

Research Report

THE EFFECT OF LEARNER CHOICE ON L2 TASK ENGAGEMENT

Sachiko Nakamura *

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

Linh Phung

Chatham University

Hayo Reinders

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

Abstract

This study examined the effect of choice on EFL learners' task engagement. Twenty-four Thai university students completed two opinion-gap tasks. In one, they discussed and agreed on three items among given options (+constraint). In the other, they discussed and agreed on three items among the options they generated (–constraint). Spoken interaction and questionnaires were analyzed for behavioral (time on task, words produced, turns), cognitive (negotiation of meaning and form, self-repairs), social (overlaps and turn completion, backchannels), and emotional engagement (anxiety, enjoyment), based on Philp and Duchesne's multifaceted model. The –constraint task had positive effects on all the cognitive engagement measures, but only one of the behavioral measures (turns) and one of the social measures (overlaps). Learners reported higher anxiety and enjoyment in the –constraint task. The findings highlight the interrelated multidimensional nature of learner task engagement while suggesting pedagogical implications and avenues for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Engagement in L2 learning has received increasing attention in recent years in response to a growing recognition of the dynamic, highly individual, and contextual nature of the L2 learning process. Engagement is shown to be key to academic success (Klem & Connell, 2004) and L2 learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Correspondingly, there

We are deeply grateful to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions to improve the quality of the paper.

* Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sachiko Nakamura, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand. E-mail: sachiko8266@gmail.com

© The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press

has been an ongoing attempt among L2 researchers to find means to enhance it. One prominent variable hypothesized to have an impact on engagement is choice (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003; Reeve, 2012). It is postulated that providing learners with choice leads to a greater sense of control and intrinsic motivation, which in turn can have a positive effect on their engagement in the learning activities (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003; Zuckerman et al., 1978). This notion is also supported by empirical findings in task-based studies (e.g., Butler, 2017; Lambert et al., 2017; Phung, 2017).

At the same time, various operationalizations of choice and outcome measures have contributed to inconclusive findings. In a meta-analysis by Patall et al. (2008), the manipulation of choice ranged from choices between activities and choices between multiple versions of a single activity to choices about the reward participants receive for the task. They found the effects of choice on effort and task performance were in both positive and negative directions. Another emergent issue in L2 engagement research is the theoretical and empirical conceptualization of engagement. Philp and Duchesne (2016) argue that “in applied linguistics research there is little principled understanding of this overused term although there is a shared intuitive recognition of ‘engagement’ as optimal for learning” (p. 50).

Thus, the current study sought to contribute to our understanding of the effect of choice by employing the model of task engagement proposed by Philp and Duchesne (2016), which is composed of behavioral, cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions. We hope the findings will help researchers and teachers to identify how to effectively design tasks that enhance L2 learners’ engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

Since the publication of the pioneering work by Mosher and MacGowan (1985), engagement has received increasing interest in the fields of educational psychology, general education, and second language acquisition (SLA). Engagement in the educational literature has typically been described as energy, action, effort, and active participation (e.g., Christenson et al., 2011; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017; Reeve, 2012; Skinner et al., 2009a, 2009b) and studied using a range of definitions and operationalizations in four contexts: school, community, classroom, and learning activity (Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Regardless of this variety, there is a growing consensus that engagement is a multidimensional construct that drives learning (Christenson et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2001; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). The following section further discusses this multidimensional characteristic of engagement in the context of task-based instruction, which is the focus of the current study.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL OF TASK ENGAGEMENT

In task-based instruction, engagement can be defined as “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” (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 3). Behavioral engagement can be described in terms of time on task or participation

(Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Correspondingly, studies (e.g., Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Lambert et al., 2017; Phung, 2017) have employed the amount of time on task, the number of words, and/or turn as the measures of behavioral engagement.

Cognitive engagement concerns sustained attention and alertness (Helme & Clarke, 2001; Svalberg, 2009). The degree of elaboration in language-related episodes is one of the most commonly adopted measures in studies of language awareness (e.g., Baralt et al., 2016; Storch, 2008; Svalberg, 2009) while verbal indicators specific to peer interaction, such as co-completion, negotiation of meaning or form, and self-correction, are adopted in the analysis of task-based instruction (e.g., Bygate & Samuda, 2009; Lambert et al., 2017; Phung, 2017).

