

The Impact of Online Course Anxiety and Student Engagement on Participation Style in Online Language Class

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ABSTRACT

Online course anxiety (OCA) and its impact on learning outcomes and educational achievements are documented in the literature but problems that emerged in online language class following OCA are under-researched. This study determined the interplay of students' OCA and engagement in online language class on their participation style (PS). Findings revealed *moderation of anxiety and moderation in participation style*, and *very true to me* in student engagement. In terms of the correlation of the variables, participation style and emotional engagement were found to be statistically correlated. The paper concludes with insights into the consequences of OCA in online language class and offers recommendations to mitigate it by improving digital infrastructures and learning resources, as well as changing teachers' rigid teaching styles. The implications of this study can inform decisions of ASEAN Teacher Education Institutions related to the efficacy of online teaching practices and the learning outcomes of students.

Keywords: Behavioral engagement (BE), emotional engagement (EE), online course anxiety (OCA), participation style (PS), student engagement (SE)

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Introduction

Students are exposed to different processes of learning and modalities of teaching, and it could be quite a challenge to have mastery of both processes (learning the content and attaining pedagogical soundness). Learning environment in the education field refers to a classroom setup where students actively participate by reciting answers, clarifying instructions, doing online board work, etc. Students are engaged by being involved in classroom activities and mastering the principles of an active online learning environment that is safe from terror and embarrassment, open to interactions, and comfortable to engagement. Most students have experienced the pressures and pleasures of online classes so they should be generally aware of the atmosphere of online class interactions. However, students should also be primarily mindful of the potential anxiety that online classes may bring to their participation and engagement. Anxiety is an emotional response to difficulties, feelings of isolation or “aloneness”, and often results in disengagement and dropping out of school (Hoi & Hang, 2024). Another challenge that students have to overcome, other than online course anxiety, is managing or honing their communication skills in the limited time frame offered by online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. Online course anxiety could also impact students’ interpersonal communication during their virtual classes. The current study investigated the online course anxiety (OCA) of undergraduate students at a university in the Philippines and explored the potential relationship between OCA and online language class engagement, as well as its impact on students’ participation style.

Literature review

The scope of the literature review covers some studies in the Philippines and the ASEAN countries that report online course anxiety, contextual variables and conditions influencing students’ online learning, student engagement in language class, and participation style.

Online Course Anxiety (OCA) in the ASEAN Context

Researchers in some ASEAN countries are equivocal on the psychological conditions that tertiary students experienced in online class environment (e.g., Fabito et al., 2020; Nuypukiaw & Chompurach, 2023; Perdana & Lia, 2021; Phanphech et al., 2022; Romadhana et al., 2021; Toquero, 2020). According to Romadhana et al. (2021), the change in the learning environment and teaching methods can cause stress and anxiety to students. The psychological impact of anxiety on students includes disengagement and underperformance in class (Dubovi, 2022) and students eventually drop out of school. Furthermore, the results of these studies in ASEAN countries underscore a common challenge in technological resources (e.g., smartphones, laptops, network stability, and internet quota), mostly occurring in remote areas (Heng & Sol, 2021; Nashrudin et al., 2020; Santosa et al., 2021; Sol, 2021; Wahab & Iskander, 2020).

Moreover, course anxiety is often a result of the teacher’s rigid style and students’ personalities. For instance, several teaching styles can be detrimental to the learning process, such as *unclear teachers’ explanations, difficulty in asking questions to teachers* (e.g., Aguilar & Torres, 2021; Apridayani et al., 2023b; Peng et al., 2024b), *less engaging types of activities* (e.g.,

Aguilar & Torres, 2021; Peng et al., 2024b), and *excessive assignments* (e.g., Phanphech et al., 2022; Suwathanpornkul et al., 2023). Furthermore, reaction to online course anxiety differs from one student to another based on certain personalities, attitudes, and characteristics. Some students are either introverts or extroverts, less or more proficient in English, and some with low or high motivation. Students who are more proficient in English are less anxious and those who are less proficient tend to communicate less. Level of self-efficacy, proficiency in English, and motivation may contribute to students' anxieties (Efriana, 2021; Peng et al., 2024). Self-belief and high (or low) regard for oneself can determine the online behavior of a student. Some students are introverts and can adapt easily to online learning environment; however, extroverts may experience an increase in anxiety level (Sanudin et al., 2022).

