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UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF ENGAGEMENT IN DIRECTED MOTIVATIONAL CURRENTS[1-2]

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Abstract

The present study explores the dynamic nature of learner engagement emerged as a critical area of interest in recent years, within the framework of Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) in EFL. Departing from previous investigations that often have been limited to engagement in isolated tasks within controlled laboratory settings, this study adopts a longitudinal approach, exploring engagement fluctuations of five L2 learners experiencing DMCs over the course of an academic year. Given a lack of research focused on the engagement dynamics in the case of

[1]This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Adıyaman University, (Application Date: 20.05.2025; Approval Date: 10.06.2025; Approval Number: 141). All participants provided written informed consent, and the study adhered to ethical principles regarding confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

[2]The initial analysis results of this study were presented at the 6th TESOL Türkiye International ELT Conference, Future-Proof Learning: Rethinking Education to Inspire and Sustain Tomorrow, held on 18 April 2025.

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DMCs, adopting a qualitative multiple case design, the study utilizes weekly self-reports and in-depth interviews to capture the multifaceted nature of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement trajectories within the framework of DMCs. The findings reveal that engagement within DMCs is a complex and dynamic process characterized by significant variability with only brief periods of stability and shaped by a range of factors, including positive feedback, supportive learning environments, task novelty, perceived progress, and emotionally resonant experiences. Importantly, the study underscores the crucial need to view the dynamic and multifaceted nature of engagement in L2 learning, particularly within the context of DMCs. These findings present significant insights for designing interventions supporting and sustaining learner engagement throughout the dynamic and multifaceted process of L2 learning.

Keywords: *Directed motivational currents, L2 engagement, psychology of language learning*

YÖNLENDİRİLMİŞ MOTİVASYON AKIMLARI (DMC) BAĞLAMINDA KATILIMIN DİNAMİK DOĞASINI ANLAMAK

Öz

Bu çalışma, son yıllarda kritik bir ilgi alanı haline gelen öğrenen katılımının dinamik doğasını, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenme (EFL) bağlamında Yönlendirilmiş Motivasyon Akımları (Directed Motivational Currents - DMC) çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Daha önceki çalışmalar genellikle kontrollü laboratuvar ortamlarında yürütülen ve izole görevlerle sınırlı kalan katılım incelemelerinden farklı olarak, bu araştırma uzunlamasına bir yaklaşım benimseyerek, bir akademik yıl boyunca DMC deneyimi yaşayan beş ikinci dil (L2) öğrenicisinin katılım dalgalanmalarını ele almaktadır. DMC durumlarında katılım dinamiklerine odaklanan araştırmaların eksikliği göz önünde bulundurularak, keşifsel ve karma yöntemli bir tasarım benimsenmiştir. Bu kapsamda, davranışsal, bilişsel ve duygusal katılımın çok boyutlu doğasını yakalamak amacıyla haftalık öz değerlendirme raporları ve derinlemesine mülakatlar kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, DMC'ler içindeki katılımın yalnızca kısa süreli stabilite dönemleri gösteren, önemli ölçüde değişkenlik içeren karmaşık ve dinamik bir süreç olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu süreç; olumlu geri bildirim, destekleyici öğrenme ortamları, görev yeniliği, algılanan ilerleme ve duygusal olarak yankı uyandıran deneyimler gibi çeşitli faktörlerden etkilenmektedir. Çalışma, özellikle DMC bağlamında, ikinci dil öğreniminde katılımın

dinamik ve çok boyutlu doğasının anlaşılmasının ne kadar kritik olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Bu bulgular, L2 öğrenim sürecinin dinamik ve çok katmanlı yapısı boyunca öğrenen katılımını destekleyen ve sürdüren müdahale stratejilerinin tasarımı açısından önemli iç görüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yönlendirilmiş motivasyon akımları, İkinci dil katılımı, dil öğrenme psikolojisi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholarly discourse on applied linguistics has progressively acknowledged that 'language learning engagement is …the "action-based core of motivation,"' highlighting 'the multidimensional investment they make cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally in learning opportunities', therein through extended periods of time (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Hiver, Al-Hoorie, & Mercer, 2020). Yet despite engagement's centrality, motivation is an insufficient precondition for engagement, that is, "a highly motivated learner may not display actual engagement in productive learning behaviours" (Mercer, 2019, p. 3). Within this framework, the construct of Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) provide a compelling analytical perspective to reconcile this by conceptualizing sustained engagement as an optimal form of engagement with an extended project" (Dörnyei et al., 2016, p. 33) that incessantly sustains behavioural momentum across extended periods of time that withstands contextual variability (Gümüş, 2019; Selçuk & Erten, 2017). Importantly, the defining feature of DMCs is their ability to sustainably energize engagement towards difficult tasks and long-term learning projects, namely its self-regulatory dynamism, where action and motivation recursively interact and reinforce each other (Dörnyei et al., 2016). In this view, engagement is positioned as its core operational mechanism through which the current

