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# Maintaining Young Learners' Engagement in Zoom-Based English Classes: A Qualitative Case Study at Standard English

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates how young learners' engagement is maintained in Zoom-based English classes at Standard English. The study is important because maintaining students' engagement in online learning environments remains a significant challenge, especially for young learners who often experience limited attention spans and reduced interaction during virtual classes. Although previous studies have discussed online learning and student engagement, limited research specifically explores strategies used to sustain young learners' engagement in Zoom-based English classes within private English courses. Therefore, this study aims to examine how engagement is maintained in one online English class consisting of nine young learners. This research employed a qualitative case study design. The data were collected through classroom observations and teacher-student interaction analysis during Zoom-based learning activities. The findings reveal that several strategies effectively maintain learners' engagement. First, visually attractive PowerPoint presentations help sustain students' attention throughout the lesson. Second, gamification activities using platforms such as Wayground and Blooket increase students' participation and enthusiasm during learning. Third, teacher verbal interaction, including questioning and direct responses, helps maintain students' responsiveness in class activities. Finally, praise and name-calling strategies support students' motivation and active involvement during the online learning process. In conclusion, interactive media, gamified activities, and supportive teacher interaction play important roles in maintaining young learners' engagement in Zoom-based English classes.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed educational practices across various levels and disciplines, including English language teaching (ELT). Online learning has become an increasingly prominent mode of instruction due to its accessibility, flexibility, and ability to facilitate (Robson, 2026) learning interactions across different locations (Wahab & Aisyah, 2022); In language education, synchronous online learning platforms such as Zoom have gained considerable attention because they

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enable real-time communication and interaction between teachers and learners. Supported by technological advancements, online education is increasingly perceived as a flexible and enriching mode of learning (Yuan & Dao, 2025). Moreover, Zoom provides opportunities for teachers and students to engage in virtual classrooms that support communication, collaboration, and interactive learning experiences.

Student engagement has emerged as one of the most important factors influencing the success of online learning. Engagement reflects the degree of learners' active involvement, participation, and investment in learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). In online environments, engagement becomes even more critical because learning effectiveness largely depends on students' willingness to interact, participate, and sustain attention throughout the learning process (Wahab & Aisyah, 2022). Research consistently indicates that higher levels of engagement are associated with positive learning outcomes, increased motivation, and stronger academic achievement (Wang et al., 2016) (Petare, P. A, Shamim, M., Gupta, T., Verma, R., Singh, 2023). Consequently, understanding how engagement can be maintained in virtual learning environments has become a significant concern for educators and researchers.

Young learners present unique challenges and opportunities within online English language learning contexts. Compared to older learners, children generally possess shorter attention spans, lower levels of self-regulation, and a stronger preference for interactive, visually stimulating, and enjoyable learning activities (Addae et al., 2025). Their motivation is often driven by exploration, play, and immediate enjoyment rather than long-term academic goals (Mushfi et al., n.d.). Therefore, maintaining young learners' engagement requires instructional approaches that are highly interactive, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate. Educational games, visual media, and technology-enhanced activities have been identified as effective tools for attracting young learners' attention and supporting active participation (Martha, 2024).

Despite the potential benefits of synchronous online learning, maintaining engagement among young learners remains a significant challenge. Previous studies have reported issues such as distraction, passive participation, limited interaction, technological difficulties, and screen fatigue in online learning environments (Consoli & Curle, 2024) . The technological nature of online classes can simultaneously facilitate and hinder engagement. While digital tools can promote interaction and participation, they may also reduce learners' attention and increase opportunities for distraction (Zulaikhah et al., 2024) . Furthermore, boredom has been identified as a critical factor that negatively affects learners' motivation, participation, concentration, and overall engagement during online learning (Alzahrani, 2023).

In Zoom-based English classes for young learners, these challenges become particularly pronounced. Teachers often face difficulties monitoring students' attention, encouraging participation, and managing classroom interaction in virtual settings. Young learners may become distracted by their home environment, lose interest in repetitive activities, or disengage when instructional tasks do not match their developmental needs (Saputra et al., 2021). Consequently, tutors must employ various strategies to maintain students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement throughout the learning process.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Student engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Abdul Kadir, 2023) . Behavioral engagement refers to learners' participation in academic activities, emotional engagement involves affective responses such as interest and enjoyment, while cognitive engagement reflects learners' mental investment and effort toward learning tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004; Wahab & Aisyah, 2022). These dimensions collectively contribute to meaningful learning experiences and successful educational outcomes.