Participation Style in the ASEAN Context

In online class discussion, students participate mainly by interacting through chat messenger in group chats and video conferencing. Pala and Erdem's (2020) questionnaire includes verbs and verb phrases to express the participation style of students such as *making comments, sending motivating messages, proposing solutions, and using personal experiences*. Students who participate in online classes are usually often more confident and may feel less anxious and therefore participate more (Efriana, 2021). However, some students remain quiet and disengaged for reasons such as *nervousness, fear of making mistakes and receiving negative evaluations*. Communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation affect the participation of students in an online class (Alla et al., 2020).

Student Engagement in Online Language Class in the ASEAN Context

In the context of language teaching and learning, engagement refers to learners' active participation and genuine commitment to their own educational process. Without such engagement meaningful learning is unlikely to occur (Hiver *et al.*, 2024). In the study of Hiver et al. (2020), the validated scale reflects operational definitions of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects.

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement, a sub-dimension of student engagement involves mental effort and mental activity during the learning process (Wei, 2024). Intrinsic motivation fuels a student to cognitively engage and specific examples include *peer interactions, questioning, and verbal manifestations*. This means that students flexibly use language knowledge while enhancing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In an online learning environment more cognitive effort to handle complex learning situations needs to be exerted in contrast to an offline learning environment (Wang et al., 2025).

Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement (BE) refers to students' active participation in learning. Recent reviews define BE as the effort students put into learning tasks, the quality of their participation, and their level of active involvement in the learning process (Sang & Hiver, 2021). The underlying effort exerted by students in learning activities is referred to in the literature as "energy" and physical behaviors that positively impact the academic performance of students (Wang et al., 2025). Numerous studies have equivocal claims on the positive impact of behavioral engagement

on academic performance (Wang et al., 2025; Wei, 2024).

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement refers to students' emotional reactions, attitudes, and affection towards learning activities. Emotionally engaged students either display positive or negative emotions that impact their participation in class activities, quality of learning motivation, and learning performance in online learning (Ozhan & Kocadere, 2020; Wang et al., 2022). Positive emotional reactions include enjoyment, enthusiasm, and anticipation (Hiver et al., 2024) while negative emotional reactions or attitudes include anxiety, boredom, frustration, and anger (Mercer, 2019). Emotionally disengaged students have feelings of isolation (Apridayani & Waluyo, 2022) and are prone to cognitive disengagement (Dubovi, 2022).

In essence, the new educational norm inevitably leads to the occurrence of OCA. Its impact on online instruction, practices, curriculum structure, and the well-being of students is evident and apparent. Recommendations from researchers in the literature review should be reconsidered such as improving digital infrastructures and learning resources, particularly in remote areas (Heng & Sol, 2021) and changing teachers' rigid teaching styles to more thoughtful and flexible strategies (Rahim et al., 2025).

Framework of the Study

This study was grounded in TDT or Transactional Distance Theory by Moore (1997) who posits that, in distance learning scenarios, the separation between the teacher and students can lead to a communication gap or psychological space. According to Moore, the nature of transaction

between teachers and students in distance learning needs to take into account three factors: dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy. First, dialogue refers to the quality of interaction which enables the resolution of learning problems that distance learners may be experiencing (Fallon, 2011). Second, structure in Moore's theory relates to course rigidity or flexibility. This factor includes course goals and objectives, the nature of assessment, and the ability of the course to accommodate individual student needs (Zhang, 2003). Third, learner autonomy is the extent to which the learner exerts control over learning procedures (Giossos et al., 2009). Learner autonomy is intimately tied in with learner's sense of self-direction or self-determination (Fallon, 2011) which impacts dialogue and structure. Moore's theory asserts that an inverse relationship exists between these factors. In other words, when there is an increase in structure, say, an inflexible course structure, it can lead to decrease in the quality of dialogue and sense of learner autonomy.

