



កាលកបត្រស្រាវជ្រាវមនុស្សសាស្ត្រនិងវិទ្យាសាស្ត្រសង្គម  
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## Students' Engagement and English Performance: A Case of Undergraduate Students in the University of Cambodia<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*The relationship between students' learning engagement with their academic performance has attracted vast interest among scholars and educators in English as Foreign Language setting. Empirically, learning engagement is considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development. This research bared three objectives: (i) to assess students' learning engagement (ii) to assess the English performance, and (iii) to determine the relationship between students' engagement and their performance in English. Quantitative research method was employed with an online test in English tense and a survey questionnaire were used to collect the data from respondents. 96 students participated in the study, and male students comprised of 65.26% of the sample. It was found that, during high school education, most of the students (62.5%) moderately engaged in their English learning activities, 32.3% were poorly engaged while those who actively engaged in their English learning were only 5.2%. For the current academic year, almost 96% of the students engaged poorly in their learning activities. Additionally, the students' English performance was not significantly related to the students' high school learning engagement but was significantly related to their learning engagement at the university for the current academic year, despite the relationship is weak.*

**KEYWORDS:** Students' engagement, academic writing, learning performance, Cambodia, relationship

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this research was conducted during the second-wave of Covid-19 pandemics in Cambodia.



**សង្ខេប**

ទំនាក់ទំនងរវាងការចូលរួមរៀនសូត្ររបស់សិស្សជាមួយនឹងលទ្ធផលនៃការសិក្សារបស់ពួកគេ បានទាក់ទាញចំណាប់អារម្មណ៍អ្នកសិក្សាស្រាវជ្រាវនិងអ្នកអប់រំក្នុងបរិបទកាលាអង់គ្លេសជាភាសាបរទេស។ ជាក់ស្តែងការចូលរួមរៀនសូត្រត្រូវបានចាត់ទុកថាជាឧបករណ៍ព្យាករណ៍ល្អមួយក្នុងចំណោមឧបករណ៍ព្យាករណ៍ផ្សេងៗទៀតក្នុងការរៀនសូត្រនិងការអភិវឌ្ឍផ្ទាល់ខ្លួន។ ការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះមានគោលបំណងចំនួនបី៖ (១) ដើម្បីវាយតម្លៃការចូលរួមក្នុងការសិក្សារបស់និស្សិត (២) ដើម្បីវាយតម្លៃសមត្ថភាពរៀនរបស់និស្សិត និង(៣) ដើម្បីកំណត់ពីទំនាក់ទំនងរវាងការចូលរួមរបស់និស្សិតនិងលទ្ធផលការសិក្សាកាលាអង់គ្លេសរបស់ពួកគេ។ វិធីសាស្ត្រស្រាវជ្រាវបែបបរិមាណត្រូវបានយកមកប្រើប្រាស់រួមជាមួយនឹងការធ្វើតេស្តអនុញ្ញាតជាភាសាអង់គ្លេសទាក់ទងនឹងកាលកាលាអង់គ្លេស និងបានប្រើកម្រងសំណួរស្រាវជ្រាវដើម្បីប្រមូលទិន្នន័យពីអ្នកឆ្លើយតប។ មាននិស្សិតចំនួន៩៦ រូបបានចូលរួមនៅក្នុងការសិក្សានេះ និងមាននិស្សិតប្រុសចំនួន ៦៥,២៦% ក្នុងចំណោមសំណាកទាំងអស់។ មានការកើតឡើងអំឡុងការអប់រំនៅវិទ្យាល័យ និស្សិតភាគច្រើន (៦២,៥%) មានការចូលរួមមធ្យមក្នុងសកម្មភាពរៀនកាលាអង់គ្លេស ៣២,៣% មានការចូលរួមខ្សោយ ខណៈអ្នកដែលចូលរួមយ៉ាងសកម្មក្នុងការរៀនកាលាអង់គ្លេសមានតែ ៥,២%ប៉ុណ្ណោះ។ សម្រាប់ឆ្នាំសិក្សាបច្ចុប្បន្ន មាននិស្សិតស្ទើរតែ៩៦% មិនសូវចូលរួមបានល្អទេនៅក្នុងសកម្មភាពសិក្សារបស់ពួកគេ។ ក្រៅពីនេះលទ្ធផលសិក្សាកាលាអង់គ្លេសរបស់និស្សិតមិនមានទំនាក់ទំនងខ្លាំងជាមួយនឹងការចូលរួមក្នុងការសិក្សានៅវិទ្យាល័យរបស់និស្សិតទេ ប៉ុន្តែមានទំនាក់ទំនងខ្លាំងជាមួយនឹងការចូលរួមរៀនសូត្ររបស់ពួកគេនៅសកលវិទ្យាល័យសម្រាប់ឆ្នាំសិក្សាបច្ចុប្បន្នទោះបីជាទំនាក់ទំនងនោះខ្សោយក៏ដោយ។