Social engagement concerns the relationship among learners whereby they interact and affiliate with one another (Lambert et al., 2017; Phung, 2017). In other words, learners, when socially engaged, “listen to one another, draw from one another’s expertise and ideas, and provide feedback to one another” (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 10). Accordingly, backchanneling is one of the most widely used measures to indicate learners’ active listening behaviors (Phung, 2017).

Emotional engagement has been defined with reference to various affective constructs. Skinner et al. (2009a, 2009b), for example, defined emotional engagement as motivated involvement during learning activities, while Baralt et al. (2016) included purposefulness and autonomy. Other definitions include specific types of positive emotion, such as enjoyment, interest, excitement, curiosity, and enthusiasm as “task-facilitating” emotions as well as negative emotions, such as anxiety, boredom, anger, frustration, and fear, as “task-withdrawing” emotions (Reeve, 2012, p. 150).

One key aspect of this multidimensional model is that these dimensions overlap, interact, and manifest differently in different contexts (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). It is therefore critical for more studies to take into account all the dimensions and investigate their interdependence to capture the full complexity of engagement.

CHOICE AND ENGAGEMENT

The discussion of choice has a rich theoretical history in learning and human motivation, particularly as a concept of *perceived choice* (Deci, 1975). Perceived choice has been identified as an important experiential quality in relation to self-determination, the underlying theoretical concept of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Self-determination theory posits that some environments provide individuals with opportunities to choose among options with flexibility in their decision-making process while others obligate them toward a prescribed course of action (Reeve et al., 2003). The former can enhance the perception of choice and, in turn, self-determination and intrinsic motivation (Reeve et al., 2003; Williams et al., 1996).

As a growing recognition of these critical characteristics of choice, educational researchers have begun to explore its effects on engagement. They have hypothesized that choice increases cognitive engagement and learning as it helps learners feel more motivated to learn (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Empirical findings have been mixed. In a meta-analysis by Patall et al. (2008), a positive overall effect of choice was found on subsequent learning, task performance, effort, intrinsic motivation, and other related outcomes. In studies on choice and cognitive engagement by Flowerday and Schraw (2003), however, choice was shown to have no effect in the first experiment

and a negative effect in the second experiment. They concluded that “There is no evidence in any of these studies that choice increases or deepens cognitive engagement or task performance” (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003, p. 214).

In the field of task-based language teaching (TBLT), the construct of choice has not yet been addressed much; TBLT studies have by and large focused on task complexity, which is operationalized according to Robinson’s (2001a, 2001b) triadic componential framework, under the assumption that increasing task complexity promotes greater interaction and thus facilitates L2 development (cognition hypothesis, Robinson, 2001a, 2001b). Nevertheless, an increasing interest in the notion of choice can be observed among recent TBLT research. For example, Butler’s (2017) study on digital instructional game tasks found that providing students with choice in designing and playing games was one of the key elements in making tasks engaging for young Japanese learners of English. Phung’s (2017) study also indicated that allowing learners to choose from comparable tasks based on preferences may help to promote engagement. On the contrary, a study by Mozgalina (2015) showed that a task with no choice condition, compared with limited choice and free choice, was the most optimal for task engagement.

These contradictory findings call for further investigation of the effect of choice on engagement. For example, choice is likely to have a positive effect on learners’ task engagement but only when provided along some form of instructional structure or guidance (e.g., more or less constraint with choices). The four elements of engagement can be differently affected by factors in task design and other contextual factors. This study thus set out to explore these underresearched issues of multifaceted L2 learner task engagement in relation to choice.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of choice by addressing the following research question:

How do L2 learners’ social, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement differ in the +constraint and –constraint tasks?