Research Questions/Objectives:

The current study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the participants' self-reports on the following: online course anxiety, participation style, and student engagement in language class?
2. Is there a significant relationship between (and among) participation style, online course anxiety, and student engagement?
3. Which variable affects the participation style of the participants in online language class?

Participants

The participants of this study are undergraduate students enrolled at a state university in the Philippines. They are currently enrolled in the 2023-2024 academic session. The total number of participants who are enrolled from various year levels is 95. As a consequence of the sudden class suspension, the number of participants who answered the questionnaires is uneven which is a limitation of the current study. Sending the questionnaires via email required preparation (and permission) which was difficult to accomplish, especially when the suspension of classes was sudden and done in short notice. The participants agreed to fill out the adapted tools. The researcher distributed the physical copies of the questionnaires (i.e., online course anxiety and participation style) while the questionnaire on student engagement in language classes was sent to the participants via a Google form. The researcher had to administer the physical copies when the participants were unable to answer the questionnaire (i.e., Google Form).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design ideal for variables needing descriptive details such as mean, standard deviation, and details of the correlation of variables using Pearson's correlation coefficient. In addition, multiple regression analysis determined the variables likely to affect students' participation style.

Instruments

There are three adapted tools to assess online course anxiety (OCA), participation style (PS), and student engagement in language classes. In addition, a Google form about the participants' reasons or motives in reciting during online class was prepared and disseminated before answering the adapted tools.

Online Course Anxiety Scale. This is a 22-item questionnaire of Li et al. (2021), which respondents have to rate following the scale (5-1) where 5 means *very characteristic of me*, while 1 means *not at all characteristic of me*. In this questionnaire, there are four (4) factors statistically analyzed and confirmed by the proponents (the separation from instructors, the separation from peers, the technological, and the lack of two-way communication).

Participation Style Scale for Online Instructional Discussion. This is a 32-item questionnaire of Pala and Erdem (2020) which participants have to rate following the scale (5-1) where 5 means *very characteristic of me*, while 1 means *not at all characteristic of me*. The questionnaire has two dimensions. The Why dimension comprises the main motivators of the participants' participation in online instructional environments, while the How dimension comprises items expressing participation behaviors or forms.

Student Engagement in Language Class. This is a 24-item questionnaire consisting of Behavioral Engagement (items 1-8), Emotional Engagement (items 9-16), and Cognitive Engagement (items 17-24). The proponent of the questionnaire approved the use of the tool, *Student Engagement in Language Class*, following a written request from the researcher.

Google Form. This form contains questions relative to participants' online class participation (e.g., *Do you recite in your online class? Why do you (or do not) recite in your online class? How often do you recite in an online class? What do you do during an online class?*).

Data Collection Procedure

The procedure for collecting data included the following. First, the participants answered a Google form that required answers to the following questions: *How often do you recite in an online class? What do you do during an online class?* A few weeks later, the researcher administered the instruments (OCA, PS, and SE). After the physical and electronic copies were collected, tabulation of the data followed.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions of the current study, the data collected were organized and analyzed by utilizing descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. For research question number 1, descriptive statistics were used to determine the self-rate characteristics of the participants in terms of online course anxiety (OCA), participation style (PS), and student engagement (SE) in language class. For research question number 2, Pearson correlation (2-tailed) was used to determine the relationship between the variables (OCA, PS, and SE). For research question 3, variables were subjected to regression analysis to determine the factors that impact participation style (PS), and to determine the extent of impact that OCA has on participation style and student engagement.