**ពាក្យគន្លឹះ:** (១) ការចូលរួមក្នុងការសិក្សា (២) សំណើបែបសិក្សាស្រាវជ្រាវ (៣) សមត្ថភាពរៀន (៤) កម្ពុជា (៥) ទំនាក់ទំនង

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The concept of school and learning engagement has attracted a number of researchers to conduct research regarding the issues, especially in general education. At school level, evidence from several research studies pointed out that the level of students' engagement has strong relation to their academic achievement, student boredom and disaffection, and high dropout rates, especially in urban areas. There are numerous studies about student's engagement (Abbing, 2013; Akbari et al., 2016; Barghaus et al., 2017; Carini et al., 2006; Chan, 2018; Conner, 2009; Johnson et al., 2001; Pike et al., 2011; Salamonson et al., 2009; Shernoff et al., 2003). Empirically, one of the good predictors for the learning and personal development is engagement as it is simply seen that students will absorb the concepts more they are being disclosed when they study or practice more about the subject (Carini et al., 2006). According to Carini et al. (2006) engagement in learning is an active participation with purposeful activities. Not only are students seen to take charge of building their knowledge, but their learning also relies on the institutions and staff's provision or

conditions to push the students' involvement (Raine & Gretton, 2013). By this we mean, amongst other things, the time spent actively and cognitively engaged with the subject matter also plays a major role in the student's learning progression (Trowler & Trowler, 2010; Trowler, 2010).

To promote learning, student engagement is closely relevant to students' involvement, which many researchers have focused on studying educational constructs via students' active participation in classroom activities. Actually, based on scholars' conceptualization and dimensions, they have defined engagement differently (Norazmi et al., 2017).

Engagement is defined as students' involvement in such activities as active learning, participation in educational activities, getting guidance from staff or cooperating with other students (Coates, 2005, as cited in Vinson et al., 2010). Kuh (2009) stated that student engagement involves a high level of participation and a high quality of effort in the learning process. As a result, student engagement has been the focal point for numerous research studies as it is an area of the



college experience that presents student behaviors and performance to be addressed by universities and colleges through suitable assessment (Lee, 2018).

Regarding to English performance, students need to master a variety of such major skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing along with minor skills including vocabulary and grammar. For second language learners, grammar is regarded as a key part of a language and plays a significant role in fostering learners' language knowledge and social skills in the context. In addition, English grammar has also been considered to be a vital guidance for effectively acquiring English. (Cam & Tran, 2017, as cited in Lin et al., 2020). Also, to facilitate student engagement in learning grammar, Smagorinsky et al. (2007) found that instruction should be given in engaging, meaningful, enjoyable and relevant ways.

In addition, English grammar contains a lot of significant points, one of which is English tenses. In the study of the performance of English tenses by Chang (2012), among the 12 English tenses, the most difficult one was present perfect progressive, followed by future perfect progressive and past perfect progressive for freshmen and seniors, while for the graduate students was future perfect progressive, followed by present perfect progressive and past perfect progressive. The least difficult ones were simple past, simple present and simple future for freshmen and seniors as well as for graduates.

### **1.1. Contextual Understanding**

Upon the arrival of United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1991 to ensure a democratic election in accordance with the Paris Peace Accord signed by four main political parties led to the formation of the Royal Government in 1993 as well as came the popularity of an international language – English as a medium of communication and work, following French a once popular language in the country (Sun, 2019). In addition, when Cambodia became a full member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1999, Cambodia announced its official participation in the international arena. Therefore, Cambodia's return to democracy and its return to international society were also a transition to a market economy which encouraged the study and use of English in the country. English is likely to remain the preferred language of international communication in Asia and

ASEAN for three reasons: investment in English may be regarded too much to dismiss; the privileged who have benefited from knowing English may not wish to give up their privileged position; and English is the common shared language (Igawa, 2008). This was also mentioned by H.E Hang Choun Naron, Minister of Education, Youth, and Sports, provided that Cambodians had good English language skills and professional skills, they could work with other members of ASEAN. He also said that in order to improve the quality of education, starting from grade 5, English as well as French were introduced as foreign languages (Hang, 2014).

Based on research findings of Hashim et al. (2014), Cambodia shows cultural capital such as in multiple concurrent degree program, the increase of English teaching careers in the capital, English's role as a primary communication function in higher education and work, and differences in the perceptions of Cambodian teachers compared to English native speakers at different institutional settings. Moreover, the cultural capital is enabled by the system of exchange to be linked to such capital forms as economic capital, social capital, symbolic capital and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, as cited in Hashim et al., 2014).

Currently, in Cambodia 125 Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs) are being operated under the jurisdiction of 16 ministries/government institutions in 20 provinces. Among those HEIs, there are 76 institutions: 13 for public and 63 for private are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS, 2019). It should be noted once again that during the 1990s Cambodia saw the rebirth of foreign languages, and English was introduced in the formal school curriculum after grade 4 onward (Sun, 2019). However, some private schools, especially those located in the capital city start to introduce English education at very earlier age. In some cases, like in the case of international schools, English is taken as the main medium of instruction. Even that prior to entering the university learning, all students have been through at least six years of English learning, but their learning style lacks academic activities. Reading academic texts or preparing academic reports at their general education is not seen as common practices for high school students. Basically, academic writing is very limited.



## 1.2. Research Problem

No difference from other nations, in Cambodia, the issues concerning students' engagement has also attracted several researchers' interest. With existing literature, engagement in learning, especially in the field of EFL in Cambodian context, gains the most interest among Cambodian scholars. Evidences concerning this could be found in Heng (2017), Heng (2012), and Heng (2014). However, reviewing these, there are empirical gaps that no prior study focuses on students' engagement with relation to specific domain of disciplines. Based on Kong et al. (2003), discipline-specific models of academic engagement shall be conducted for students' engagement in different subject areas. For example, students' engagement in mathematics should be differently measured than their engagement in other subject areas. With this regard, the current research aims at providing scientific evidence related to students' engagement and their English language performance.

