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Initiating Language Engagement with Multimodal Learning Tasks

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Abstract

Engaging students in meaningful learning is currently a significant challenge for many teachers and those who observe daily how students' attention spans are affected by a variety of distractions in the classroom. In fact, engagement has become one of the most fashionable research topics in educational psychology. The present study explores the engagement among five engineering undergraduates for one semester while working on L2 tasks, which entailed the multimodal analysis of 8 technology-related TED Talks and was purposefully designed to initiate them into multimodal literacy and foster their language learning. A narrative qualitative analysis of an open-ended questionnaire that the students completed at the end of the semester shows that the students were working on the task and engaged in the process. All five students acknowledged that they found L2 task completion meaningful because it could lead to positive academic outcomes and help them see the relevance of L2 in the real world. The multimodal L2 task presented in this study may offer a pedagogical scenario that can be replicated by other L2 lecturers across different contexts and communities to develop students' multimodal competence while initiating their language engagement.

Keywords: Language engagement, L2 course, multimodal analysis, multimodal literacy, TED Talks.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Engagement is one of the most significant concerns for learning in general and for instructed language learning, where the “automatization of L2 skills requires an extended practice period” (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020, p. 3). Having a good command of communicative language skills, as Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) note, requires lengthy communicative practices, which in turn demands “learners’ willing engagement” (p. 3). The learners’ involvement can relate to the amount and the type of participation in a specific language learning task. When students are engaged in their learning, teachers are halfway through their jobs. Engaged students are more likely to be motivated to learn because they find the learning material more interesting. In addition, an engaged classroom is usually more dynamic and interactive, creating a positive and supportive learning environment which can enhance the overall classroom experience for both students and teachers.

A defining feature of the construct of engagement is that it concerns students’ active participation and their involvement. Most definitions that try to encompass the elusive nature of this ‘metaconstruct’ (Fredrick et al., 2004, p. 60) agree in associating engagement with action.

However, teachers often face challenges when trying to involve their students in the learning process because of the multiple competing and pressing influences. Students using smartphones, tablets, or laptops for non-academic purposes during class, for instance, is currently a significant distraction. Another major obstacle is related to the fact that students’ involvement includes external and internal dimensions that do not always go together. Thus, the amount of learning behaviours a student may exhibit does not necessarily have to correspond with their involvement at a cognitive or affective level. Students, for instance, may exhibit behaviours that suggest engagement, such as taking notes, participating in discussions, or completing assignments. However, these behaviours might be more about fulfilling requirements than understanding the material.

The dynamicity and malleability of engagement are two other important defining characteristics of engagement. In terms of its dynamicity, the construct of engagement is not static but dynamic and emergent, which can be easily shaped by providing pedagogical support and creating suitable learning environments (Fredricks et al., 2004). The malleability of engagement, on the other hand, means that personal and socio-cultural factors can promote or undermine engagement (Wang et al., 2020). Thus, for example, students may enter the class with preconceived ideas related to the L2 that will help or hinder their engagement with the language. It may be helpful, therefore, for teachers to consider the different contexts and the L2-related baggage students bring to class (e.g., values, expectations) in order to know better how they will engage in language learning. Building a bridge between what they learn and do in the classroom, who they are, and what they are interested in doing outside the classroom may give them a sense of continuity while enhancing their confidence and engagement.

L2 practitioners, as Dörnyei et al. (2016, p.113) contend, are therefore challenged to “create a better ‘fit’ between learning activities and learner identities” so that they can realise that there is a continuity between what they learn and do in the classroom, and who they are and want to become. Teachers can then become designers of experiences for students aiming at creating engaging tasks with clear objectives that

cater to their interests, opportunities, and experiences. If engagement ensures meaningful learning and active participation in the classroom and student's academic life, there is a need to understand the intricacies of this construct better, delving into teaching practices that can connect students' curricular and extra-curricular spheres so that they can find the process of learning an L2 personally relevant.

Different studies have investigated task engagement as a construct relating to how students focus on, interact within, and learn from tasks in the language classroom. Thus, some studies have researched the effect of choice on students' task engagement (Mozgalina, 2015; Nakamura et al., 2020). Other studies have focused on agency in selecting and producing the learning content as a contributing factor to having students actively engaged in a learning task (Henry & Thorsen, 2020; Zare & Derakhshan, 2024). Some research has also focused on the influence of cognitive and metacognitive strategies on task engagement (Dao, 2019; Hiver et al., 2021). The purpose of the present qualitative study is to investigate for the first time, to the researcher's knowledge, whether the design of an L2 task that draws on TED Talks could engage tertiary students in multimodal literacy and foster language learning. The students in the present study completed the L2 task outside the classroom, which required them to exercise their agency and self-directed actions. Therefore, the present study may showcase an interesting context for understanding students' engagement, especially what may affect it and how it develops. Therefore, two research questions were formulated.

