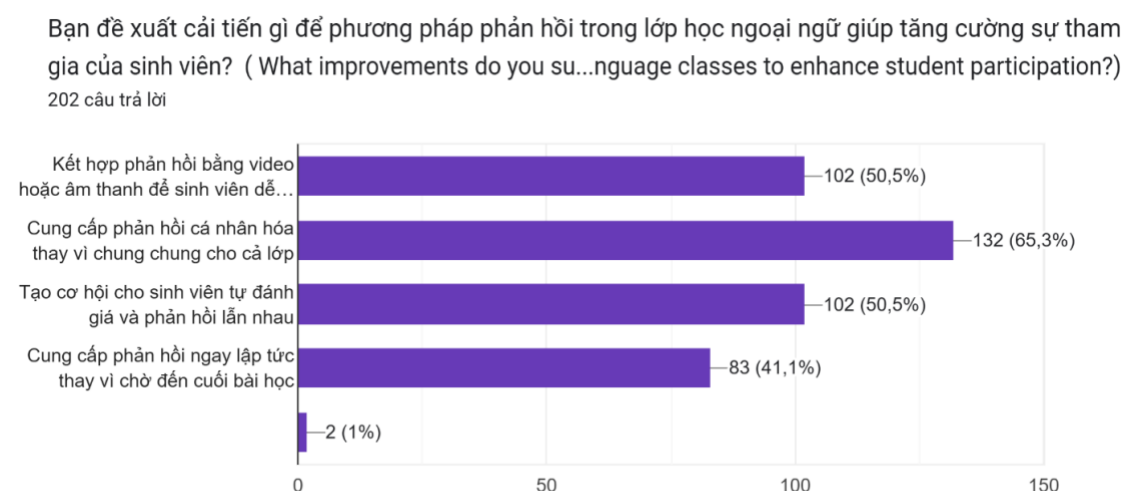


Figure 4 presents the effectiveness of providing feedback in specific situations on learner motivation and engagement. Notably, nearly 70% of learners say that when instructors give detailed feedback and point out areas for improvement, it enhances their motivation and engagement. In addition, positive feedback or encouragement also helps promote learner engagement, with about 63% of respondents agreeing with this item. Furthermore, these two

forms of feedback, namely receiving private feedback or from peers, have about 50% and 47% of responses agreeing, showing that they have a significant impact on learners' learning incentive.

### Figure 5 (Item 49)

Student recommendations for enhancing feedback methods



Based on Figure 5, students show a strong preference for detailed feedback, which helps learners increase their motivation and active participation in classroom activities. Therefore, in Figure 4, students indicate that they expect to improve and are more motivated by receiving detailed, specific, personalized feedback than by general feedback.

In addition, students also suggested other forms of feedback, such as using audio or video recordings and peer feedback. These forms of feedback were also noted with about 50% agreement among students, indicating that a group of students highly appreciated their effectiveness.

## Discussion

While the findings of this study provided valuable insights, several limitations warrant further consideration. More specifically, these shortcomings are primarily methodological, particularly related to the reliance on self-reported data, which may affect the validity of the findings. Notably, some unexpected results emerged that challenge initial hypotheses. For example, inconsistencies such as relatively high agreement alongside notable neutral responses suggest that reported engagement may not fully reflect actual learning behaviors. As Ananthan, Gao, and Salim (2024) pointed out the discrepancy between self-assessment and being assessed. This aligns with the current study, where students' perceived engagement may differ from their observable participation, indicating a potential gap between perception and reality. Similarly, Fuller et al. (2018) pointed out that many students often feign

participation, providing subjective assessments, which poses a serious limitation when research relies on self-assessment feedback. Moreover, relying on self-assessment data can introduce subjective biases and significantly affect the reliability of feedback. This phenomenon may help explain why a large proportion of students in this study responded positively despite the presence of anxiety and neutral responses on other items. These studies emphasize that the influence and importance of cross-checking data sources and mixed-method approaches in future research should be strengthened through richer, more appropriate strategies.

The collected data contain extraneous variables that can introduce bias in the study. Self-report bias, in which participants may intentionally or unintentionally rate themselves in a positive light or misrepresent their own experiences, can directly influence a study's validity. Additionally, sample size and demographics such as environment, age, and cultural background are confounding variables that can introduce bias in participants' responses. Acknowledging these variables is essential to understanding the findings and putting them into context.

To deepen our understanding and address these limitations, it is recommended that future research incorporate more objective and validated approaches, such as behavioral observations, video recordings of classroom learning, and triangulated self-assessment feedback. Implementing a longitudinal study design could provide further evidence of the relationship between intervention strategies and learner growth and motivation. Expanding the sample size and research context beyond EFL students would also provide further assurance of the strategies' effectiveness.

## Conclusion

The study aims to explore the factors affecting student engagement and to propose appropriate learning strategies for learners, teachers, and learning environments to improve engagement and promote students' motivation to learn, especially first-year students. Data from student feedback indicate that factors affecting student engagement include psychological factors, changing learning environments, and feedback quality. Due to passive learning habits in the previous learning environment, students often lack opportunities to practice and real-life environments, so adjusting to innovation is one of the major challenges for new students.

Student evaluations show that they are significantly motivated by receiving feedback in a variety of forms, from general to detailed, constructive, or positive. Teaching in a variety of forms, flexible content, practical learning tasks, and especially technology-integrated classes significantly increases their interest in learning.

Thanks to the pressure-free learning environment, students' language use is constantly encouraged. Feedback helps students improve their self-study and self-regulation abilities, thereby fostering motivation in line with SDT and SRL theories.

### Limitation

The study has some acknowledged limitations. First, the study was conducted at one Vietnamese university and involved only EFL students, which may mean the reported trends are not representative of findings from other culturally and linguistically diverse institutions or learning environments. Second, the sample size was relatively modest, which may not have adequately represented the diversity of responses needed to demonstrate a clearer trend. Third, the study data largely relied on Google Forms questionnaires, which are subjective self-reports and susceptible to environmental factors and response bias. Finally, due to time constraints, the impacts and longitudinal surveys of the strategy's effectiveness cannot specifically demonstrate its effectiveness and do not provide insight into its long-term impact. The study used a cross-sectional survey to examine challenges, drawing on previous studies of strategies, and a questionnaire was designed for participants to evaluate effectiveness based on their own experiences.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the research expand its scope to other disciplines and include the second-, third-, and fourth-year students. Further research could examine each aspect as an effective strategy to improve specific skills. It is recommended to conduct long-term surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies. Combine the analysis from the teacher's perspective to suggest or modify strategies that are practical for both teachers and learners.

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