Upon entering higher education, students need to expose to new learning styles of which preparing English performance is one of the common practices and several researches pointed out major difficulties students face during their higher education learning due to lack of experience in academic writing. Itua et al. (2012) found that shortage of time and confidence, extended writing, reading and understanding of academic texts or journals, referencing, and academic jargons were obstacles to academic writing. As shortage of the practice, college students may not work hard until they face deadline (Shaw, 2002, as cited in Lumpkin, 2015). Moreover, based on many research studies in Europe, Africa, Gulf Straits, Australia, and Asia in different settings, situations, levels, and methods, EFL students were found to have almost similar type of linguistic difficulties at tertiary level of education in both general English writing and research writing (Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015). For example, Mohamed (2020) conducted a study on a number of Libyan students, who were studying at Tennessee State University in the United States, and concluded that the difficulty of university study arises when it comes to academic writing, group discussion, and critical thinking. Also, there were some concerns that lack of familiarity in learning styles at higher education affect their performance greatly (Dunn & Griggs, 2000).

## 1.3. Research Objectives

The present study had the following objectives:

- To assess the level of learning engagement of undergraduate students at the University of Cambodia (UC)
- To assess the English performance of undergraduate students at the University of Cambodia (UC)
- To determine the relationship between the students' learning engagement and their English performance

With the above objectives, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the level of the learning engagement among undergraduate students at UC?
- Do the students' learning engagement differ in terms of some independent variables such as gender, their attendance in English extra-paid class at high school or their working status?
- What is the level of students' English performance and how it differs in terms of the aforementioned independent variables?
- Are there any significant relations between students' English performance and their learning engagement?

## 1.4. Conceptual Framework

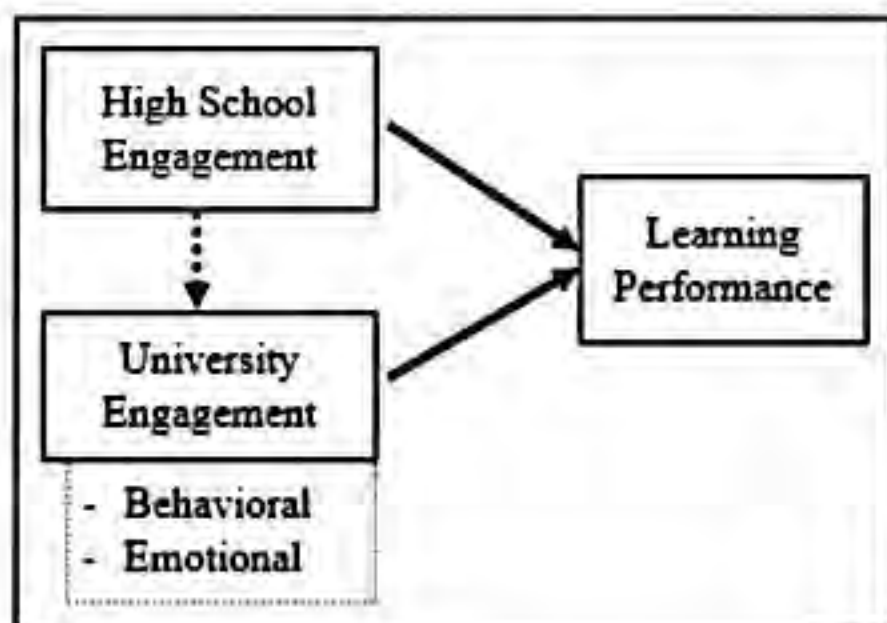
Students' engagement in school and their school performance or achievements are essential focal points of educational research. Regarding student engagement, three dimensions are raised such as behavioral engagement which refers to students' participation in academic and extracurricular activities; emotional engagement which refers to students' positive and negative reactions to peers, teachers and schools; and cognitive engagement which refers to student's thoughtfulness and willingness to master difficult skills (Fredericks, et al., 2004). Moreover, as raised by Skinner and Pitzer (2012) on the motivational conceptualization of engagement contains both behavioral dimension including effort, intensity, persistence, determination, and perseverance to confront barriers and hardship; and emotional or affective engagement such as enthusiasm, enjoyment, fun, and satisfaction; as well as cognitive engagement that includes attention, concentration, focus, absorption, direct participation, and a willingness to do more than the requirements.



In this study, two areas of students' learning engagement: high school engagement and university engagement were covered. For the university learning engagement, only two types of learning engagement were measured: behavioral and emotional engagements based on Fredericks et al. (2014).

The overall framework of this study was presented in the following figure.

Figure 1  
Conceptual Framework for the Study



## 2. METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this study were to assess the students' engagement in learning and the English performance as well as determine their relationship of undergraduate students at the University of Cambodia (UC). Quantitative research methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was used in this study.

### 2.1. Research Sample

This research was conducted with 96 junior undergraduate students studying in UC. The selection of the research sample followed convenient sampling technique where all of them were students who have registered into an international-track English program at the university. The majority of the participants were male (65.26%) while female comprised of only 34.74% of the sample.

### 2.2. Research Instrument

This study utilized a survey questionnaire and an English grammar test to collect data from respondents.

