



Students' Engagement in Learning Listening Skills through Plotagon Story

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' engagement in learning listening skills through the use of Plotagon Story in an EFL context. While previous studies have primarily focused on learning outcomes and speaking skills, this research examines engagement as a multidimensional process consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. A descriptive qualitative case study design was employed, involving 20 junior high school students and one English tutor at the ASYEE Basic Course Club in Banyuwangi. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with both students and the tutor, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the use of Plotagon Story contributes to increased student engagement, particularly in terms of active participation, positive emotional responses, and the use of cognitive strategies such as contextual inference and selective attention. However, the results also reveal variations in engagement levels, including instances of distraction and cognitive difficulty, suggesting that the effectiveness of multimodal learning depends on task design and learner characteristics. This study highlights that engagement in digital learning environments is dynamic and context-dependent rather than uniformly positive. It also extends the use of animation-based storytelling from speaking to listening contexts. The findings suggest that educators should carefully integrate multimedia tools to balance engagement and comprehension. Future research is recommended to explore long-term effects and broader educational settings.

Keywords: students' engagement; listening skills; plotagon story

Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning has become an essential component of global education, particularly in preparing learners to participate in international communication and knowledge exchange (Yang & Kuo, 2023). However, EFL learning is inherently complex as it requires the integration of multiple language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) within diverse sociocultural contexts. Among these skills, listening plays a foundational role, as it serves as the primary input channel through which learners acquire linguistic structures and develop communicative competence (Zhang & Graham, 2020). Despite its importance, listening instruction in many EFL contexts remains underemphasized and often lacks effective pedagogical strategies (Bagheri & East, 2025). As highlighted by Goh and Vandergrift (2021), listening is a complex process involving both bottom-up and top-down mechanisms, while Rukthong (2021) emphasizes it as an active meaning-making process shaped by cognitive and affective factors. However, in many classrooms, listening activities remain dominated by decontextualized audio-based practices that position learners as passive recipients rather than active participants (Ye & Kaplan-Rakowski, 2024). This often results in low engagement and limited comprehension (El Baghdadi et al., 2024).

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed language pedagogy, offering new opportunities to enhance learning experiences (Bond et al., 2020). From the perspective of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), educational technology is defined as the ethical practice of facilitating learning through the appropriate use of technological processes and resources (Januszewski & Molenda, 2010). This perspective emphasizes that technology should function as an integral part of instructional design rather than merely as a supporting tool.

Recent studies on L2 listening highlight the increasing importance of cognitive processes, task design, and engagement (Zhang & Shen, 2023). Listening tasks differ in the level of cognitive processing they require, the multiple-choice formats often focus on lower-level processing, while integrated tasks promote higher-order comprehension (Rukthong, 2021). Furthermore, research suggests that multimedia learning can enhance learning effectiveness when learners actively regulate their strategies, although it may also increase

cognitive load if tasks are not carefully designed (Fan et al., 2023). Similarly, digital storytelling tools such as Plotagon have been found to reduce anxiety and increase learner motivation, particularly in speaking contexts (Aksoy et al., 2025). These affective factors are relevant to listening, as emotional readiness and motivation influence learners' ability to process input effectively.

Moreover, research suggests that digital and multimodal tools are most effective when they simultaneously support behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2021; Hiver et al., 2021; Oga-Baldwin, 2023). For example, animated digital media can enhance motivation, reduce anxiety, and increase learner confidence (Tai & Chen, 2022). However, poorly designed multimedia may introduce distractions or cognitive overload, potentially hindering learning (Sailer & Homner, 2020). In this study, engagement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, which together reflect students' active participation, affective involvement, and investment in learning. Drawing on Trowler (2010) and the foundational framework of Fredricks (2004), behavioral engagement refers to students' observable participation in learning activities; emotional engagement captures affective responses such as interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging; and cognitive engagement reflects students' effort, persistence, and willingness to engage in deeper understanding. Taken together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for examining how students interact with and respond to learning experiences.

Despite the growing body of research on digital tools in language learning, several important gaps remain. First, previous studies have predominantly focused on product-oriented outcomes, such as language achievement and performance, while giving limited attention to the underlying learning processes that shape these outcomes. Second, research on Plotagon has largely been conducted in speaking contexts, emphasizing its role in reducing anxiety and improving oral performance, whereas its potential contribution to listening learning remains underexplored. Third, prior studies tend to emphasize cognitive aspects of learning, with less attention given to engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a process-oriented perspective to examine how the use of

Plotagon Story supports students' engagement in EFL listening activities. By focusing on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how learners interact with multimodal digital tools during the learning process, particularly in a non-formal learning context.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach to explore students' engagement during listening activities using Plotagon Story. A qualitative case study was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavioral responses within a specific instructional context (Ary et al., 2019). The focus of this study is student engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The case in this study refers to a single learning group within the ASYEE Basic Course Club during a two-week instructional intervention using Plotagon Story as the primary learning media.