1. How did the accomplishment of the L2 task engage the students?
2. How did the students feel more multimodal competent at the end of the semester?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Students' Engagement

Engagement is a construct that has its origins in the field of educational psychology. The model frequently used for understanding how engagement develops is known as the 'self-determination theory' (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to this framework, a student's engagement can be enhanced by meeting three important needs: the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The need for competence means that students need to feel that they can face any tasks they are given, that they can have an influence on the outcome, and that they can successfully meet the goals the specific course establishes. The second key dimension of SDT is the need for autonomy, and this has to do with the students' need to feel a certain degree of control and ownership of their learning so that engagement can occur. Meanwhile, relatedness is the third core component of SDT that significantly contributes to understanding engagement. Positive group dynamics, peer relations, and students' relationships with their teachers are crucial to facilitating students' readiness and willingness to engage. Teachers can play a key role in fostering good group dynamics and promoting healthy learning environments.

Engagement has traditionally been regarded as an outcome that augurs learning or as a resource that is gradually developed during the learning process (Symonds et al., 2019). L2 research has devoted a great interest to probing the nature of engagement, seizing the specific requirements for engagement, researching its

development over time, and exploring different ways to sustain students' engagement (Hiver et al., 2021). The action and state of heightened involvement that engagement usually brings about among students are reflected in four dimensions: cognitive engagement, behavioural engagement, emotional engagement, and social engagement. Cognitive engagement concerns the student's mental effort and sustained attention (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) and the use of learning strategies and self-regulation. Behavioural engagement is related to the time students spend on a given task and the quality of their participation (Sang & Hiver, 2021). Among the instances of behavioural engagement in L2 contexts are time on task, persistence on task, the number of semantic contents produced during the task, and the students' voluntary involvement in speaking (Hiver et al., 2021). Emotional engagement concerns the affective nature of students' involvement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) in each task. Students may show interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm or boredom, anxiety, and frustration whenever they participate in a learning task. These positive and negative emotions will function differently in each student and at different times. The fourth dimension of engagement, social engagement, refers to the relations among students, their intentions to participate in turn-taking and topic development, and their willingness to listen to one another and participate in collaborative activities (Phung, 2017).

2.2 Engaging Students with L2 Tasks

Designing engaging learning tasks that capture a considerable amount of student's attention has become a real challenge for L2 teachers because it is commonly assumed that high engagement in L2 tasks might lead to better learning outcomes. Students' needs, goals, preferences, agentic engagement, and attention to task set-up are vital concepts that teachers, as designers of learning practices, need to have in mind to create engaging tasks. Designing learning tasks that appeal to the student's interests is important, particularly in keeping their attention during the learning process.

Different factors influencing students' interest have been investigated in language learning contexts: teacher talk (Tin, 2016), choice of topic (Renninger & Hidi, 2016), and the use of technologies and text-based elements, such as layout, language, and content (Eidswick & Asaba, 2018). Curiosity, closely related to interest, also plays a significant role in engaging students in the learning task. For example, nowadays, many key topics can capture the thinking and imagination of students of different ages, from secondary to tertiary students.

When teachers know the students' goals at the beginning of the course and the gains of the course are prepared coherently, the chances to get the students engaged increase. In this sense, if the student's goals are considerably assumed, and the teacher strategically accommodates these throughout the course and "through well-designed tasks that are both challenging and closely matched to their needs" (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 50), there may be a promotion of students' sense of agency. Reeve and Shin (2020) include agency as a feature of engagement and define agentic engagement as a "purposive, proactive, and reciprocal type of engagement that is integral to promoting important student outcomes (e.g., learning, achievement), but its essential purpose is to recruit greater autonomy support from the teacher" (p. 150). Some scholars even regard agency as the underpinning construct of engagement (Sinatra et al., 2015). After all, Mercer (2015, p. 1) also highlights "learners' success in embracing language

learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom depends primarily on their agency and engagement, which stem from what they think, feel, and do”.