In reference to Robinson’s framework (2001a), the tasks in this study were intentionally designed to be equivalent in their complexity, conditions, and learner factors (due to the within-subject design). The only difference was the different options within the same topic that learners were asked to discuss and express their opinions on, as well as how learners used their two-minute planning time. Learners in the –constraint task were instructed to come up with their own buildings to propose and reasons to support their proposals while learners in the +constraint task were given a list of buildings to discuss. We argued that these differences reflect different levels of choice in the two tasks and hypothesized that the learners would demonstrate higher levels of engagement in the –constraint task.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 23 Thai (15 male, 8 female) and 1 Korean (1 female) learners of English as a foreign language (L2) at a university in Bangkok. Of those, 2 were in their second

year, 2 in their third, and 20 in their fourth year of undergraduate studies (Mean = 21.8, SD = .61) in engineering ($n = 17$), science ($n = 4$), or technology ($n = 3$). They were all enrolled in an elective academic writing course, which was taught by the first author at the English department of the School of Liberal Arts. Their proficiency level was deemed to be approximately CEFR B1/B2 based on their completion of foundational English courses and the first author's observations. At the time of the study, the students had been in the course for 2 months.

MATERIALS

Tasks

The tasks used in the study were two opinion-gap tasks, each providing learners with choices with different degrees of freedom. We labeled these +constraint and –constraint tasks. In both tasks, students worked in groups of three and were instructed to discuss and choose three new buildings they would like for the university to build on campus. In the +constraint task, each student was given a different set of three buildings (i.e., a total of nine buildings) to choose from, defend to their peers, and negotiate to reach an agreement on the final choice of three buildings. In the –constraint task, each student was instructed to first come up with three buildings by themselves (i.e., a total of nine buildings) and then negotiate with each other to reach agreement on the three buildings. In the task instructions, we provided a range of descriptions about the kinds of buildings that could be included with examples, which was intended to help students come up with buildings by themselves. In this way we reduced the possibility of participants completing the second task in the same way as the first. In both tasks, students were given 2 minutes preparation time before the discussion. Students were instructed to spend as much time as they needed to reach an agreement. According to Robinson's (2001a, 2001b) triadic componential framework, both tasks can be classified as single, open, two-way, divergent-oriented tasks, involving the same number of elements, planning time, and reasoning skills, and requiring learners to have similar prior knowledge. The task instructions and building choices are provided in Appendix A.

MEASURES

We operationalized measures of engagement based on Philp and Duchesne's (2016) multifaceted model and selected nine measures by reviewing TBLT studies on engagement in the literature. Behavioral engagement was measured by (a) time on task, (b) number of words produced, and (c) number of turns. Time on task referred to the amount of time that each learner spent on completing the tasks. The number of words referred to the words produced in *pruned discourse* (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005), which discards minor, one-word utterances (e.g., ah, yes, yeah), "you know" used as fillers, self-repetitions, false starts, self-reformulations, and self-replacement to retain only substantive ideas expressed by the participants. A turn was defined as a "string of utterances produced by a single speaker and bounded by other speakers' turns" (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993, p. 95). Accordingly, backchannels and minor utterances were not regarded as turns.

Cognitive engagement was measured by (d) the number of moves produced for negotiation of meaning and/or form and (e) the number of self-repairs. Moves produced for negotiation of meaning and/or forms were identified based on the definition, “negotiation of conversational exchanges that arise when interlocutors seek to prevent a communicative impasse occurring or to remedy an actual impasse that has arisen” (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, pp. 166–167). Such examples included co-constructions, confirmation checks, clarification requests, and metalinguistic exchanges. Self-repairs were defined as “occasions where the speaker attempts to make changes to what is being said, rather than simply having problems saying it” (Skehan, 2014, p. 20). Our operationalization of self-repairs therefore included self-corrections, self-repetitions, self-reformulations, self-replacements, and false starts.

Social engagement was measured by (f) the number of overlaps and turn completions and (g) the number of backchannels. An overlap was regarded as an occurrence of utterances by more than one speaker at a time (Sacks et al., 1974). Turn completion was regarded as a speaker completing the other speaker’s turn. A response from the listener, such as uh-huh, mmm, and yeah, without claiming the floor from the speaker (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) was considered a backchannel. Each of these variables, except for time on task, were converted to a count-per-minute, and all measures were calculated for each learner for each task.

Emotional engagement was measured by self-reported levels of (h) enjoyment and (i) anxiety through a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire immediately after the tasks. Enjoyment was selected as an indication of positive task-facilitating emotion while anxiety was selected as an indication of negative task-withdrawing emotion, based on Reeve’s (2012) conceptualization of emotional engagement. The items were adapted from the learning-related emotion scales (Pekrun et al., 2002, 2005) and modified to address the emotions within the specific task context. Five items assessed enjoyment (e.g., “I thought the task was enjoyable”) and four items anxiety (e.g., “I was anxious while doing this task”). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were .86 for enjoyment and .87 for anxiety, indicating good internal consistency for the items (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). The items are listed in Appendix B.

