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Engaging Online Language Learners: A Practical Guide

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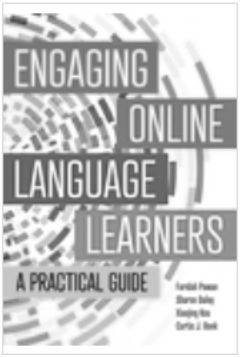
Authors:	Faridah Pawan, Sharon Daley, Xiaojing Kou and Curtis J. Bonk (2022)		
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Engaging Online Language Learners: A Practical Guide is a short introduction to online language teaching and approaches to student engagement in online environments. The authors note in their introduction that they are writing in response to the rapid introduction of online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in many courses and teachers moving online for the first time. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of this sudden shift in teaching practice (e.g., Cheong et al., 2021), the authors chose to focus on the opportunities that online learning presents for language teaching and learning. The purpose of the book, therefore, is to discuss why and how student engagement in online language learning should be a priority and what the next steps are for teaching and learning online. The book targets language teachers, including those who are teaching online for the first time and experienced online teachers.

Engaging Online Language Learners is structured in four parts. The preface provides a brief statement of the purpose of the book and an overview of the chapters. The following three parts, each of which is divided into several chapters, introduce a substantive aspect of the topic, addressing the *whys*, *ways*, and *next steps* in engaging students in online learning.

Part I addresses ways to engage students online. Here the authors present brief introductions to online language learning. Chapter 1 introduces online language learning as it

is, highlighting the growing number of students engaged in remote language learning and changes in how languages are taught online. This chapter also introduces the concept of language learning motivation, which is integral to the book's theoretical framework of learning motivation and self-led learning. Chapter 2 turns to the principles for online learning in which self-efficacy and self-regulation lead to participation in the learning environment. The authors also introduced a small set of other learning principles (i.e., TEC-VARIETY; see detailed explanation in Bonk & Khoo, 2014). Chapter 3 raises the question of online language teaching competencies, using the TESOL Technology Standards Framework (Healey et al., 2008) as a guide. The online language teaching competencies set out in this chapter address the skills and knowledge teachers need to teach online effectively.

In Part II, there are four technique-oriented chapters structured around the different forms of learner presence (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010). Chapter 4 sets out the core principles of teaching presence, including self-presentation, course design, and facilitation as the primary tools for student engagement. In Chapter 5, the tools of cognitive presence are presented, including challenge and higher-order thinking. Chapter 6 introduces social presence (the extent of social involvement in the online classroom) as a factor in engagement. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses learner presence, with self-directed learning being the core of the chapter. In each of these chapters, a number of activities are presented that concretely illustrate how these forms of presence can be activated for engagement. The activities use a set template, including age ranges, description and purpose, suggested tool(s), and scaffolding, which allow teachers to use the activities in their course materials and lesson plans. Most of these lessons are suitable for all ages, although some are better designed for upper-level and adult learners.

In Part III, the authors turn to the question of the future and how online language teaching can be more fully developed. In Chapter 8, the authors discuss exemplary and inspirational online teaching practices, which include practices like VOCAL (visible, organized, compassionate, analytical, and leaders; Savery, 2010) and "guide on the side." These brief reviews provide more insight for teachers who want to expand their online teaching practice further. Chapter 9 turns to the role of administration in online language teaching. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses the challenge of inclusion in the online environment, particularly cultural and linguistic inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds. The authors provide a concrete example for an inclusive course design that addresses the problem through a teacher workshop. The free, online, self-paced workshop addresses the problem of implicit bias in teaching and how teachers can reduce these biases in order to teach effectively.

Engaging Online Language Learners is a practical book that is well targeted to its language teaching audience. The authors have chosen to view the sudden move online associated with COVID-19 as an opportunity to engage more students and increase the inclusivity of language learning for their students. The authors ground their work firmly in foreign language teaching theory and principles of learning engagement. As a result, any reader can refer to the authors' theoretical framework to better understand the engagement activities and develop their own. The activities featured in Part II are well structured, simple, and adaptable to learners at all levels and for all languages, making them very useful. The example of the culturally and linguistically inclusive online course in Chapter 10 is particularly effective, showcasing exactly how teachers can develop such a course and maximize the inclusion and reach of their courses.

There are a few minor weaknesses that should be considered, although these do not hinder the usefulness of *Engaging Online Language Learners* for its audience. The activities are somewhat generic and may need significant adaptation and elaboration for use in online courses. While the activities should not be hard to adapt, teachers may need additional resources. This adaptability does mean that the activities are very flexible and can be applied to different types of language courses. The authors also pay relatively little attention to structural factors in student engagement, such as adequate technological resources and administrative policies that address these limitations. To some extent this makes sense, as the book is targeted to course management practices and these structural factors are outside the authors' control. A potential theoretical problem lies in their adoption of learner presence, a controversial inclusion to the community of inquiry (COI) framework, and one of which the originator of the COI framework has questioned the necessity (Garrison, 2016).

Despite the few weaknesses, *Engaging Online Language Learners* remains a practical, theoretically rigorous introduction to engagement for online learning. It is likely to be useful for its core audience of new and experienced online language teachers. It may also be of interest to administrators tasked with moving courses online and curriculum developers who implement online courses, as well as academics seeking insight into online teaching practice.

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