Apart from making the expected results and goals of each task sufficiently clear, students also need to know the value and use of each task. The key to maximising the learning potential of any task is to make students actively involved in the classroom. Regarding task design, [Mercer and Dörnyei \(2020\)](#) also contend that teachers must consider four critical issues for designing a task to be interesting, engaging, and enjoyable: (1) the mode of working, (2) the medium of working, (3) the social structure, and (4) the form of task output students create. The mode of working is related to how much time, freedom, and resources students have on the task. The medium of working deals with the different language skill areas that are used in completing the task. The social structure involves the place, the ways, and with whom the students work. Finally, the form of task output concerns the degree of attractiveness involved in creating the task output as perceived by students so that they can establish different connections to what they do. When students find a task design personally relevant or emotionally appealing, they are more likely to show a positive affective disposition toward the task ([Qiu & Lo, 2017](#)). It is important to note that the L2 task in this present study considered these four issues as future sections describe.

2.3 TED Talks to Engage Students Multimodally

One of the most influential online popularisation genres nowadays is TED Talks. These talks lend themselves well to engaging students and developing interest differently. Considered by many viewers as inspirational and influential, these talks can also be considered as challenging and valuable tools, not only to be viewed and listened to during English classes but also to be analysed in multimodal terms. The combination of multiple semiotic resources afforded by digital technologies ([Xia & Hafner, 2021](#)), presented in most TED Talks, offers students authentic models of communication and teaches them to communicate through multimodal expression. Their regular visualisation exposes viewers to a theatrical situation, allowing one to observe and analyse speakers’ non-verbal behaviour related to gestures, body positioning, proxemics, and facial expressions.

Students can construct communication when they attentively observe and make meaning from specific ensembles of non-verbal modes (i.e., images, gestures, proxemics, and gazes). Verbally, TED Talks are characterised by using different strategies to engage viewers and attain affective engagement while showing intimacy, inclusiveness, and informality ([Luzón, 2019](#)). To make scientific and technological ideas more comprehensible, TED speakers often use simple and explicit language, devoid of too technical terms or acronyms. In many talks, the speakers start by using their audiences’ language assumptions and concepts to build innovative ideas inside their audiences’ minds ([García-Pinar, 2019](#)). Technical concepts and ideas are often synchronised with visuals that complement or enhance the verbal mode. Among the lexical and grammatical choices TED Talks frequently resort to are the marked use of first-person and inclusive pronouns, subjective and emotive adjectives, pathos techniques ([Scotto di Carlo, 2015](#)), and questions. The transcriptions of TED Talks are always provided on the website (www.ted.com), making their use in the L2 classroom quite convenient as they also offer students the possibility to revise the speeches at any time and allow the L2 lecturer to teach vocabulary and grammar in different ways.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

The present qualitative narrative study was employed to explore the engagement that five engineering undergraduates enacted while completing a semester L2 task, which entailed the multimodal analysis of eight technology-related TED Talks and was purposefully designed to initiate them into multimodal literacy and foster their language learning. The students performed a weekly multimodal analysis task of a TED Talk, and the teacher/researcher gave feedback to each student weekly. Thus, the teacher could track the progress of each student, noting recurrent failures and progress in the development of multimodal competence for each of the five students. The teacher's supervision of the L2 task and the answers the students provided in the open questionnaire at the end of the semester contributed to answering the research questions in this study.

3.2 Context and Participants

The research site was a Technical English course offered to third-year engineering undergraduates at a public university in Spain, where English is learned as a foreign language. Undergraduates at this university attended the Technical English course during one semester of their four-year degree study. The course was designed to improve students' communication skills and enhance their specialised language knowledge.

The participants of this study were a mixed-ability group of five engineering undergraduates who volunteered to complete an extra activity on a weekly basis and succeeded in completing it. To respect the participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Accordingly, the participants' original names have been replaced by pseudonyms. They were Susan (female, 20 years old), Ann (female, 19 years old), Paul (male, 20 years old), Daniel (male, 20 years old), and Mario (male, 20 years old). Regarding English proficiency, the participants had between B2 and C1 levels on the *Cambridge English Placement test*, which assessed their listening and reading skills. All students were placed in the same course despite the difference in their English proficiency level.

3.3 Design and Materials

TED Talks are suitable for designing different L2 tasks that entail some type of critical multimodal analysis, by which students can study the aptness of verbal and non-verbal modes and critically assess why the speaker says something visually and not verbally or which mode is best for which purpose. In this study, the researcher/teacher designed the L2 task focusing on the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication in TED Talks, conveyed through diverse behaviours such as gestures, facial expressions, and proxemics. As shown in Figure 1, the L2 task was carried out during the three-month course by five of the 18 students in the course, given the non-mandatory nature of the task. During the first three weeks, the students visualised different TED Talks in class, and their attention was particularly drawn to the moments when the interplay of modes was especially relevant to meaning-making.