actualizes itself, not as a consequence of a DMC, thus rendering engagement a key, yet largely unexplored, aspect of a DMC.

1.1. Engagement as the Core Processual Signature of DMCs

Mainstream educational psychology widely recognizes engagement as the "holy grail of learning" (Sinatra et al., 2015) and recent L2 scholarship views it as a critical indicator of how learners navigate the complexities of learning a language (Hiver et al., 2020). Theoretically, engagement is fundamentally understood as a multidimensional construct of active, effortful, and voluntary participation in the learning process, which can be effectively grasped as a multivariate phenomenon integrating behavioral, cognitive, and affective facets (Fredricks et al., 2004; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). However, notwithstanding this theoretical consensus and the increasing attention paid to DMCs, engagement is a theoretically underexplored concept within specific DMC literature.

The extant literature on DMCs implicitly documents engagement without necessarily explicit terminological use. Specifically, learners experiencing DMCs articulate markers synonymous with engagement, such as increased concentration, sustained task focus, and a heightened tolerance for challenging practice. Muir (2020) note, for example, that such learners "actively seek out new language, put themselves in communicative scenarios they had previously lacked confidence to engage in, and work productively together." Such descriptions as "the optimal state" described in DMC literature correspond directly to what is now understood to be the modern scholarly conceptualizations of engagement.

The existing literature suggests that DMCs serve as a form of "structural attractor states" because they stabilize engagement through the regulation of variability that exists in long-term learning processes (Gümüş, 2019). Whereas

typical forms of motivation can be vulnerable to variability, a key aspect of DMCs is their stability-related association for sustained, more stable engagement trajectories, where, through surface-level variability, while remaining responsive to feedback and subgoal attainment (Selçuk & Erten, 2017).

While this unique dynamic process of micro-level stability with microscopic fluctuation is theoretically sound, much is left to be covered.

1.2. Engagement as a Dynamically Fluctuating Phenomenon within DMC Pathways

Despite being viewed as intense, enduring motivational processes, DMCs experience the same non-linear patterns of variability that characterize dynamic systems in general (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2019). It is postulated that, unlike linear models, DMCs do neither remove variability nor reduce its presence to a constant state, but rather deal with variability through "re-triggering mechanisms" (Dörnyei et al., 2016). Empirical evidence suggests that DMCs are maintained through a process of oscillation and restoration, through which inevitable "dips" occurring for reasons of tension or tasks demands, are gradually mitigated through the occurrence of re-triggering events (Henry et al., 2015; Pietluch, 2022). It is for this reason that the "stability" observed in DMCs is best conceptualized as a “patterned organization of fluctuation”, actually a dynamic stability that oscillates according to micro-variable parameters such as teacher affect and peers' participation (Gümüş, 2019; Sak, 2019). Thus, there is a pressing need for empirical inquiry that can systematically capture the specific micro-dynamics—the rises and dips—that sustain engagement over time.

1.3. Conceptualizing Stability and Variability within DMC Engagement Patterns

Dynamic Systems Theory posits that stability and variability are not mutually exclusive but are concomitants of all motivated behavior. In this view, stability is viewed as an attractor pattern, that is a self-sustaining configuration, whereas variability is a reflection of the system's sensitivity to internal and external disturbances (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2019). Structurally, DMCs manifest a deep attractor basin that bounds behavioral variability, maintaining learners' engagement even when faced with negative conditions. But the exact dynamic process of engagement, tracing the 'basin' of this variability, is left empirically opaque. Mercer (2019) emphasizes the need for a holistic framework to investigate engagement as the "action component of dynamic motivational processes" (p. 6), yet fine-grained longitudinal analyses of these trajectories are scarce.