#### A. Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire was about the students' engagement in learning and was classified into three sections below:

- **Section 1: General Questions**

This section consists of six items (Q1-Q6) which ask the respondents about their gender, age, working status and learning schedule etc.

- **Section 2: Students' High School Learning Engagement**

This section consists of nine questions (Q7-Q15) which ask the respondents about their involvement or experience in English learning at high school.

- **Section 3: University Learning Engagement**

In this section there are 19 items which ask the participants about two types of learning engagement: (i) Behavioural Engagement and (ii) Emotional Engagement. There are 14 items (Q16-Q29) for behavioural engagement, and they have been adapted from AUSSE Student Engagement Questionnaire (ACER, 2012). These 14 items were selected and contextualized so that they fit the current situation of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are 5 items (Q30-Q34) which were developed by the researchers, and used to assess the respondents' emotional engagement in learning English.

Before administering the questionnaire, the researchers conducted a pilot survey among 15 students to see how well it was developed and check the language used in the questionnaire. The final version of the questionnaire had considerably high reliability scale of 0.851 based on Cronbach's alpha value.

#### B. English Grammar Test

The researchers specifically developed the English test so that it fits well to the real situation of English courses offered in the selected university. The test covered English grammar concepts which were taught during the last semester. The following four grammatical skills were covered and tested in this research:

- Skill 1: English Tenses
- Skill 2: Verb Pattern Recognition



- Skill 3: Passive Voice
- Skill 4: Grammar in Context

To deal with validity concern, the researchers consulted the first draft of the test with the lecturers and professors teaching at the selected university. The researchers tried to make sure that the final version of this test fits well the real situation of the students and the English programs at this university.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Due to the Covid-19 where social distancing and online learning were mandatory, the data collection was carried out in an online format. The researchers first requested the students to take the English test for 90 minutes before admitting the engagement questionnaire. The collected data were coded and entered into SPSS program for analysis. Descriptive summaries and statistical tabulations as well inferential statistical tools were used to analyse the data. The dependent variables in this study are students' test score and the three categories of learning engagement: (i) high school learning engagement, (ii) behavioural learning engagement and (iii) emotional learning engagement.

The Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed that the students' test scores and the three types of learning engagements were normally distributed; therefore, the students' t-tests were used to compare the differences in these dependent variables with respect to some independent variables such as gender, working status and their attendance in English extra-paid classes, while Pearson's Correlational Analyses were used to seek the relationship among these dependent variables.

## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 3.1. Participants' Information

There were 96 students participated in the study with the majority of them aged between 18-24 years old (86.5%) where the students aged between 24-30 covered 13.5% of the remaining sample. Among those students, full scholarship category covered the biggest proportion (64.6%), partial scholarship (26%), and 9.4% of them were fully paid students. Moreover, it was found that 62.1% of the students (numbered at 59) had attended English extra-paid classes during their high school learning. Among

these, female students (69.49%) had more chance to attend this English supplementary education.

Table 1  
*Students' attending in English extra-paid classes during their high school education*

	English Extra-Paid Class		Total
	Attended	Not Attended	
Male	18	15	33
Female	41	21	62
Total	59	36	95

Table 2 below revealed that 61.5% of the respondents had either part-time or full-time job that requires certain English knowledge to perform daily task more effectively. This would also indicate that they had a good chance to practice their English outside of classroom.

Table 2  
*Participants' job that requires English to perform more effectively*

	Frequency	Percent
Need English	59	61.5
No Need English	37	38.5
Total	96	100.0

### 3.2. Students' Learning Engagement

In this section, the students' learning engagements were presented in three themes: (i) students' high school learning engagement, (ii) students' behavioural learning engagement and (iii) students' emotional learning engagement. For simplicity, these three concepts are called as 'High School Engagement', 'Behavioural Engagement' and 'Emotional Engagement'.

The analysis and interpretation of the findings for 'High School Engagement' were based on the following table.

Table 3  
*Interpretation criteria for students' High School Engagement based on the total score*

Value Range	Interpretation
9 – 25	Low Engagement
26 – 35	Moderate Engagement
36 – 45	Active Engagement

In similar sense, the analysis and interpretation of the finding for 'Behavioural Engagement' were based on the following table.



Table 4  
*Interpretation criteria for the Students' Behavioural Engagement based on the total score*

Value Range	Interpretation
14 – 40	Low Engagement
41 – 55	Moderate Engagement
56 – 70	Active Engagement

The analysis and interpretation of the findings for 'Emotional Engagement' were based on the following table.

Table 5  
*Interpretation criteria for Students' Emotional Engagement based on the total score range*

Value Range	Interpretation
5 – 15	Low Engagement
16 – 20	Moderate Engagement
21 – 25	Active Engagement

The result in Table 6 revealed that, during high school education, most of the students (62.5%) moderately engaged in their English learning activities, 32.3% were poorly engaged while those who actively engaged in their English learning were only 5.2% of the participants. In addition, it was found that all the students who were actively engaged in learning responded that they did attend the English extra-paid classes during their high school education. It was evidenced from the t-tests that the student's high school learning engagement had no significant differences in relation to their gender and working status that require English to complete the daily tasks. However, the difference was found with their high school attendance in English extra-paid classes. The students who had attended the English extra-paid classes at high school were found to have higher engagement in their learning at high school ( $Mean = 29.17$ ) in their learning than those who did not attend these classes ( $Mean = 26$ ).