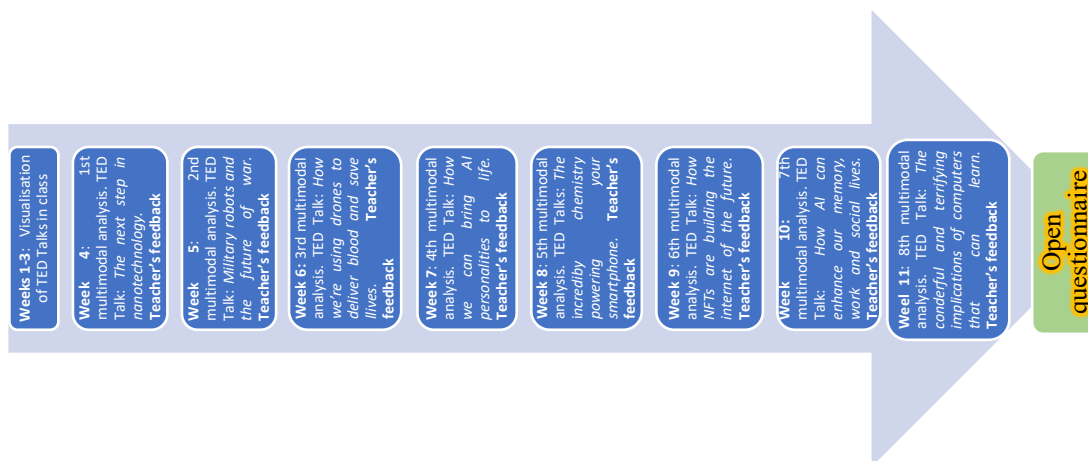


Figure 1. Design of the L2 task.

During the rest of the course and every week, the students completed the multimodal analysis (see Appendix) of technology-based TED Talks. The eight talks were chosen carefully based on the interest and curiosity they might raise among the students. The technological topic discussed in each talk functioned, in most instances, as a catalyst that motivated students to dive into the topic. The talks covered the topics of artificial intelligence, the Internet of the future, robotics, and nanotechnology. As noted earlier, to have students emotionally engaged, content appeal can play a relevant role. Thus, the researcher felt that the topics developed in the lectures allowed them to connect with the personal and academic interests of the students. The titles of the eight talks selected by the researcher are: (1) ‘The Next Step in Nanotechnology’, (2) ‘Military Robots and the Future of War’, (3) ‘How We’re Using Drones to Deliver Blood and Save Lives’, (4) ‘How We Can Bring AI Personalities to Life’, (5) ‘The Incredible Chemistry Powering Your Smartphone’, (6) ‘How NFTs are Building the Internet of the Future’, (7) ‘How AI Can Enhance Our Memory, Work, and Social Lives’, and (8) ‘The Wonderful and Terrifying Implications of Computers that Can Learn’.

The students had to complete four sections after watching the TED Talks videos (see Appendix). Firstly, they had to summarise the talk in the first section. The second section of the task focused on the verbal mode, in which the students had to specifically analyse the speaker’s speech regarding the complexity of the ideas presented. The students were requested to focus on the use of jargon or other specific terminology, the use of examples, and the use of humour. The third part of the task dealt with the analysis of non-verbals. In particular, the students had to zoom in on the use of visuals, gestures, and proxemics by the TED Talks speaker. In terms of visuals, the students analysed whether the visuals in the talk enhanced or complemented the verbal part. Concerning gestures, the students had to assess whether the speaker made any gesture to perform a distinctive focusing function that enhanced listeners’ awareness of essential information. Regarding proxemics, the students were asked to explain whether the speaker made wise and intentional use of the stage and whether they paced or stood still to engage their audience. In the fourth or the last section of the task, the students critically assessed the talk and explained why they would or would not recommend watching the talk.

The L2 task above was designed with clear objectives and aimed to encourage language learning and use. By studying the different affordances of different modes in these talks, the researcher assumed that the students could realise the importance of combining verbal and non-verbal modes for meaning-making. Therefore, multimodal competence could be a changeable and engaging aspect the students could develop during the semester.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The research data was collected during a semester and through a combination of students’ weekly completion of the L2 task and an open-ended questionnaire. The researcher used a qualitative method to collect narrative data that could assess the five students’ engagement. The questionnaire, which was sent to the five students at the end of the semester, has been referred to as an open questionnaire as it was made up of five open-ended questions that requested specific answers.