This study involved all members of a single learning group at the ASYEE (Asyafi'iyah English Excellent) Basic Course Club in Banyuwangi during the 2025–2026 academic year. The participants consisted of 20 seventh-grade junior high school students (aged 12–13 years) and one English tutor. Since the number of participants was limited, all members of the group were included in the study without sampling, which is aligned with the definition of the total sampling technique, frequently used in case study research (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The students served as the primary subjects of the research, from whom data on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement were collected. The tutor acted as a secondary informant, providing complementary data through professional observations of students' engagement, classroom dynamics, and changes in students' learning behavior during the use of Plotagon Story.

Data were collected using two primary instruments: classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. First, non-participant observation was conducted during all four listening sessions to capture students' real-time engagement. An observation guideline was developed based on the multidimensional engagement framework (Fredricks et al., 2021; Trowler, 2010), focusing on three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive

engagement. Observation checklists were used to document students' participation, attention, interaction, facial expressions, and responses during the learning process. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students and the English after the completion of the intervention. Student interviews focused on their participation, emotional responses, and cognitive involvement during classroom interaction.

The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation by comparing observational data with perspectives from both students and the tutor, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. To operationalize student engagement, this study adopted a framework from Fredricks et al. (2021) and Trowler (2010), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Operational Indicators of Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive Engagement (Adapted from (Fredricks, 2004; Trowler, 2010))

Engagement Dimension	Positive Engagement	Non-Engagement	Negative Engagement
Behavioral	Actively participates in listening activities, pays attention, responds to instructions, engages in discussions	Shows limited participation, passive during activities, occasionally distracted	Disrupts activities, refuses to participate, shows off-task behavior
Emotional	Demonstrates interest, enthusiasm, enjoyment, and confidence during learning	Shows boredom, lack of interest, or emotional neutrality	Displays frustration, rejection, anxiety, or negative attitudes toward learning
Cognitive	Shows effort to understand content, asks questions, makes interpretations, engages deeply with tasks	Minimal effort, superficial responses, incomplete understanding	Avoids tasks, shows confusion without effort to resolve, rejects learning tasks

The study was conducted over a two-week period consisting of four listening sessions using Plotagon Story as the primary instructional media. The two-week timeframe was intentionally selected to capture students' initial engagement and immediate responses to the digital tool, and was also influenced by institutional constraints related to the scheduled end-of-term assessment period. Although relatively brief, this duration is considered adequate for observing behavioral and emotional engagement in response to new learning media (Olga-Badwin, 2023).

Each session followed a structured sequence of activities. In the *pre-listening* phase, the instructor introduced the topic and activated students' prior knowledge. In the *while-listening* phase, students watched and listened to Plotagon Story dialogues, focusing on understanding main ideas and contextual meaning. In the *post-listening* phase, students participated in discussions and reflective activities to deepen their comprehension. Observations were conducted throughout all sessions.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Miles et al. (2019) which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the first stage, data reduction, all observational field notes and interview transcripts were transcribed, organized, and carefully reviewed. The researcher conducted an initial coding process by assigning labels to meaningful units of data related to students' engagement. Coding was guided by the predefined three-dimensional engagement framework.

In the second stage, data display, the coded data were categorized into broader themes based on patterns of engagement. These categories were further organized into three levels: positive engagement, non-engagement, and negative engagement. In the final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, the researcher interpreted the patterns that emerged from the data by examining relationships between engagement dimensions and classroom activities. The analysis focused on identifying how students transitioned from passive to active learning during the use of Plotagon Story. The findings were continuously reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and accuracy.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, data triangulation was employed by comparing data from multiple sources, including classroom observations, student interviews, and tutor interviews. This triangulation process ensured that the findings were not based on a single perspective but reflected a comprehensive understanding of students' engagement. In addition, the analysis was conducted iteratively, allowing the researcher to revisit the data multiple times to confirm emerging themes and avoid premature conclusions.

Result and Discussion

Result

Table 2 presents a summary of engagement patterns observed across all four sessions, organized by engagement dimension and level.