PROCEDURES

Prior to the study, consent was obtained from all the participants. First, the students were randomly assigned into groups of three (i.e., a total of eight groups). Counterbalanced design was used to control for performance effects. Four groups completed the +constraint task while the other four groups completed the –constraint task, followed by the questionnaire. Three weeks later, they completed the other task and the questionnaire. Their task performance was audio-recorded and transcribed.

DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

The data consisted of 16 audio-recorded task performances (hereinafter, interactional data) and two sets of questionnaire responses (hereinafter, questionnaire data). Task performance was transcribed in two different ways for data coding and analysis: using pruned (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) and unpruned transcripts.

INTERACTIONAL DATA

The interactional data were used to measure behavioral, cognitive, and social engagement. Of the three measures of behavioral engagement, time on task was calculated in seconds, from the onset of the first syllable uttered by a student, to the last syllable produced before the students' indication of task completion. The number of words and turns in the pruned transcripts were counted using Excel. Cognitive and social engagement measures were hand-coded by the researchers. To ensure the validity and reliability of measures and coding, the first and second authors first separately coded one transcript after the agreement of the constructs' definition and operationalization (see "Measures" section). They then met and discussed any differing coding and clarified any issues that arose during the first coding. They then coded another three sets of transcripts and went through the same process. Krippendorff's Alpha revealed interrater reliability of $\alpha = .83$, which is above the required α value (Krippendorff, 2004). Each author coded half of the remaining scripts.

These interactional data were converted to words, turns, negotiation moves, self-repairs, overlaps and turn completions, and backchannels per minute for each learner in each task. They were entered into SPSS for analysis, and descriptive statistics were generated. The data were explored to see if they met normality assumptions. Many variables were positively skewed. Log 10 transformations were carried out for negotiation, self-repairs, overlaps and turn completions, and backchannels. After the transformations, they were negatively skewed, but the level of skewness was less serious. A series of paired samples *t*-tests was conducted on the seven dependent variables in two conditions ($-/+$ constraint) with an adjusted alpha using the Bonferroni correction.

QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

Enjoyment and anxiety scores were calculated for each learner and each condition. Examination of the kurtosis and skewness scores, histograms, and boxplots indicated that the data met normality assumptions. A paired samples *t*-test was then conducted on these two dependent variables for the two conditions.

RESULTS

BEHAVIORAL, COGNITIVE, AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the seven engagement measures by the $-$ constraint and $+$ constraint conditions. The results indicated that on average learners spent more time and generated more words in the $+$ constraint condition. On the contrary, they generated more turns, negotiation moves, self-repairs, overlaps and turn completions, and backchannels in the $-$ constraint condition.

As shown in Table 2, a series of paired-sample *t*-tests with Bonferroni correction revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the tasks in turns (mean difference = .67, $p = .02$), with a small effect size ($d = .31$), negotiation moves (mean difference = .19, $p = .03$) with a large effect size ($d = .99$), and self-repairs (mean difference = .32, $p = .00$) with a medium effect size ($d = .72$). A difference in overlaps (mean difference = .16, $p = .11$) was found with a medium effect size ($d = .79$). No

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics for engagement measures in the –constraint and +constraint tasks ($N = 24$)

Task	Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD
–Constraint	Time	2.80	8.40	5.74	1.63
	Words	10.00	63.21	28.93	14.78
	Turns	.33	6.43	2.80	1.65
	Negotiation	.00	2.14	.75	.61
	Self-repairs	.00	5.22	1.29	1.11
	Overlaps	.00	1.79	.80	.58
+Constraint	Backchannels	.00	5.44	.87	1.23
	Time	4.50	7.70	6.19	1.16
	Words	10.19	70.67	30.75	15.71
	Turns	.37	4.51	2.15	1.15
	Negotiation	.00	1.56	.24	.40
	Self-repairs	.00	3.11	.63	.68
	Overlaps	.00	1.69	.40	.42
	Backchannels	.00	3.33	.62	.86

Note. Each variable, except for time on task, was converted to a count-per-minute.