The main aim of having the students fill in the open questionnaire was to obtain a detailed account of the students’ impressions of their participation in the L2 task. Another objective was to examine the engagement that made the five students persevere until the end of the semester. In particular, the researcher aimed at tapping into affective, cognitive, and behavioural engagement through the students’ attitudes and feelings towards the L2 multimodal task. Therefore, the open questionnaire comprised questions that elicited students’ perceptions about their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement with the L2 task as presented in Table 1. The questions in the open questionnaire were in Spanish, and the students also provided their answers in Spanish. Finally, the analysis of the qualitative data obtained through a questionnaire sought to determine whether the students felt more multimodally competent at the end of the course.

Following thematic content analysis, the students’ responses were thoroughly read through three times. The analysis also went through open and selective coding. During the first phase, the data were coded manually line-by-line to obtain closer familiarity with the overall organisation. Different categories were assigned. Special attention was given to nouns, adjectives, and adverbs that conveyed (1) students’ persistence and time spent on the given task (behavioural engagement), (2) students’ affective character of their involvement during the completion of the task (emotional engagement), and (3) students’ intellectual effort and use of feedback provided by the teacher (cognitive engagement). The second phase involved singling out the expressions that reflected the students’ perceptions about the role of verbal and non-verbal modes in public speaking. The students’ closely related responses were then grouped (Loewen et al., 2009) in the next phase. After drawing conclusions and verifying the data, an independent coder was invited to ensure the quality of the coded data.

Table 1. Open-ended questionnaire on engagement.

Dimension of Engagement	Open-ended Questions
Behavioural Engagement	How much effort did you put into the L2 multimodal task? Did you stay focused even when it was difficult to conduct the L2 multimodal task?

Table 1 continued...

Cognitive Engagement	Did the feedback provided by the teacher about the first talk in multimodal analysis contribute to an easier analysis of the remaining talks in the task?
Emotional Engagement	What part of the task did you enjoy the most?

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes how the L2 task engaged the five students who volunteered to undertake it at the beginning of the semester. Additionally, this section aims to ascertain how the visualisation and analysis of different talks initiated the students into multimodal literacy. Relevant excerpts from the open-ended questionnaires are also presented to provide answers to the study research questions. This section is divided into three sub-sections: (1) Students' engagement in an L2-focused activity; (2) Teacher-student rapport; and (3) Initiation of students' multimodal competence.

4.1 Student Engagement in an L2-Focused Task

There are important variables that need to be given due attention whenever research on engagement is connected to language learning and teaching, and with a focus on the learning task. One important variable is task design, and regarding this, [Dörnyei and Mercer \(2020\)](#) distinguish three different levels: (1) physical appeal, (2) activity appeal, and (3) content appeal. The physical appeal, which has to do with the aesthetics of the design of the materials, plays an important role in attracting students at the initial stage. The activity appeal concerns the emotions the students undergo while they are on task. Meanwhile, content appeal is related to the topics the task develops. The design of the L2 task in the present study reflected on the three levels described above.

Regarding physical appeal, the students regarded the task as attractive and experienced some enjoyment in performing it. The feeling of pleasure might have derived from knowing that they were doing something personally rewarding. Moreover, each topic covered in the TED Talks was of a technological nature and hence of interest to engineering undergraduates. The five participants highlighted the novel and ground-breaking ideas of the selected TED Talks and how these prompted their curiosity and encouraged them to research the topic. Susan, for instance, emphasised the talks on Artificial Intelligence and how these had made her reappraise the role of Artificial Intelligence in lives.

- (1) The talk on how AI can improve memory and social lives was impressive. Regardless of what we already know about Artificial Intelligence, it seems that we can learn something new every day. For us future engineers, this fact has become even more important. The speaker shares his vision for a future where Artificial Intelligence can help humanity achieve optimal levels of perception, creativity, and cognitive function. We must take note of all of this. (Susan, 21/04/2022)

Another participant, such as Daniel, was somewhat critical about the core idea from the speaker of another talk on AI entitled 'How We Can Bring AI Personalities to Life'. He expressed his concerns related to the current uses of AI. However, he positively acknowledged that he liked the subject matter of all the talks.

- (2) In general, what I liked the most were the topics covered in all the talks. The talk by Mariana Lin on Artificial Intelligence was quite insightful. Yet, some concepts she mentioned made me reconsider the topic. When she talks about “self” AI, it seems anybody could customise it to their interest, which needs to be checked to protect our future. (Daniel, 21/04/2022)

The TED Talk that unanimously made the five participants voice their opinions was ‘How We’re Using Drones to Deliver Blood and Save Lives’. In this talk, Keller Rinaudo, the co-founder of Zipline, explained to the audience how he and his team have created a delivery system to transport blood and plasma to different countries in Africa. In the students’ own words, this talk was inspiring and motivational. Paul’s and Ann’s excerpts were quite illustrative, as presented in Excerpt (3) and Excerpt (4).