Table 2

Summary of Student Engagement Patterns during Plotagon Story-Based Listening Activities

Engagement Dimension	Session Observed	Positive Engagement	Non- Engagement	Negative Engagement
Behavioral	Sessions 1–4 (all sessions)	Active participation; repeated viewing; note-taking; responsive to discussion questions	Reduced participation during extended tasks; fatigue after multiple repetitions	Distraction by humorous animation characters; off-task behavior
Emotional	Sessions 1–4 (all sessions)	Increased enjoyment; reduced boredom; greater confidence; positive classroom atmosphere	Neutral emotional response; limited interest during repeated viewing	Focus on entertaining visuals rather than instructional content
Cognitive	Sessions 1–4 (all sessions)	Contextual inference; selective attention; meaning construction; use of visual cues for comprehension	Surface-level processing; limited effort with unfamiliar vocabulary	Confusion from simultaneous visual-auditory input; difficulty among lower-proficiency learners

The findings indicate a noticeable shift in students' behavioral engagement during listening activities using Plotagon Story. Most students demonstrated positive behavioral engagement, characterized by active participation, sustained attention, and task persistence throughout the sessions. Several students reported engaging in repeated viewing of the animated dialogues to improve their understanding. For instance, one student stated that they watched the video three times in order to understand every word (Student 3). Another student reported using a self-regulated strategy by pausing the video and noting unfamiliar vocabulary (Student 7).

These responses suggest that students were not merely passive listeners but actively managed their learning process through repetition, note-taking, and strategic attention. Classroom observations also showed that students participated more actively in discussions

and were more willing to respond to questions compared to previous sessions without Plotagon Story. This pattern was supported by the tutor's observation, who noted that students asked questions more frequently and were better prepared to respond after using Plotagon compared to previous lessons.

However, instances of non-engagement were also observed. A few students showed reduced participation when the listening material required multiple repetitions, indicating fatigue or decreased focus during extended exposure. In addition, occasional negative engagement appeared when students became distracted by non-instructional aspects of the animation, such as humorous character movements, which temporarily diverted attention from the learning task. Overall, while Plotagon Story encouraged active participation, the level of behavioral engagement varied depending on task difficulty and duration of exposure.

In terms of emotional engagement, most students demonstrated positive affective responses toward the use of Plotagon Story. They reported increased interest, enjoyment, and a greater sense of comfort during listening activities, indicating a more supportive learning atmosphere. For example, one student stated that the use of animated storytelling made the learning process more enjoyable (Student 5). Another student explained that, unlike traditional audio-based listening, the inclusion of visual elements such as images and character expressions helped maintain attention and reduce boredom (Student 9). In addition, some students reported increased confidence in responding to questions after engaging with the animated materials (Student 14). These findings suggest that the integration of animation contributed to a more positive emotional learning experience, which in turn encouraged greater participation. This interpretation was supported by the tutor, who observed that the classroom atmosphere became livelier, with students appearing more enthusiastic and relaxed during listening activities.

Despite these positive trends, instances of non-engagement were observed when some students displayed neutral emotional responses, such as limited interest or temporary boredom during repeated viewing. Additionally, minor cases of negative engagement occurred when students focused more on entertaining visual elements rather than the instructional content, indicating that visual features may sometimes distract attention from

learning objectives. The findings also indicate the presence of cognitive engagement, as students demonstrated active efforts to understand and interpret the listening materials. They employed various strategies, including contextual inference, selective attention, and meaning construction. For example, one student reported using visual cues such as facial expressions and body language to support comprehension (Student 2). Another student described inferring the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context of the story (Student 10). A third participant explained focusing on frequently repeated words to identify the main topic (Student 16).

These responses suggest that students were not only engaged at a surface level but were actively processing multimodal information. This pattern was confirmed by the tutor, who noted that visualizing characters and dialogues helped students understand the context without translating every word. However, instances of non-engagement were also identified, particularly when some students showed limited effort in processing unfamiliar vocabulary and relied on surface-level understanding. In addition, occasional negative engagement occurred when students experienced confusion due to the simultaneous presentation of visual and auditory input, especially among those with lower language proficiency. Overall, these findings indicate that while Plotagon Story can support deeper cognitive engagement, the extent of engagement varies depending on students' individual abilities and their capacity to manage complex multimodal input.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the use of Plotagon Story contributes to variations in students' engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Rather than showing uniformly positive outcomes, the results reveal a dynamic and context-dependent pattern of engagement shaped by both the features of the digital media and the characteristics of the learners. This is consistent with the conceptualization of engagement as a non-linear, multidimensional construct (Fredericks et al., 2021; Hiver et al., 2021).