From a sociocultural perspective, learning is fundamentally mediated through social interaction (Wu, 2023) . This perspective aligns with (Kedia & Mishra, 2023) interaction framework, which emphasizes learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner interactions as essential components of effective online learning. In language learning contexts, interaction facilitates meaningful communication and language development. Therefore, maintaining engagement in synchronous online classrooms requires teachers to create opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and active participation.

Recent studies have increasingly explored engagement in online language learning contexts. (Martin & Bolliger, 2018) found that interaction, collaboration, and communication significantly contribute to online learner engagement. Similarly,(Irawan et al., 2024) reported that behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement play essential roles in determining the success of online learning experiences.

Investigated young learners' engagement in synchronous online second-language classrooms and highlighted the importance of teacher scaffolding, technological affordances, social support, and pedagogical strategies in sustaining learner engagement. Their findings suggest that engagement among young learners is influenced not only by instructional design but also by learners' developmental characteristics and the specific features of virtual learning environments.

Studies examining technology-enhanced English learning have also emphasized the role of digital tools in promoting learner participation and autonomy. (Kristi Pramudika Sari et al., 2026) argued that digital technologies can facilitate active learning and provide opportunities for learners to engage with instructional content in flexible and meaningful ways. However, they also noted that technology may create distractions and reduce learning effectiveness if not carefully integrated into instructional practices. These findings indicate that technology alone does not guarantee engagement; rather, engagement depends on how teachers design and implement learning activities.

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into online learning engagement, virtual language learning, and young learners' participation in digital environments, several gaps remain. Existing research has primarily focused on higher education learners, formal school settings, or learners' perceptions of online engagement (Martha, 2024) (Andewi & Trinovita, 2024) and (Yuan & Dao, 2025) have recently explored young learners' engagement in synchronous online language learning, there remains limited research investigating how tutors actively maintain engagement in real classroom contexts, particularly within non-formal English course institutions.

Furthermore, studies specifically examining Zoom-based English instruction for young learners in private language course settings are still scarce. The unique characteristics of non-formal language education, including smaller class sizes, flexible curricula, and diverse learner backgrounds, may create different engagement dynamics

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compared to formal educational settings. Therefore, further qualitative investigation is needed to explore tutors' strategies, challenges, and experiences in maintaining young learners' engagement in synchronous online English classes. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how tutors at Standard English maintain young learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during Zoom-based English instruction

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a design with a qualitative case study approach to explore how young learners' engagement was maintained in Zoom-based English classes at Standard English. The qualitative case study approach was selected because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon within its real-life context (Martha, 2024) .

In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the maintenance of young learners' engagement during synchronous online English learning. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine teaching practices, classroom interactions, and engagement-related behaviors as they naturally occurred in virtual learning environments. Furthermore, the study sought to generate detailed insights into tutors' strategies, learners' responses, and contextual factors that influenced engagement in Zoom-based English classes.

### 2.1 Participants

The research was conducted at Standard English, an English course institution that provides online English learning programs for young learners. The participants of the study consisted of English tutors and young learners who regularly participated in Zoom-based English classes. The selection of participants was based on their direct involvement in the teaching and learning process being investigated. The tutors were selected because they played a central role in designing and implementing instructional strategies aimed at maintaining student engagement. Meanwhile, the young learners provided observable evidence of engagement through their participation, responses, and interactions during classroom activities. The exact number of participants involved in the study was 1 tutor and 10 students, depending on the availability and accessibility of the classes observed during the research period.

### 2.2 Instruments

To obtain comprehensive data, this study employed three research instruments: an observation checklist, field notes, and a semi-structured interview guide. The observation checklist was used to systematically record aspects related to classroom engagement during Zoom-based learning sessions. The observed aspects included tutors' teaching strategies, classroom interaction patterns, student participation, responsiveness, attentiveness, enthusiasm, and the overall classroom atmosphere. The checklist enabled the researcher to identify recurring engagement indicators throughout the observed classes.