- (3) The talk on drones was quite inspiring and motivating. The author aims for everyone on earth to have access to primary health care, and he succeeds by using an amazing delivery system that transports blood and plasma. The talk really inspired me as a future engineer. (Paul, 21/04/2022)
- (4) What I enjoyed the most was watching and analysing the talk about drones to the point of wanting to research more about the company that managed all the blood delivery. I think it is Zipline. I learned that besides blood delivery, they also distributed COVID-19 vaccines across Ghana. They use complex technology but achieve so many things. For instance, they reduce fossil fuel consumption and contamination, decrease road congestion, but deliver what many people need in a clean manner. This company has become quite an important autonomous delivery system in the world today. (Ann, 21/04/2022)

Regarding the activity appeal or the emotions students experienced when working on the task, all five participants were engaged with the task throughout the semester because they perceived the task as something meaningful that led to learning. The task was designed so that the students could maximise their learning opportunities by acquiring and practising different skills in every talk. Meanwhile, in terms of the content appeal, the task in the present study, as explained earlier, requested the students to write a summary of the talk and analyse the talk in multimodal terms, providing a critical reflection on the content of the talk and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the speaker’s use of verbal and nonverbal modes. This indicates that the task encouraged the students to create, evaluate, and analyse the talks, thus fostering their higher-order thinking skills, which were more likely to be engaging. Each activity then presented a level of difficulty just above the student’s current achievement level, and this was a challenge for them that enhanced their commitment and persistence.

Based on the above explanation, it can be stated that the physical, activity, and content appeal of the task contributed to meeting one fundamental need postulated by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), namely, the need for competence. Despite stating that the multimodal analysis was something new, they felt sufficiently agentic. They believed that their competencies in the L2 could be developed during the course by carrying out the multimodal task. Furthermore, they also realised that they could control and influence their abilities.

- (5) Yes, I completed the task every week, which took me at least an hour. I hardly had any difficulty writing the summary of the talk. The multimodal analysis was something completely new, and despite your guidance at the beginning of the course, I had to carefully watch each talk two or three times to write about the non-verbal cues used by the speaker. The last section was challenging because I had to critically assess the talk and provide the reasons that would lead me to recommend

the talk. This was the most challenging part but the one that kept me active and engaged. This part often absorbed me! (Mario, 21/04/2022)

- (6) Despite the intensity of the degree and the high demand for work required this year, I completed the task every week. The talks we had to watch and analyse were related to our interests as future engineers. This was indeed advantageous. (Ann, 21/04/2022)

Another critical factor that made the students maintain interest and engagement in the task was related to the valuable information they received on how far they had already come on the multimodal analysis every week. As illustrated in the following section, detailed feedback was used to communicate the students' answers to the task constructively and indicate their strengths and areas for improvement.

4.2 Teacher- Student Rapport

As pointed out earlier, students received positive feedback on their progress every week, highlighting their achievements and stimulating their further efforts. Weekly feedback, therefore, functioned as a way of communicating with students in a productive and personalised manner. The students regarded detailed feedback as highly positive since they viewed it as sufficiently clear and purposeful. At the beginning of the course, students set themselves the goal of completing the L2 task every week. This goal was a strong motivator that helped them push themselves to their best. The task had been designed to include the analysis of a talk per week. This design encouraged the students to achieve incremental goals and made assessing their progress more manageable. As the students analysed one talk, they accomplished an incremental goal, which improved their sense of competence, helped them keep track of the ultimate goal, and contributed to sustaining the task engagement. The feedback provided by the teacher offered them a motivating sense of progress, made learning visible, and helped them feel more competent. The following excerpts illustrated how students benefited extensively from the feedback situations.

- (7) The teacher corrected my work punctually every week, and this fact helped me see the progress of the week compared to the previous one. For instance, the first TED Talk I analysed was not good enough. The sentences were extremely long. I resorted too much to repetition and did not provide enough support to recommend the talk. The second talk analysis I made avoided these mistakes. (Daniel, 21/04/2022)
- (8) The feedback the teacher gave me every week was valuable. If I had opted to complete this task, it was merely to make progress on my English level. However, I needed the support of the teacher to move forward towards this goal; that is, I really wanted her to make my progress visible and highlight my flaws. (Susan, 21/04/2022)
- (9) I had never analysed a talk using multimodal terms, and when I started with the first talk, I used the concepts the teacher had given us in class. However, I needed to confirm that I was doing it correctly. To complete the rest of the analysis, I found the feedback the teacher provided extremely helpful. (Ann, 21/04/2022)