Table 6  
*Students' engagement in English learning activities during their high school education*

	Frequency	Percent
Low Engagement	31	32.3
Moderate Engagement	60	62.5
Active Engagement	5	5.2
Total	96	100.0

Table 7 below presented the findings of students' behavioural engagement in learning English at the university for the current academic year. It was

revealed that 25% of the students stated that they engaged very low in their learning activities. 68.8% of them reported that they moderately engaged in their learning processes, while only 6.3% of them engaged actively in their learning for the current academic year.

Table 7  
*Students' behavioural engagement in their learning processes during the current academic year.*

	Frequency	Percent
Low Engagement	24	25.0
Moderate Engagement	66	68.8
Active Engagement	6	6.3
Total	96	100.0

Moreover, it was evidenced from t-tests that the differences in the respondents' behavioural engagement in learning English with regard to gender and their working status were not statistically significant.

The result in Table 8 below showed that majority of the respondents (60.4%) have moderately engaged emotionally in learning English during the online learning while 7.3% of them engaged lowly in their learning. Those who actively engaged emotionally in their learning accounted for 32.3% of the sample.

Table 8  
*Students' emotional engagement in their learning during the current academic year.*

	Frequency	Percent
Low Engagement	7	7.3
Moderate Engagement	58	60.4
Active Engagement	31	32.3
Total	96	100.0

The results from t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences in their emotional engagement in learning English with regard to gender or the respondents' working status that requires English. In addition, the study also revealed that there is a significant relation between the students' 'Behavioural Engagement' and their 'Emotional Engagement' in learning English despite this relation is weak ( $r(96) = 0.272, p = 0.007$ ). It was evidenced that the students who positively involved emotionally in English learning tend to participated actively in their learning processes at the university level.



### 3.3. Students' English Performance

It should be noted that the English performance was measured with grammatical concepts and covered four important grammatical skills below:

Table 9  
*English test expected scores*

No.	Tested Skills	Expected Score range
1	English Tenses	0-10
2	Verb Pattern Recognition	0-10
3	Passive Voice	0-10
4	Grammar in Context	0-10
Total Score		0-40

It was found that the students' overall performance in grammar was slightly above the average score ( $Mean = 22.0, SD = 5.723$ ). Their performance in English Tenses was the highest where their competency in using English grammar in contexts was found to be the lowest among the four skills (see Table 10).

Table 10  
*Student's performance in each of the tested grammatical skills*

	N	Mean	SD
English Tenses	96	6.073	1.848
Verb Pattern Recognition	96	5.36	2.068
Passive Voice	96	5.64	2.331
Grammar in Context	94	5.03	1.840

In addition, the students' English grammatical performance was found to be of no significant difference with regard to gender, their high school attendance in English extra-paid classes or whether they have or no job that requires English to complete the daily tasks.

### 3.4. Learning Engagement and Performance

The following table presented the findings about relationships among the dependent variables in this study. It was found that the students' English performance was not significantly related to their students' high school learning engagement or their 'Emotional Engagement', but was positively related to their 'Behavioural Engagement' at the university for the current academic year ( $r(96) = 0.175, p = 0.044$ ), although the relationship is weak. In this case, we may infer that those who actively engage in all learning activities tend to do better in their learning.

Table 11  
*Correlation matrix of students' performance and their learning engagement*

	1	2	3	4
1. Total Scores	1	.111	.175*	.126
2. High School Engagement		1	.435**	.137
3. Behavioural Engagement			1	.272**
4. Emotional Engagement				1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

The findings further explained that there was a significant relationship between the students' 'High School Engagement' and their 'Behavioural Engagement' ( $r(96) = 0.435, p = 0.001$ ). We could deduce from this finding that those who learnt actively during high school education tend to participate actively in their university learning.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### *Research Objective One*

The finding from this study revealed that more than 60% of the students moderately engaged either emotionally or behaviourally in their English learning during the current academic year. We could also see that there was a significant difference with the proportions of students who were lowly and actively involved in their English learning in term of behavioural and emotional engagements (see Table 7 and 8 for more details). This might be caused by two main reasons. First, all learning activities were conducted online because of Covid-19 pandemic, while some students were not familiar with such technological tools as Zoom Meetings, Google Classroom, Google Meet and so on. For Cambodia, a country with 9.7 million internet users (about 58% of its 16.7 million population), transitioning to online learning and teaching is a real challenge and a difficult adjustment for many students, teachers, administrators, and parents (Heng, 2020). Second, some of the students also stayed in the provinces which could get slow internet signal to be able to catch up with every lesson properly. According to Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020), they raised that for developed countries and some developing countries,



online teaching and learning are not a new way of delivery, but the transition from physical class to online learning is challenging for teachers, students, families, and the countries government in terms of shortage of finance, skill, ICT infrastructure, internet access, and educational resources. Moreover, based on the study of seventy-three STEM undergraduates by Wester et al. (2021), it was found to have a dramatic decline in emotional engagement during Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, in the survey of Canadian undergraduate students by Daniels et al. (2021), the findings showed that all students' achievement goals, engagement and perception of success significantly declined while the cheating perception increased, also it was found that emotional engagement was the most significant decline during Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Amir et al. (2020) who did research about the student perspective of classroom and distance learning found out that distance learning led to more difficult communication and less learning satisfaction, along with such challenges of external factors as unstable internet connection, additional financial burden for internet quota; as well as such internal factors as time management and focus difficulty in online learning for a long time.