Findings and Discussion

The presentation of findings aligns with the sequence of research questions in the study.

Table 1

Self-report of Participants (SE, PS, and OCA)

Student Engagement (SE)	82	1.5	1.8	1.618	0.0756
Participation Style (PS)	163	0.8	5.0	3.348	0.9689
Online course anxiety (OCA)	205	0.9	5.0	3.472	1.0217
Valid N (listwise)	82				

(Legend: SE- Student Engagement, PS - Participation Style, OCA - Online Course Anxiety)

Self-reports of the participants in terms of OCA, PS, and SE are found in Table 1. The findings in terms of OCA (online course anxiety) revealed *moderate characteristics of anxiety*. The mean score of 3.472 for OCA indicated that a significant portion of the participants experienced anxiety while attending online classes. This condition was evident in their self-reported anxiety levels on the Google form. Some causes of anxiety include *poor internet connection, being shy, nervous, afraid to commit a mistake, and unfamiliar classmates and teachers*. Clearly, these self-reports confirm the participants' level of moderate anxiety. Furthermore, item number 16 in the OCA scale instrument (*Face-to-face interaction is more comfortable than online interactions*) obtained the highest frequency, 68/95. This result also confirms the participants' anxiety about attending online classes. In addition, the report of the participants' *moderate* online course anxiety is evident in the Google form entries for the question, *"Why do they recite (or*

don't recite) in online class?". Most participants' answers were categorized as Theme 1 or Social and Psychological Barriers. The opportunity of the participants to hone their communication skills is hampered by fear, low self-efficacy, and low peer support. The results of research studies in some countries in Asia revealed that anxiety impacts students' academic performance (Apridayani et al., 2023; Chang, Yuan, & Wang, 2020; Fang & Tang, 2021; Phanphech et al., 2022; Pelucio et al., 2022; Sindiani et al., 2022; Sunardi, 2023) and their English speaking skills (Munari & Roshida, 2024). Next, the result in terms of students' participation style (PS) showed that most styles in online class were

moderately characteristic (i.e., to socialize, get information, discuss, fulfill requirements, etc.) of the participants. In other words, the participation style could be influenced by their reasons for socializing, getting information, discussing, and fulfilling requirements (Hiver et al., 2020). The reasons of the participants' participation are evident in the participation scale instrument. Item number 6 obtained the highest frequency (*I participate to better understand the subject of the thread.*). Moderation in terms of their PS could be in part attributed to the moderate anxiety participants felt during online class discussion. In addition, reports from the Google form indicated the participants' reasons for not reciting or

Table 2

Correlation of Variables (Participation Style [PS], Self-Engagement [SE], and Online Course Anxiety [OCA])

Variables	PS	BE	CE	EE	OCA	
Participation Style (PS)	Pearson Correlation	1	.044	.253*	.031	.086
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.696	.022	.781	.273
	N	163	82	82	82	163
BE	Pearson Correlation	.044	1	.299*	.125	.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.696		.006	.263	.514
	N	82	82	82	82	82
EE	Pearson Correlation	.253*	.299*	1	.192	-.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022	.006		.085	.955
	N	82	82	82	82	82
CE	Pearson Correlation	.031	.125	.192	1	-.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.781	.263	.085		.894
	N	82	82	82	82	82
Online Course Anxiety (OCA)	Pearson Correlation	.086	.073	-.006	-.015	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.273	.514	.955	.894	
	N	163	82	82	82	205

**Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).*

(Legend: BE - Behavioral Engagement; CE - Cognitive Engagement; EE - Emotional Engagement)

participating in class such as *fear of being judged by classmates and teachers (whom they have not met personally), distractions such as household chores, and slow to no internet connection*. Finally, in terms of the participants' self-report on student engagement, the mean obtained is 1.61, *very true of me*. The mean rating of the participants' engagement revealed "very true" in terms of behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. The first three items obtained the highest mean (2.0) - *I enjoy learning new things about language in class; I go through the work for my language class carefully and make sure that it's done; I try to understand my mistakes in the language classroom when I get something wrong*. In the Google form, participants reported that reciting in class meant *additional points, the teacher will remember the name, and it builds self-confidence*. In other related studies, there were other reasons for (dis) engagement in online classes such as proficiency in English (Efriana, 2021) and lack of internet access (Regalado et al., 2022).