TABLE 2. Results of paired-sample t-tests with Bonferroni correction for the difference in engagement measures between the –constraint and +constraint tasks ($N = 24$)

Measure	Mean difference*	Std. error	Sig. ^a	95% confidence interval for difference		Cohen’s d
				Lower	Upper	
Time	.45	0.47	.35	–1.42	.52	.31
Words	1.81	1.71	.30	–5.35	1.73	.11
Turns	.67	.25	.02	.13	1.18	.46
Negotiation	.19	.08	.03	.02	.35	.99
Self-repairs	.32	.08	.00	.16	.47	.72
Overlaps	.16	.10	.11	–.04	.36	.79
Backchannels	.15	.08	.07	–.01	.31	.24

Note. Based on estimated marginal means.

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

^aAdjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

statistically significant difference was found in time on task (mean difference = .45, $p = .35$, $d = .31$), words (mean difference = 1.81, $p = .30$, $d = .11$), and backchannels (mean difference = .15, $p = .07$, $d = .24$). Effect sizes were interpreted based on the benchmark: .40 = small; .70 = medium; 1.00 = large, proposed by Plonsky and Oswald (2014).

EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of the enjoyment and anxiety scores in the two task conditions. The reported level of enjoyment was higher in the –constraint task ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .74$) than in the +constraint task ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .46$). The reported level of anxiety was also higher in the –constraint task ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .46$) than the +constraint task ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.03$).

TABLE 3. Descriptive statistics for enjoyment and anxiety scores in the –constraint and +constraint tasks ($N = 24$)

Task	Measure	Mean	SD
–Constraint	Enjoyment	4.64	.74
+Constraint	Enjoyment	4.17	.46
–Constraint	Anxiety	4.17	.46
+Constraint	Anxiety	3.08	1.03

TABLE 4. Results of the paired-sample t -test for the difference in enjoyment and anxiety scores between the –constraint and +constraint tasks ($N = 24$)

	T	df	Sig.	Mean difference	Std. error	95% CI for mean difference		Cohen's d
						Lower	Upper	
Enjoyment	3.30	23.00	0.00	0.47	0.14	0.18	0.76	0.67
Anxiety	4.36	23.00	0.00	1.09	0.25	0.57	1.61	0.89

The paired samples t -test showed this difference to be significant for both enjoyment ($t(23) = 3.30, p = .00$) and anxiety ($t(23) = 4.36, p = .00$), as shown in Table 4. The effect size was medium for both enjoyment ($d = .67$) and anxiety ($d = .89$).

DISCUSSION

The results showed a statistically significant positive effect of choice on cognitive engagement, as measured by the amount of negotiation of meaning and form and self-repairs, thus lending support to the theoretical link between choice and cognitive engagement (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Choice also had a significant effect on turns (behavioral engagement), overlaps (social engagement), and enjoyment and anxiety (emotional engagement).

This positive effect of choice can be explained by examining the role that choice may have played in the tasks. In the –constraint task, the learners were given a greater freedom to generate and contribute their own ideas, as opposed to the +constraint task where their discussion had to be based on the options given by the teacher. In other words, the –constraint condition could have promoted learners' *personal investment*, that is, a learner's decision, persistence, and willingness to work on the task and continued motivation to perfect their work, which is shown to increase task engagement (Lambert et al., 2017; Maehr, 1984). It is also likely that the learners felt that they had more control over what to choose and how to go about the choices they had made when performing the –constraint task. Mercer (2019) indeed suggests that learners' perceived sense of control, as a form of autonomy, is one of the psychological antecedents of engagement.

There was no statistically significant effect of choice on time on task and words (behavioral engagement) and backchannels (social engagement), which highlights the complex multidimensional characteristics of engagement and provides empirical evidence to the theoretical discussion that each dimension of engagement can manifest differently

(Philp & Duchesne, 2016). This mixed finding can be explained through a further examination of the task design and involved constructs. The fact that learners produced an approximately equal proportion of words in both tasks but more turns in the –constraint is an indication that learners were indeed more interactive in the –constraint task.