### **Research Objective Two and Three**

It was found that the students' overall performance in grammar was slightly above the average score (  $Mean = 22.0, SD = 5.723$  ). Moreover, it was found that the students' English performance was positively related to their 'Behavioural Engagement' but not related to their 'Emotional Engagement'. This kind of a bit poor performance in English grammar could be caused by impacts of Covid-19 which shifted the physical classroom to online learning that faced such aforementioned challenges in the objective one as lack of digital literacy, poor internet connection, as well as extra financial burden. In a study of tertiary education in Bangladesh by Dutta and Smita (2020) found out that students faced a lot of challenges during Covid-19 pandemic such as lacking of skills in using electronic devices, having limited or no access to internet, paying high cost of internet package, and facing frequent power cut in the areas. The interruption of internet connection could lead to obstruction of students' concentration. All of these

could be regarded as a new stress along with physical problems for the students. In another study on Covid-19 and E-learning in Ghana by Aboagye et al. (2020), the findings showed that accessibility issues such as internet connectivity and compatible devices were the most significant challenge for students to conduct online study. Based on the same study, the findings revealed two factors: students were not ready for online study, and another one is that they were attached to the conventional approach. Thus, when students were not prepared for online study, they also had no motivation and willingness to learn intrinsically (Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009, as cited in Aboagye et al., 2020). In addition, it might be caused by such time factor as for an evening session that is mostly attended by students who also work for the whole day before pursuing their study in the evening, which could make them lose some learning engagement because of some fatigue after work and lack of concentration on study as well, particularly while studying online for such a long time.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Implication and Conclusion**

In conclusion, it could be seen that the Covid-19 outbreak significantly affect the students' learning as not only has their engagement in the learning processes has dropped, but their performance has also been jeopardised. The majority of the participants reported that they poorly engaged in their learning processes due to the online learning approaches. Their English performance decreased significantly, particularly related to English grammar. Regarding English performance, grammar in context seemed to be somewhat difficult for most students to do it well while individual skills were a bit easy for them to complete. The reasons which might cause their performance to go down could be in terms of the fast adoption of online study and internet connection which might lead to their lack of concentration and effort for their study. Regarding the online study, as raised by Corrado (2021), Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) by themselves can only provide little support to a student's learning experience if the implementation is not guided by clear guidelines and needs to consider such key factors as seeking funding, promoting the course, legal issues, scaffolding, connection between learners, and alignment with learning outcomes. Moreover, to improve students'



English language performance particularly in applying grammar in the context, blended learning approach should be applied to engage students in learning and guiding them to extend their learning outside the classroom by using various technological resources both offline and online (Qindah, 2018) so that students' engagement, motivation, and active learning will be enhanced to promote their academic performance.

## 5.2. Limitation and Direction for Further Study

It should be noted that the context, interpretation and the findings of this research were bonded to the following limitations:

- It was conducted with a small sample size from limited courses within a particular university; therefore, making a generalization to the whole university or other population is not scientifically practical.
- The research questionnaire used was strictly situational-based which bonded to the actual situation of online learning during the Covid-19; therefore, the items chosen were strongly related to the aforementioned situation. The results may not reflect the theoretical framework of students' engagement and learning performance.
- The English test items used in this study covered only a few grammatical points such as tenses, passive voices, verb patterns and grammar in context based on UC's English courses; therefore, the performance level found in this study may not reflect the students' real knowledge in English.

Therefore, the researchers suggest a further study that should go deeper in all macro skills to analyse the students' English performance. The engagement assessment should cover more items beyond the context-based of online learning. Moreover, to provide a strong scientific foundation of theoretical framework, future research should be conducted in a larger sample size across different higher institutions.

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**Chumrong  
CHHOM**

To Know More



**Workplace:**

- Royal Academy of Cambodia

**B.Ed in TEFL**

*Institute of Foreign Language (IFL), RUPP*

**MA in TEFL**

*Norton University, Cambodia*

**Research Interest:**

- Learning engagement
- Language performance
- Motivation
- Teaching and learning grammar



**Bunly KEP**

To Know More



**Workplace:**

*Institute of Police Science Research, Police Academy of Cambodia*

**PhD's Degree in Leadership**

*Pannasastra University of Cambodia*

**Research Interest:**

- Organizational behavior
- Organizational learning
- Motivation



**APPENDIX**

**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Students' Engagement and English Language Performance: A Case of Undergraduate Students in University of Cambodia**

**Research Purpose:**

This study aims at assessing the relationship between students' learning engagement with their English language performance. The analysis from this study is exclusively for research and educational purposes where privacy of your information will be kept confidential.

**(Your Cooperation is highly appreciated.)**

**Part 1: General Questions**

Q1: Gender:     Female                       Male

Q2: Age:     Below 18     18-24                       24-30                       Over 30

Q3: Did you attend English classes at extra hours during your general education years?  
 Yes                                       No

Q4: Degree Status:     Scholarship                       Partial Scholarship                       Fully Paid

Q5: Learning Schedule

- Weekday (Morning)     Weekday (Afternoon)                       Weekday (Evening)  
 Weekend                       Other.....