From a behavioral perspective, the increased participation, repeated viewing, and active note-taking observed in this study indicate a shift from passive listening to more active involvement. These findings align with previous research suggesting that multimodal

and interactive learning environments can enhance students' on-task behavior and participation (Bond et al., 2020; Ye & Kaplan-Rakowski, 2024). However, this study extends existing research by showing that such behaviors are not solely driven by increased motivation, but also by task demands. For instance, repeated viewing was not only a sign of persistence but also a response to the difficulty of the listening material. This suggests that behavioral engagement in technology-supported learning is shaped by the interaction between media affordances and task complexity, rather than being inherently improved by the mere presence of digital tools.

In terms of emotional engagement, the findings indicate that Plotagon Story creates a more positive and supportive learning atmosphere. Students reported increased enjoyment, reduced boredom, and greater confidence during listening activities. These results are consistent with prior studies highlighting the role of digital storytelling in enhancing learner motivation and reducing anxiety in language learning contexts (Aljaraideh, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Teng, 2022). The visual and narrative elements of Plotagon appear to make listening activities more relatable and less intimidating, thereby encouraging students to participate more actively.

However, the findings also reveal that emotional engagement is not always stable. In some cases, students' attention shifted from the instructional content to the entertaining aspects of the animation. This indicates that while visual elements can enhance engagement, they may also introduce distractions when not carefully aligned with learning objectives. This finding supports the view that engagement is not inherently positive but can fluctuate depending on how learners interact with the learning environment (Fredricks et al., 2021; Olga-Badwin, 2023).

Regarding cognitive engagement, the results show that students actively employed strategies such as contextual inference, selective attention, and meaning construction when interacting with Plotagon Story. These behaviors suggest that students engaged in deeper processing of the learning material by integrating visual and auditory information. This aligns with previous research indicating that multimodal input can support meaning-making by providing contextual cues that facilitate comprehension (Polat & Eristi, 2022; Tai & Chen, 2022).

Nevertheless, the findings also highlight that cognitive engagement is influenced by learners' prior knowledge and language proficiency. Some students experienced difficulty processing simultaneous visual and auditory input, leading to confusion or reduced comprehension. This suggests that the effectiveness of multimodal learning is not universal but depends on individual learner differences. This finding also points to the importance of task scaffolding and differentiated instruction when using complex digital media in language classrooms (Sailer & Homner, 2020).

Taken together, these findings reinforce the conceptualization of engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks, 2004; Trowler, 2010). More importantly, this study demonstrates that these dimensions do not always develop in a uniform or linear manner. For example, students may show high behavioral engagement (e.g., repeated viewing) while simultaneously experiencing cognitive difficulty or distraction. This supports recent research suggesting that engagement dimensions should be examined independently rather than assumed to co-occur (Hiver et al., 2021).

Finally, this study contributes to the literature by extending previous research on Plotagon, which has primarily focused on speaking skills (Aksoy et al., 2025; Aljaraideh, 2020), into the domain of listening. The findings suggest that animation-based storytelling can support engagement in listening activities, particularly by creating a more interactive and emotionally supportive learning environment. However, the results also emphasize that technology alone does not guarantee effective learning; its impact depends critically on how it is integrated into instructional practice and how learners respond to multimodal stimuli within their specific sociocultural and proficiency contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integration of Plotagon Story in EFL listening activities can meaningfully enhance students' engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. More importantly, the findings show that engagement is not a fixed outcome but a dynamic process shaped by the interaction between instructional media, task characteristics, and individual learner differences. The use of animation-based storytelling contributes to a more active and supportive learning environment, encouraging

participation, reducing anxiety, and facilitating deeper processing of listening materials. However, the study also reveals that engagement may vary among students, with instances of distraction and cognitive difficulty indicating that the effectiveness of digital media depends on how it is pedagogically implemented.

This study contributes to the field of language education in two ways. First, it extends the application of Plotagon Story from speaking contexts to listening learning, demonstrating the tool's potential across receptive skill development. Second, it provides empirical evidence that engagement in technology-enhanced language learning is multidimensional and non-linear, reinforcing the theoretical framework proposed by Fredricks (2004) and Trowler (2010) in a digital, non-formal EFL setting.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted within a short timeframe and focused on a single learning group, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study primarily captures initial engagement rather than long-term learning effects. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal designs to explore the sustained impact of animation-based learning on listening proficiency, and to investigate its effectiveness across different learner levels, age groups, and formal educational settings. Researchers are also encouraged to examine the role of task design variables—such as animation complexity, dialogue speed, and vocabulary density—in mediating the relationship between multimodal input and student engagement.

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