The feedback provided by the teacher on a weekly and individual basis contributed to fostering the students' engagement by meeting the three fundamental needs postulated by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Feedback, therefore, (1) helped the students realise that they could carry out the task competently

(need for competence); (2) helped to make the students feel that they could influence their learning, for example, by avoiding some of the grammatical mistakes and incorporating some of the writing tips provided by the teacher, thus taking some degree of responsibility for their results in the following multimodal talk analysis (need for autonomy); and (3) helped students to develop a positive connection with the teacher as the students could see the teacher as a facilitator, rather than a controller. Feedback was a key factor contributing to the development of the student's sense of belonging (need for relatedness).

As illustrated in the above excerpts, students' multimodal competence was a changeable and engaging aspect they developed during the semester. By studying the different affordances in these talks, students could realise the importance of non-verbal modes to meaning-making. The following section addresses this aspect.

4.3 Initiation of Students' Multimodal Competence

Language proficiency for communication in educational contexts has been reassessed to include multimodal ability. With image and speech forming a semantic unit, it becomes more and more difficult to understand one without the other (Zhao & van Leeuwen, 2014). The meaning that arises across these semiotic resources or 'intersemiosis' is frequently more profound than the meaning that a single semiotic resource can produce on its own. Given that the screen is the predominant medium used worldwide, it seems reasonable that there is an increasing interest in pedagogical research on how meaning-making materialises through different forms of representation (i.e., linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural). One important undertaking of the second language lecturer, thus, is to teach language students the interpretation of different ways that technology affords to represent meaning these days.

Different digital resources, including TED Talks, lent themselves to optimally prepare students for real scenarios of discipline-specific communication (Kohnke et al., 2021). As language teachers, it was essential to take stock of the potentialities from the realisation of meaning through different forms of representation to promoting the students' agency in expressing discipline and improving academic language. Rather than taking for granted the students' digital composing skills, the L2 lecturer was encouraged to develop multimodal competence in the classroom and other skills so that students can discern the most appropriate way to communicate and represent a particular topic. The students' proactive investment in multimodal competence was likely to foster their motivation and engagement in the L2.

One main goal that pursued the design of the L2 task presented in this study was making students realise how the efficient handling of verbal and non-verbal modes in communication by expert speakers could achieve impact and how different gestures, facial expressions, and appealing visuals when working in synergy with words were likely to improve comprehension. To this end, different technology-related TED Talks were selected so that students could first construct meaning by tracking the speaker's gestures, postures, visuals, and wise uses of the stage, along with current, natural, and unabridged languages. At a later stage, the students had to analyse these talks in order to explain how the different semiotic resources interacted and functioned to involve the speakers' audiences. The following excerpts illustrated how students came to give due attention to TED speakers' purposeful interwoven modes.

- (10) Overall, the speakers in the talks we analysed captivated my attention. They made their speeches really enjoyable. It was after the second viewing that I realised the impacting role the purposeful use of hand gestures had in some of these speakers' talks. I could understand that some keywords and ideas were strengthened and highlighted by the deliberate hand gesture. Now I can recall some of those key ideas. (Susan, 21/04/2022)
- (11) All the speakers were excellent communicators. One could tell they had rehearsed their speeches repeatedly. And yet, they sounded completely natural. One aspect that really grabbed my attention was how some of these speakers led us to follow key aspects in some of the visuals they had designed. They used hand gestures, which I think are called iconic gestures, to make us notice important concepts and images. I think everything was carefully studied to hook their audiences. (Daniel, 21/04/2022)

Some students highlighted the masterful handling of visuals that most TED Talk speakers exhibited during their performances. They expressed the key role that visuals play in most oral performances. In addition, they showed themselves determined to use these in their classroom presentations, as shown in the following excerpts.

- (12) I genuinely think that TED speakers have been coached not only in public speaking but also not to lose their audiences while they talk. When I watched the talks for the second time, particularly Keller Rinaudo's, I realised the importance of appealing visuals to get our attention. The efficiency and self-explanatory affordance of the visuals the speaker chose was helpful. So, yes, visuals can play a facilitative role in any talk, and it seems very clear that we have to carefully select and design the visual part in our presentations. (Mario, 21/04/2022)
- (13) We all know the importance of visuals in presentations and the dangers of stuffing the slides only with text. However, some of the talks we watched made the crucial role that visuals play even more evident. It is not just the images the speaker chose, but also the design, I mean, the choice in colours, fonts, and how they are used, integrated with text and data. Now, it is clear to me that how these modes are assembled in space is of importance. (Paul, 21/04/2022)

Other students remarked on the way the speakers moved on stage. They could notice how these proficient speakers got closer to their audience and maximised their stage presence. The students also expressed their intention to imitate the purposeful movement on stage in the classroom to reach their audience better.