Next, to further explore the dynamics of online learning behavior, the study also investigated significant relationships among the key variables: Online Course Anxiety, Participation Scale, and Student Engagement.

Table 2 shows the significant relationship of the following variables - participation style and emotional engagement (.253), emotional engagement and behavioral engagement (.299), emotional engagement and cognitive engagement (.299). The results revealed the crucial role of the participants' emotional engagement to their behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and participation style. The correlation of the variables indicated that the participants' participation style depended on their emotional engagement in online language class discussion.

In other words, participants are likely to *socialize, discuss, get information, and fulfill requirements* (Hiver et al., 2020) when there are positive emotional reactions from teachers and peers, and when L2 classroom activities and learning outcomes are valued by the participants.

Lastly, the answer to the last research question (i.e., *Which variable impacts participants' participation style?*) is found below.

Table 3

Impact of OCA and SE on Participation Style

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t-value	
	B	S.E	Beta	
Constant	-0.550	2.424		-0.227
Online course anxiety	-0.008	0.105	-0.008	-0.077
BE	-0.300	1.052	-0.033	-0.285
EE	3.085	1.359	0.266	2.270**
CE	-0.102	0.727	-0.016	-0.140
F= 1.346, p<.05 ** significant at .05 level				
R ² = .065				

The third research question investigated the variable likely to impact participation style. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the answer to this question. Table 3 shows the factors affecting the participation style of the participants. Among the variables, student engagement in online language classes was found to impact participation style. Specifically, emotional engagement had a significant impact on the participation style of the participants.

Following regression analysis, the variable that had significant impact on the participants' participation style was related to emotions (*e.g., I look forward to my language classes, I enjoy learning new things about language in class, I want to understand what I am learning in my language class, I feel good when I am in my language class*). Emotional engagement is an indispensable construct of transactional distance theory and social cognition theory. These theories underscore feelings and behaviors of individuals during distance learning. Reports from Google form responses (*e.g., fear of judgment, lack of personal connection with classmates, weakness in public speaking*) confirmed the covert and overt impact of emotional engagement on participants' participation style. Furthermore, a Coefficient of Multiple Determination (R^2) of 6.5% indicates that the independent variables—online course anxiety and student engagement in language class—explain only a small portion of the variance in the dependent variable, participation style. Statistically, this suggests that 93.5% of the variability in participation style is influenced by other factors not included in the model. While the relationship is statistically measurable, it is relatively weak, implying that online course anxiety and engagement, though relevant, are not the primary drivers of how students choose to participate in online language class. This finding aligns with the Transactional Distance Theory (Moore, 1997) which emphasized the psychological and communicative space between the teacher and student in distance learning environment. The theory suggests that misunderstandings and lack of interaction can lead to anxiety and disengagement which in turn may affect participation. However, the low R^2 value implies that participation style is likely shaped by a broader set of psychological, social, and contextual factors such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation,

cultural norms, personality traits, and even technological proficiency.

Implications

The findings of this study underscore the anxiety of the participants as they struggle to fulfill their responsibilities in the class - attend virtually, recite, and accomplish tasks. Participants' experiences during online class were also reported via a google form and somehow confirmed the roles of anxiety to participation styles and engagement in language class. Following the findings of this study, there were two important things that this study would like to impart to the teaching of English in a virtual scheme. First, the findings suggest that there is a significant correlation between emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, and participation style. Ultimately, this finding resonates the need for teachers to follow up students even after online class to at least lessen the formalities or disconnection (both physically and mentally) some students may have experienced in an online class. In cases where there are more than thirty or forty students, perhaps, the teacher can devise a way, say, by batch scheme to accommodate all students. In addition, instant messaging applications can also be resorted to keep in touch with students. Moreover, breakout rooms and group online discussion could be arranged so that all students can be given a chance to actively and naturally engage without fear of being left out because of limited time.