Q6: Do you have part-time or full-time job that requires certain knowledge of English to perform daily tasks more effectively?  
 Yes                                       No

**Part 2: English Learning Experiences**

With regard to your previous learning experience at high school (either in formal classes or extra-paid classes), how often did you do the following tasks in English?

Activities/Statements		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Q7	I attended English extra-paid classes to improve my English during high school education.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q8	Read English texts/ stories then write a summary of 200-500 words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q9	Were asked to write a paragraph about any general topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q10	Write a short essay about any general topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q11	Write a paragraph about specialized/ technical topic (more academic).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q12	Write a short essay/school report about specialized/ technical topic (more academic).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q13	Have peer/classroom conversation during learning hours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q14	Conduct roleplay during learning hours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q15	Make a presentation in front of the class that last from 10-15 minutes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Part 3: Learning Engagement**

In your experience at your university during the current academic year, about how often have you done each of the following?

Activities		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Q16	Sought advice from academic staff including lecturers and/or consulting adviser.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q17	Made a class or online presentation on your assigned work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q18	Worked hard to master difficult contents or lessons in your classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q19	Prepared two or more drafts of an assignment before handing it in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q20	Used library resources on campus or online to do your work or expand your horizons.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q21	Worked on an essay or assignment that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q22	Blended academic learning with workplace experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q23	Came to class having completed writings or assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q24	Worked with other students outside class to prepare assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q25	Tutored or taught other university students (paid or voluntary).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q26	Used an online learning system to discuss or complete an assignment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q27	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with teaching staff outside class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q28	Received prompt written or oral feedback from lecturers on your academic performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q29	Worked harder than you thought you could to meet your lecturers' standards or expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How do you agree to the following statements?

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Normal	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q30	I always prepare myself well for my English classes, tests and quizzes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q31	I always feel nervous in quizzes or exams of English.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q32	I often motivate myself to get a good score in English.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q33	I always pay full attention during my English classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q34	I always find time outside of my usual classes to listen or watch songs, movies etc. in English.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**(Thank you for your cooperation)**



## ENGLISH GRAMMAR TESTING

This test is just a normal survey to identify the grammar points you have learnt from various subjects at the University of Cambodia such as ENG 108, ENG 208, and particularly ENG 107. The main purpose is to find out what problems you may face in learning these grammar points, particularly on tenses, verb patterns, and passive voices. Thank for your cooperation in completing this survey.

### SECTION 1: TENSES

Read the following sentences and identify whether the following sentences are correct or incorrect.

1. Since I have been a college student, I made many new friends.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
2. I was interested in physics since high school.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
3. Having good social skills is essential for my job, and I decide to take a class in personal communication.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
4. Since she was a child, she likes sports, especially water sports, such as swimming and waterskiing.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
5. Mario graduate as a veterinarian in January of last year.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
6. Riza speaks English and comes from USA.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
7. First, we went to Kirium Resort. Then we travel to Preah Sihanouk and Koh Kong. Finally, we visit Kampot.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
8. There are rumors that college tuition is higher next year.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
9. By the time of the presidential election, the candidates will have campaigned in most, if not all, of the 50 states.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect
10. In my opinion, voting in elections was very important.  
A. Correct            B. Incorrect

### SECTION 2: VERB PATTERNS

Choose the correct verb form to complete each sentence.

11. Are you looking forward to \_\_\_\_\_ with your childhood friend?  
A. meet up    B. meeting up    C. to meet up
12. I really don't mind \_\_\_\_\_ my little sister.  
A. look after    B. looking after    C. to look after
13. If you want me to tell you, you have to promise \_\_\_\_\_ it a secret.



A. keep      B. keeping      C. to keep

14. I regret \_\_\_\_\_ her because it's not her fault.  
A. blame      B. blaming      C. to blame

15. My son denied \_\_\_\_\_ my smart phone.  
A. break      B. breaking      C. to break

16. I usually stop \_\_\_\_\_ breakfast before going to school, so I won't feel hungry in the class.  
A. eat      B. eating      C. to eat

17. I am not sure who \_\_\_\_\_ for help with this problem.  
A. ask      B. asking      C. to ask

18. Aren't you afraid of \_\_\_\_\_ your father in the party?  
A. meet      B. meeting      C. to meet

19. I believe in \_\_\_\_\_ hard, not in destiny.  
A. work      B. working      C. to work

20. He went on \_\_\_\_\_ till 11 o'clock to review the lessons.  
A. study      B. studying      C. to study

### **SECTION 3: PASSIVE VOICES**

**Read carefully and choose the best sentences that are changed correctly from active to passive voices.**

21. My parents usually teach me for 1 hour before going to bed.  
A. I am usually being taught for 1 hour before going to bed by my parents.  
B. I am usually taught by my parents for 1 hour before going to bed.  
C. Before going to bed, I am usually being taught for 1 hour by my parents.  
D. Before going to bed, my parents are usually taught by me for 1 hour.

22. Her children are offering each monk some food and money in front of their house at the moment.  
A. Each monk is offered some food and money by her children in front of their house at the moment.  
B. Some food and money are offered by her children to each monk in front of their house at the moment.  
C. Each monk is being offered some food and money by her children in front of their house at the moment.  
D. Each monk, some food and money are being offered by her children in front of their house at the moment.

23. Someone has stolen some fruit from my garden.  
A. Some fruit has been stolen from my garden by someone.  
B. Some fruit have been stolen from my garden by someone.  
C. Some fruit has been being stolen from my garden.  
D. Some fruit has been stolen from my garden.