The lack of a statistically significant difference in backchannels between the two tasks may be explained by social and contextual factors. Backchanneling behavior has long been regarded as a central aspect of active listening (Bjørge, 2010; Yngve, 1970), and for this reason it has been used as a measurement of engagement. At the same time, research has found substantial differences in the frequency and quality of backchannel signals among different languages (Miyata & Nisisawa, 2007; Wannaruk, 1997). In a study by Wannaruk (1997), it was found that Thai speakers produced a greater number of backchannels in their paired conversation than Americans did. It is therefore possible that the students' backchanneling behavior was in line with their L1 behavior irrespective of the task type.

In regard to emotional engagement, the learners reported higher levels of both anxiety and enjoyment, together with higher levels of engagement in the –constraint task.¹ This finding may seem counterintuitive. However, viewing the two emotions within a multi-dimensional model of affect (Linnenbrink, 2007) may help account for this result. In the model, affective states are described along the two intersecting dimensions of valence (pleasant vs. unpleasant) and activation (activating vs. deactivating), and enjoyment and anxiety belong to the same category as activated affect. As such, it may be possible for the two emotions to be associated with high levels of engagement. In other words, it can be speculated that learners in the –constraint task exercised heightened attention, involvement, and effort (i.e., cognitive engagement) to defend their own choices, negotiate with peers, and reach agreement, which led them to experience both high anxiety and enjoyment. This shows the interaction of the cognitive and affective dimensions of engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings suggest that teachers and material developers can design tasks to foster learner engagement by offering choice that allows them to personalize some elements in the task (e.g., what content to discuss). The results also suggest teachers may want to be cautious about the link between heightened attention and activated unpleasant affect such as anxiety. As demonstrated in our study, it may be natural for students, when they are highly engaged in performing a task, to experience activated emotions, some of which may occasionally be perceived as anxiety. Such perceived anxiety can be overcome, for example, by having a supportive teacher and peers, together with positive emotions such as enjoyment.

The study has several limitations. First, due to its small sample size, it cannot be confirmed that the study did not commit a type II error in determining that choice did not have an effect on three of the nine measures of task engagement. A replication with a larger and more strongly generalized sample size will extend this line of inquiry and help demonstrate the validity of these results. Another concern is with the task anxiety questionnaire with modified items. Although it indicated a good internal consistency, it can be argued that learners' various affective states were oversimplified into one construct, anxiety. We also acknowledge possible disadvantages of within-group comparisons, such as carry-over effects, although we sought to minimize such effects through the

counterbalanced design and careful design of task instructions (see the “Materials” section). Lastly, the nonrandom sampling technique used in selecting the participants requires caution in generalizing the findings (Bornstein et al., 2013).

Several propositions can be made for future studies. The findings indicating both high anxiety and enjoyment along with high engagement during task performance call for more empirical studies to further investigate possible links between emotions, particularly negative ones, and engagement (see, Linnenbrink, 2007; Pekrun et al., 2011). Future research on task engagement also needs to consider the validity and quality of engagement measures. Such consideration includes whether the simple frequency count of verbal backchannels without taking into account their quality can be a good indication of social engagement. This issue is particularly important in the investigation of engagement at the activity level because, as some scholars have argued, it is possible for learners to demonstrate behavioral engagement without cognitively or affectively engaged (Mercer, 2019; Trowler, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The current study set out to contribute to the understanding of the effect of choice on L2 task engagement through the implementation of two types of opinion-exchange tasks. The results indicated that providing learners with a greater degree of choice can be one means of promoting their engagement and that a high degree of engagement may involve the experience of negative emotions. These findings, while contributing to the domain of research on engagement in task-based language learning, call for further investigation of the complex nature of learners’ affective states and engagement.

NOTE

¹We would like to acknowledge that as a result of the mixed findings on the emotional engagement yielded by the current study, we conducted a follow-up study to further understand this phenomenon, namely, why learners experienced both high anxiety and enjoyment in the –constraint task, by qualitatively examining transcripts in relation to four additional affective constructs, i.e., perceived focus, freedom of expression, task difficulty, and task familiarity (Phung et al., 2020).