In addition to the observation checklist, field notes were used to document contextual information that could not be fully captured through structured observation. The field notes included descriptions of classroom events, interactional dynamics, student reactions, instructional activities, and other relevant observations that emerged during the learning process. These notes served as supplementary data that enriched the interpretation of classroom engagement practices.

The third instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the tutors and, when considered relevant and feasible, selected students. This interview format allowed the researcher to obtain detailed information while maintaining flexibility to explore emerging issues during the conversation. The interviews focused on several aspects, including strategies used to maintain learners' engagement, challenges encountered during Zoom-based teaching, perceptions of student participation and engagement, and the effectiveness of classroom activities implemented in online learning contexts.

In addition to observations and interviews, supporting documentation was collected to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The documentation included classroom photographs or screenshots, teaching modules, lesson plans (RPP) when available, and other instructional materials used during the observed classes. These documents provided additional contextual information regarding instructional planning and classroom implementation.

The data collection process was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher obtained permission from the management of Standard English and informed the participants about the purpose of the study. After receiving approval, the researcher attended and observed a number of Zoom-based English classes involving young learners. During the observation sessions, the researcher used the observation checklist and field notes to record teaching strategies, classroom interactions, student participation, and engagement-related behaviors. Particular attention was given to indicators of behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement demonstrated by learners during classroom activities.

Following the observation phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participating tutors. The interviews aimed to gain deeper insights into their experiences in maintaining student engagement, the challenges they faced in online teaching environments, and the rationale behind the instructional strategies they employed. Where appropriate, interviews with selected learners were also conducted to obtain additional perspectives regarding their learning experiences and engagement during Zoom-based classes.

All interview sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Observation records, field notes, interview transcripts, and supporting documents were then organized and compiled into a unified dataset to facilitate systematic analysis.

## 2.3 Procedures

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and

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organizing relevant information obtained from observations, interviews, field notes, and documentation. During this stage, the researcher identified meaningful segments of data related to engagement maintenance strategies, student responses, classroom interaction patterns, and factors influencing engagement.

The second stage, data display, involved organizing the condensed data into categories and thematic patterns. Information obtained from different data sources was compared and grouped according to recurring themes, such as instructional strategies, learner participation, engagement indicators, supporting factors, and challenges encountered during Zoom-based instruction. The use of thematic organization enabled the researcher to identify relationships among various aspects of classroom engagement.
The final stage involved conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, the researcher interpreted the identified themes and patterns to develop a comprehensive understanding of how engagement was maintained in Zoom-based English classes. The emerging findings were continuously verified by comparing information across observations, interviews, field notes, and supporting documents to ensure consistency and trustworthiness. Through this analytical process, the study sought to provide a detailed account of the strategies employed by tutors, learners' responses to those strategies, and the contextual factors that supported or hindered engagement in online English learning for young learners.

### 2.4 AI Tools

ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Gemini AI were used solely to assist in refining academic language and improving manuscript structure. These AI tools were not used for research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the formulation of scientific conclusions. All scientific content, research findings, and the final version of the manuscript were independently reviewed, verified, and approved by the authors, who bear full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the published work.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Visually Attractive PowerPoint as a Strategy to Sustain Learners' Attention

The findings reveal that visually attractive PowerPoint presentations played an important role in maintaining young learners' engagement during Zoom-based English learning. Based on classroom observations, the tutor consistently used colorful slides, animated visuals, vocabulary pictures, and visually appealing layouts to maintain students' attention throughout the lesson.

Observation data showed that learners appeared more attentive when visual elements accompanied explanations. Several students responded more actively to questions when the tutor displayed pictures and visual prompts. During vocabulary sessions, students demonstrated greater responsiveness by answering questions and repeating vocabulary items after observing visual representations on the screen.
The observation findings were further supported by interview data. The tutor explained that visual materials were intentionally designed to reduce boredom and sustain students' attention during online classes:

*"Young learners easily lose focus in Zoom classes, so I usually make colorful PowerPoints with pictures and animations because they enjoy visual things. If the slides are plain, they quickly become distracted."* (Tutor Interview)

This finding suggests that visual materials support both behavioral and emotional engagement by helping learners maintain attention and interest during online learning activities. Young learners generally prefer visually stimulating and enjoyable activities because their attention spans remain relatively limited. Therefore, attractive instructional media function not only as learning support but also as engagement-maintenance strategies.

The finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of visual and interactive materials in sustaining young learners' participation in online learning contexts (Abdul Kadir, 2023).

### 4.2 Gamification Activities to Enhance Behavioral and Emotional Engagement

Another major finding concerns the use of gamification platforms such as Wayground and Blooket. Observation data indicate that game-based activities generated increased enthusiasm and participation among learners during Zoom-based classes. During quiz sessions, learners actively competed to answer questions, appeared enthusiastic when receiving scores, and showed stronger classroom participation compared to conventional explanation sessions. Several students voluntarily turned on microphones and actively responded during game activities. The tutor further explained that game-based learning was intentionally used to prevent boredom and encourage active involvement:

*"If the class is too serious, children get bored very fast. Usually, I use Blooket or Wayground because they become more excited and want to participate. Even quiet students often join when there is a game."* (Tutor Interview)

This finding indicates that gamification supports behavioral engagement, as reflected through active participation and responsiveness, while also strengthening emotional engagement by creating enjoyable learning experiences. The findings support the multidimensional engagement framework proposed by Fredricks et al., particularly regarding behavioral and emotional dimensions of student engagement.

### 4.3 Teacher Verbal Interaction as Means of Maintaining Classroom Responsiveness

The findings further demonstrate that teacher verbal interaction played a central role in maintaining learners' engagement. Classroom observations indicate that the tutor frequently used questioning, prompting, repetition, and direct interaction to maintain learners' responsiveness. Students who initially appeared passive became more responsive when directly addressed by the tutor. Teacher questioning also helped sustain attention by encouraging students to think and respond verbally during learning activities. The tutor explained that maintaining verbal interaction is necessary in Zoom classes because students can easily become passive:

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*"In online classes, students can suddenly become silent or lose focus. That's why I often ask questions or call their names to make sure they are still following the lesson."* (Tutor Interview)

This finding highlights the importance of interaction in sustaining both behavioral and cognitive engagement. Through active questioning and dialogue, learners remain mentally involved rather than becoming passive observers. This finding resonates with the sociocultural perspective of learning proposed by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes interaction as essential for meaningful learning development. Likewise, Michael G. Moore highlights learner-instructor interaction as a key component of effective online learning.

### 4.4 Praise and Name-Calling Strategies to Encourage Participation

The findings also reveal that praise and name-calling strategies played an important role in sustaining learners' motivation and engagement. Observation data showed that the tutor frequently addressed students individually and provided encouraging verbal praise during learning activities. Expressions such as positive affirmations were regularly used after students answered questions or participated in activities. Calling students by name appeared to increase attentiveness because learners became more aware of their active participation. The tutor described praise as a strategy to motivate young learners and increase confidence:

*"Children like appreciation. Even simple praise can make them excited to answer again. Sometimes shy students become more confident after I encourage them."* (Tutor Interview)

The findings suggest that praise and personalized interaction primarily support emotional engagement by creating a supportive and motivating learning environment. This finding is consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of affective support and positive reinforcement in young learners' education.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study explored how young learners' engagement was maintained in Zoom-based English classes at Standard English. The findings revealed that several instructional strategies contributed significantly to sustaining learners' engagement during online learning. These strategies included the use of visually attractive PowerPoint presentations, gamification through platforms such as Wayground and Blooket, teacher verbal interaction, and motivational techniques through praise and name-calling.

The findings indicate that engagement among young learners can be effectively maintained when online learning activities are interactive, enjoyable, and supported by positive teacher-student interaction. The combination of visual media, educational games, and personalized communication contributed to students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement throughout the learning process.

This study implies that English tutors teaching young learners in online environments should carefully design engaging learning materials and incorporate

interactive activities that match learners' developmental characteristics. Future studies may involve larger numbers of participants, different educational contexts, or additional data collection methods to provide a broader understanding of engagement in online English learning.

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