Next, another finding in the current study that may inform the teaching of English is the limitation of interpersonal communication in an online class. Anxiety may have been compounded with the nature of communication in an online class - limited, unnatural, and quick response

formats. Pre-service teachers are eventually deployed to teach younger language learners but if they felt anxious and less confident in an online class, could it also be that they will feel the same way in a physical classroom? Perhaps. In an online class, teachers should prepare activities entailing articulation of ideas, demonstration of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. There is a time limit to any online class and maximizing the time by having student-centered activities with the skills in mind is worth the time.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study is to investigate the pre-service teachers' OCA, PS, and SE; and determine the variable(s) that impact their participation on online language class discussion. The major findings in this study provided insights to better teaching online and to heighten awareness on conditions that students bring in the classroom. There were three research questions in this study and highlight of each answers are presented here.

First, the likelihood of anxiety experienced by the participants resulted to non-participation and disengagement in class. Awareness of this condition and its impact on students' academic performance can inform educators and policy-making bodies. For educators, to tailor-fit teaching strategies and activities for online class setup to lessen levels of anxieties; and for lawmakers, to propose and implement laws that will safeguard mental health both teachers and students.

Second, the correlation of PS and EE; BE and EE highlights the construct of "emotion," indispensable to issues of online learning and participation styles of the participants. The investigation on the relationship of the variables

underscores conditions or factors that participants are likely to be motivated (or demotivated) to participate in online class. The significant relationship of these variables solidify the idea that participants who have positive reactions to the environment of an online class (teachers, peers, tasks, etc.) will likely participate. Furthermore, this finding on the correlation of PS and EE, BE and EE heightens the awareness of educators to conditions that students bring in an online classroom (e.g., enjoyment, interest, learning style, self-efficacy) and are likely affecting their participation (or non-participation).

Third, the investigation about the variable likely to impact the participation style of the participants is emotional engagement (EE). Emotional engagement impacts participation style of the participants. This finding solidifies the investigation on the correlation of variables (PS and EE, BE and EE). Emotional and behavioral engagement are rooted from motivation - intrinsic and extrinsic. It highlights the factors and conditions that students can bring in online class and consequently are indicators of participation or non-participation. Awareness of factors leading to non-participation can solve drop-out problems in schools and disengagement of students.

In sum, there are two things that emerged significant to the investigation of this study. First, awareness to students' well-being and then the second is acknowledgment of students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The ultimate goal of a teacher in English is for students to be communicatively competent. With the new landscape of teaching, this goal can still be achieved even as the teacher is physically distant from the student. The shift to virtual classroom is susceptible to teachers' emotional detachment and could negatively impact academic performance

and communication skills of students. Therefore, awareness of the conditions or factors such as anxiety and its impact on students would be the first step to better the teachers' online teaching.

The motivation of the author to pursue this study is an observation in online class of pre-service teachers. After physical classes shifted to online classes, the author observed that students who were silent (or non-participative) in physical class turned out asking questions, clarifying answers, and reciting in online class. The findings in this study might be plausible reasons for the positive change of students' performance or participation. Students have preferences to learn, unique personalities, and self-efficacy. The virtual platform has different effect on the learning outcome of students. Some may find it less tense and still others may find it overwhelming.

The findings of this study might be relevant to some teacher education institutions across Asia if there were more participants coming from different universities locally and internationally. Perhaps, cross-cultural comparison of online learning within Asian countries might considerably be adding more insights. Future researchers can also pursue studies investigating assessment in virtual platforms.

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