REFERENCES

- Baralt, M., Gurzynski-Weiss, L., & Kim, Y. (2016). Engagement with language: How examining learners’ affective and social engagement explains successful learner-generated attention to form. In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.), *Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda* (pp. 209–240). John Benjamins.
- Björge, A. K. (2010). Conflict or cooperation: The use of backchannelling in ELF negotiations. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29, 191–203.
- Bornstein, M. H., Jager, J., & Putnick, D. L. (2013). Sampling in developmental science: Situations, shortcomings, solutions, and standards. *Developmental Review*, 33, 357–370.
- Butler, Y. G. (2017). Motivational elements of digital instructional games: A study of young L2 learners’ game designs. *Language Teaching Research*, 21, 735–750.
- Bygate, M., & Samuda, V. (2009). Creating pressure in task pedagogy: The joint roles of field, purpose, and engagement within the interaction approach. In A. Mackey & C. Polio (Eds.), *Multiple perspectives on interaction: Second language research in honour of Susan M. Gass* (pp. 90–116). Routledge.
- Christenson, S. L., Reschly, A. L., & Wylie, C. (2011). *The handbook of research on student engagement*. Springer Science.

- Deci, E. L. (1975). *Intrinsic motivation*. Plenum.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1987). The support of autonomy and the control of behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 1024–1037.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Kormos, J. (2000). The role of individual and social variable in oral task performance. *Language Teaching Research*, 4, 275–300.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). The motivational basis for language learning tasks. In Robinson, P. (Ed.), *Individual differences and instructed language learning* (pp. 137–158). John Benjamins.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2010). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing*. Routledge.
- Ellis, R., & Barkhuizen, G. P. (2005). *Analysing learner language*. Oxford University Press.
- Flowerday, T., & Schraw, G. (2003). Effect of choice on cognitive and affective engagement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 96, 207–215.
- Gumperz, J. J., & Berenz, N. (1993). Transcribing conversational exchanges. In J. A. Edwards & M. D. Lampert (Eds.), *Talking data: Transcription and coding in discourse research* (pp. 91–122). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Helme, S., & Clarke, D. (2001). Identifying cognitive engagement in the mathematics classroom. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 13, 133–153.
- Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74, 262–273.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). Reliability in content analysis: Some common misconceptions and recommendations. *Human Communication Research*, 30, 411–433.
- Lambert, C., Philp, J., & Nakamura, S. (2017). Learner-generated content and engagement in second language task performance. *Language Teaching Research*, 21, 665–680.
- Linnenbrink, E. A. (2007). The role of affect in student learning: A multi-dimensional approach to considering the interaction of affect, motivation, and engagement. In P. A. Schutz & R. Pekrun (Eds.), *Emotion in education* (pp. 107–124). Elsevier.
- Maehr, M. (1984). Meaning and motivation: Toward a theory of personal investment. In R. Ames & C. Ames (Eds.), *Motivation in education: Student motivation* (Vol. 1, pp. 115–144). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Mercer, S. (2019). Language learner engagement: Setting the scene. In Gao, X., Davison, C., & Leung, C. (Eds.), *International handbook of English language teaching*. Springer.
- Miyata, S., & Nisisawa, H. Y. (2007). The acquisition of Japanese backchanneling behavior: Observing the emergence of aizuchi in a Japanese boy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, 1255–1274.
- Mosher, R., & MacGowan, B. (1985). *Assessing student engagement in secondary schools: Alternative conceptions, strategies of assessing, and instruments*. University of Wisconsin, Research and Development Center (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 272812).
- Mozgalina, A. (2015). More or less choice? The influence of choice on task motivation and task engagement. *System*, 49, 120–132.
- Oga-Baldwin, W. Q., & Nakata, Y. (2017). Engagement, gender, and motivation: A predictive model for Japanese young language learners. *System*, 65, 151–163.
- Patal, E. A., Cooper, H., & Robinson, J. C. (2008). The effects of choice on intrinsic motivation and related outcomes: A meta-analysis of research findings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134, 270–300.
- Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Frenzel, A. C., Barchfeld, P., & Perry, R. P. (2011). Measuring emotions in students' learning and performance: The Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ). *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 36, 36–48.
- Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., & Perry, R. P. (2005). *Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) – User's manual*. University of Munich, Department of Psychology.
- Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Titz, W., & Perry, R. P. (2002). Academic emotions in students' self-regulated learning and achievement: A program of quantitative and qualitative research. *Educational Psychologist*, 37, 91–106.
- Philp, J., & Duchesne, S. (2016). Exploring engagement in tasks in the language classroom. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36, 50–72.
- Phung, L. (2017). Task preference, affective response, and engagement in L2 use in a US university context. *Language Teaching Research*, 21, 751–766.
- Phung, L., Nakamura, S., & Reinders, H. (2020). The effect of choice on affective engagement: Implications for task design. In P. Hiver, S. Mercer, & A. H. Al-Hoorie (Eds.), *Learner engagement in the language classroom*. Multilingual Matters.