24. The police accused 3 people of breaching the curfew last night.  
A. Breaching the curfew was being accused by police of 3 people last night.  
B. 3 people were accused of breaching the curfew last night by the police.



- C. 3 people were being accused by the police of breaching the curfew last night.  
D. The police were accused of breaching the curfew last night by 3 people.
25. Some students were doing the special midterm assignments to submit to their lecturer while he was teaching the lesson.  
A. The special midterm assignments were being done by some students to submit to their lecturer while he was teaching the lesson.  
B. The special midterm assignments were done by some students to submit to their lecturer while he was teaching the lesson.  
C. Their lecturer was being done the special midterm assignment to submit by some students while he was teaching the lesson.  
D. While he was teaching the lesson, their lecturer was being done the special midterm assignment to submit by some students.
26. We had already finished the homework for our lecturer.  
A. Our lecturer had already been finished the homework by us.  
B. The homework had already been finished for our lecturer by us.  
C. The homework had been finished to our lecturer by us.  
D. The homework had already finished by us to our lecturer.
27. My friends will hold a farewell party at the end of the semester.  
A. At the end of the semester will be held a farewell party by my friends.  
B. My friends will be held a farewell party at the end of the semester.  
C. A farewell party will be held by at the end of the semester.  
D. A farewell party will be held by my friends at the end of the semester.
28. Riza is going to buy her mother a new phone on Mother's Day.  
A. Her mother a new phone is going to be bought on Mother's Day by Riza.  
B. Her mother is being bought a new phone by Riza on Mother's Day.  
C. A new phone is going to be bought for her mother on Mother's Day by Riza.  
D. Her mother is going to be being bought a new phone on Mother's Day by Riza.
29. You must bring me your new homework tonight.  
A. I must be brought your new homework tonight.  
B. Your new homework must be brought me tonight.  
C. Your new homework must been brought to me tonight.  
D. I must to be brought your new homework tonight.
30. Someone may have forgotten the wallet here.  
A. The wallet may be forgotten here.  
B. The wallet here may be forgotten.  
C. The wallet may have been forgotten here by someone.  
D. The wallet may have been forgotten here.

#### **SECTION 4: GENERAL REVISION**

**Read the passage below about the "Introduction: The Olympics" below and choose the correct answer. You can also just go straight to do the exercises.**

##### **Introduction: The Olympics**

The word "Olympics" comes from the name of the town Olympia in Greece, where the ancient Olympic Games were always held. The first recorded Olympic Games were held in 776 B.C.; the Games took place every fourth year after that date until they were abolished by a Roman emperor in A.D. 394.



38. The two World Wars prevented the Olympics from \_\_\_\_\_ place.
- A. taking
  - B. to take
  - C. to taking
  - D. took
39. The Roman Emperor Theodosius ordered the Games \_\_\_\_\_ in A.D. 394.
- A. stopping
  - B. to stop
  - C. stopped
  - D. stop
40. The Olympic torch \_\_\_\_\_ throughout the Games and is then extinguished at the closing ceremony.
- A. burning
  - B. is burned
  - C. burned
  - D. burns

**This is end of the test.  
Thanks for your cooperation!**



It was not until 1875, when archeologists discovered the ruins of the Olympic Stadium in Greece, that interest in the Games was renewed. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a French scholar and educator, proposed that the Games should be revived as an international competition to encourage both sport and world peace.

The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896. Like their classical predecessors, the athletes were men only; women were admitted to the Games in 1900. Since that time, the Games have been held at four-year intervals as in ancient Greece. However, since de Coubertin's dream of world peace has not been realized, the two World Wars prevented those of 1916, 1940, and 1944 from being held.

The Olympic Games have been confined to amateur athletes despite a few recent exceptions. There are pressures on the Olympic authorities to admit other professionals to the Games. Such a step would damage the entire concept of the Olympics. The following words appear on the scoreboard at every Olympic opening: "The most important thing is not to win but to take part." In contrast, the aim of every professional is to win. (Adopted from TOEFL® Grammar Flash, 2002)

31. When archeologists discovered the ruins of the Olympic Stadium, interest in the Games \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. was renewed
  - B. were renewed
  - C. they were renewed
  - D. renewed
32. The ancient Olympic Games \_\_\_\_\_ as amateur contests, but in time became professional.
  - A. begun
  - B. began
  - C. beginning
  - D. they began
33. The Olympic Games are held every four years in a selected country, and \_\_\_\_\_ to athletes of all nations.
  - A. they are opened
  - B. are opened
  - C. they are open
  - D. it is open
34. Winning first place in an event was the only glory in the ancient Games because second and third places \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. did not recognize
  - B. are not recognized
  - C. was not recognized
  - D. were not recognized
35. After more than 1,500 years, Athens \_\_\_\_\_ for the site of the first modern Olympics.
  - A. were chosen
  - B. was chosen
  - C. is chosen
  - D. chosen
36. The authorities permitted women \_\_\_\_\_ in track and field events in the 1928 Winter Games.
  - A. to take part
  - B. taking part
  - C. take part
  - D. to taking part
37. In ancient Greece it was agreed \_\_\_\_\_ wars for the Olympic Games.
  - A. to stop
  - B. stopping
  - C. stop
  - D. stopped



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