- (14) One aspect that really amazed me when I watched the talks was the complete control that the speaker had over the stage. They moved easily around on stage with the flow of their speeches. Some of them stopped to emphasise meaningful ideas or keywords. That alternating rhythm really got my attention, and it would be great to imitate this proficient use of space next time I have to do public speaking in class. (Ann, 21/04/2022)

The key assumption underlying the design of the multimodal L2 task was that by addressing the different verbal and non-verbal modes that contributed to meaning-making, L2 students could recognise how speakers at TED engaged and persuaded their audience. Students acknowledged that multimodal public speaking was not innate to them but rather a skill they could master with practice. This fact may have engaged students who regarded the implementation of non-verbal modes as an instrument to exhibit confidence when talking in public and to express their individuality and linguistic identity when they struggled with their language skills. Very importantly, the realisation of the multimodal character of communication played a relevant role in meeting the student's needs for competence, thereby fostering the condition for

engagement. Completing the L2 task, for instance, made the students realise that using gestures could help them embody the meaning of their class presentations and that appropriate hand gestures could enhance verbal messages. They could also realise the contributing role of visuals in any presentation and how the efficient use of these made the difference between a good presentation and a bad one. Furthermore, they learnt how the proper implementation of visuals could make more complex technological phenomena easier for the audience to understand. These multimodal aspects, therefore, helped students believe in their capabilities to cope with oral presentations and influence their linguistic self-confidence when communicating in the L2.

6. CONCLUSION

The present narrative qualitative study has explored the construct of L2 engagement with a focus on action, particularly how five engineering undergraduates were actively involved in performing an L2 task. An interesting dimension of this work on engagement was the connection between out-of-class experiences and in-class learning. Students completed the L2 task as an extracurricular activity beyond the classroom, making positive use of affordance available for language use and exercising their agency and engagement with these affordances. Students' engagement manifested in its behavioural (e.g., students' persistence and time spent on task), cognitive (e.g., students' intellectual effort), and affective dimensions (e.g., students' connection with the L2 task at an emotional level). The results also demonstrated that engagement with the L2 task was extensively fostered by meeting the three key needs established by Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination theory: the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Regarding these needs, the students felt that the multimodal analysis was doable after receiving the L2 lecturer's feedback from the first analyses. This feedback also provided them with a feeling of having control and ownership over the L2 task. Finally, weekly feedback led to a positive relationship with their lecturer, whom they viewed as supportive.

The results of this study further suggest several pedagogical implications. Designing multimodal L2 tasks, for instance, may offer a pedagogical scenario that can be replicated by L2 teachers or lecturers across different contexts and communities, with the primary purpose of developing the students' multimodal competence while initiating their language engagement. This type of L2 task may encourage students to reflect on the role of different non-verbal modes in becoming proficient users of English. In addition, the teacher's multimodal orientation may encourage students' engagement as they realise that the use of different modes can give them great linguistic confidence and help them achieve their learning outcomes. However, there were some limitations in the present study, which are expected to be addressed in future research. The sample size used in this study was relatively small, which may have limited the generalisability of the findings. Thus, future research could benefit from exploring how and why engagement manifests differently in individual, small-group, and whole-class activities, as well as examining the implications of this for language learning and teaching. Another area for improvement is related to the qualitative data analysis, which was conducted by two researchers. Therefore, interrater reliability measures could have been adopted to increase the consistency of the analysis from the qualitative data-collection instruments. Finally,

future research could consider including quantitative measures beyond qualitative data alone to assess the extent to which engagement influences language learning outcomes at a more significant level or granularity.

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APPENDIX

TED Talk (1)	The next step in nanotechnology			
Summary				
Analysis of the speaker's performance	Speech	Is the TED Talk easy to follow? (Please, justify your response)		
		Does the speaker use examples to explain more complex ideas or terms?		
		Does the speaker use too many jargon/technical words?		
		Is the speaker's use of humor appropriate?		
	Non verbals	VISUALS	Does the use of visuals enhance or complement the speaker's talk?	
			Are visuals a key mode in the talk?	
		GESTURES	Does the speaker resort to gestures?	
			Do gestures contribute to giving emphasis to the speaker's speech?	
		PROXEMICS	Does the speaker move deliberately on stage? Or is he rather static most of the talk?	
Would you recommend this TED Talk? (try to justify your response)				