- Plonsky, L., & Oswald, F. L. (2014). How big is “big”? Interpreting effect sizes in L2 research. *Language Learning, 64*, 878–912.
- Reeve, J. (2012). A self-determination theory perspective on student engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 149–172). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Reeve, J., Nix, G., & Hamm, D. (2003). The experience of self-determination in intrinsic motivation and the conundrum of choice. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*, 375–392.
- Robinson, P. (2001a). Task complexity, task difficulty, and task production: Exploring interactions in a componential framework. *Applied Linguistics, 22*, 27–57.
- Robinson, P. (2001b). Task complexity, cognitive resources, and syllabus design: A triadic framework for examining task influences on SLA. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 285–316). Cambridge University Press.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68–78.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E.A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language, 50*, 696–735.
- Skehan, P. (Ed.). (2014). *Processing perspectives on task performance*. John Benjamins.
- Skinner, E. A., Kindermann, T. A., Connell, J. P., & Wellborn, J. G. (2009a). Engagement and disaffection as organizational constructs in the dynamics of motivational development. In K. R. Wenzel & A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Educational psychology handbook series. Handbook of motivation at school* (pp. 223–245). Routledge.
- Skinner, E. A., Kindermann, T. A., & Furrer, C. (2009b). A motivational perspective on engagement and disaffection: Conceptualization and assessment of children’s behavioral and emotional participation in academic activities in the classroom. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 69*, 493–525.
- Skinner, E. A., & Pitzer, J. R. (2012). Developmental dynamics of engagement, coping, and everyday resilience. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 21–44). Springer.
- Storch, N. (2008). Metatalk in a pair work activity: Level of engagement and implications for language development. *Language Awareness, 17*, 95–114.
- Svalberg, A. (2009). Engagement with language: Developing a construct. *Language Awareness, 18*, 242–258.
- Trowler, V. (2010). *Student engagement literature review*. Higher Education Academy.
- Wannaruk, A. (1997). *Back-channel behavior in Thai and American casual telephone conversations*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)..
- Williams, G. C., Grow, V. M., Freedman, Z. R., Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (1996). Motivational predictors of weight loss and weight-loss maintenance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 115–126.
- Yngve, V. (1970). On getting a word in edgewise. In M. Campbell et al. (Eds.), *Papers from the sixth regional meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society* (pp. 567–578). Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago.
- Zuckerman, M., Porac, J., Lathin, D., Smith, R., & Deci, E. L. (1978). On the importance of self-determination for intrinsically-motivated behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 4*, 443–446.

APPENDIX A

TASK MATERIAL

Situation: <The university name, deleted> wants to become the number 1 university in Thailand for students from other countries. To do this, it will spend money on its buildings to make them more attractive for students. <The university name, deleted> has money to build three new buildings on campus. The new buildings can be places to study, eat, relax, exercise, get support, or meet other international students (for example, cafes, restaurants, offices, gyms). The university would like to hear from you about which **three buildings** you want to have on our campus.

Building options given to three students in a group in the +Constraint Task

Student A	Counseling office Tennis court Buffet restaurant
Student B	Scholarship office Internet café Swimming pool
Student C	Language exchange room Sports gym Japanese restaurant

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Enjoyment

- E1. I enjoyed doing this task.
- E2. Doing the task was fun.
- E3. I thought the task was enjoyable.
- E4. This task was interesting.
- E5. This task was boring. (Reversed item)

Task Anxiety

- TA1. Doing this task made me nervous.
- TA2. I was anxious while doing this task.
- TA3. I got tense while doing this task.
- TA4. Doing this task made me feel anxious.