Current literature has predominantly focused on the antecedents and correlates of DMCs, such as emotionality and personality (see, for instance, Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021), or the structural routines that sustain striving for a goal (see, for example, Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). Nevertheless, as noted by Mercer (2019), there is a pressing need to operationalize engagement as a phenomenon that is temporarily patterned. It was found that variabilities such as unsatisfactory progress, negative feedback, task overload, and emotional disequilibrium cause variability (Ibrahim, 2016; Pietluch & Sak, 2024; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2023). These variabilities, hence, far from discounting the presence of a DMC, actually exemplified the real-time self-regulatory activities of the system. Understanding how stability coexists with this variability is essential for advancing theoretical models of engagement. Tracing these micro-stabilizations and oscillations of engagement, this research positions engagement as the central mechanism through which DMCs are operationalized in daily learning. To this end, the present study offers a

longitudinal analysis of L2 learners across 14 weeks of confirmed DMC experiences.

Therefore, this qualitative longitudinal study is informed by the following research inquiries:

1. How do L2 learners' engagement trajectories unfold during ongoing DMC experiences over 14 weeks?
2. How do moments of stability and variability in engagement manifest within these DMC trajectories, and what factors contribute to these fluctuations or brief periods of stability?

2. METHODOLOGY

Considering the complex and personalized nature of Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) and their limited exploration in EFL contexts, a qualitative exploratory design (Creswell, 2013) was adopted to investigate learners' engagement trajectories. Qualitative methods are suited to capture the dynamic and lived experiences and personal perceptions, addressing the *how* and *why* of engagement fluctuations (Dörnyei, 2007; Henry et al., 2015; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017). A multiple-case study approach (Stake, 1995) involving five EFL learners allowed for in-depth, context-specific insights (Duff, 2008). Data were collected through weekly self-ratings, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews, providing a triangulated view of EFL learners' engagement trajectories over 14 weeks.

2.1. Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages of a public Turkish university. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured.

Participants were purposively selected using a stepwise procedure to identify those who had experienced DMCs. The students were introduced to L2-related DMC examples (in Dörnyei et al., 2015; Sak, 2021) and invited to report similar motivational surges. Interested students then completed a screening questionnaire adapted from Zarrinabadi and Khajeh (2021) to assess the presence of three key DMC components: goal/vision orientation, positive emotionality, and facilitative structure.

Based on screening, five learners (Aliya, Ben, Carla, David, and Elena; pseudonyms) were chosen since they showed high levels of evidence of having gone through DMC-like motivation. Being a small group of participants was purposeful, considering the scarceness of full-blown DMCs (Dörnyei et al., 2016) and the need to look at each case in-depth (Duff, 2008).

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	English Proficiency Level (CEFR)	Years Studying English	DMC-Related Goal	Duration of DMC Experience
Aliya	Female	19	B1	11	Achieving a top score on TOEFL for an overseas scholarship	3.5 months
Ben	Male	20	B2+	12	Preparing intensively for Erasmus+ exchange interview	4 months
Carla	Female	19	B2	10	Improving writing fluency to publish blog entries in English	3 months
David	Male	21	B1	13	Mastering academic English for graduate study abroad	4.5 months

Elena	Female	20	B2+	11	Building confidence in oral presentations	3 months

2.2. Data Collection

Data were gathered across 14 weeks and included three major sources: (1) self-ratings of engagement on a weekly basis, (2) reflective journals, and (3) semi-structured interviews. This multi-method approach provided methodological triangulation and temporal and thematic depth (Flick, 2004).

Self-Ratings of Engagement: Participants self-rated their engagement three times per lesson (start, midpoint, end) on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = not engaged, 10 = fully engaged) using a modified Kruk (2021) motivational chart. The three temporal ratings per lesson in the current study were preferred over a single measurement to capture the moment-to-moment fluctuations that are characteristic of dynamic engagement states and provide a more reliable and fine-grained representation of short-term variability within the DMC process that would have been missed by a single end-of-lesson measure. Engagement was defined as the integration of effort, interest, emotional investment, and task-oriented behavior, as defined in earlier research (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Reflective Journals: Learners kept weekly journals (300–600 words) detailing experiences of engagement, and perceived causes of peaks and troughs (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Over 14 weeks, journals generated a corpus of 25,000+ words, offering rich qualitative insight into EFL learners' engagement trajectories of their individual DMC paths.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted at Weeks 1, 7, and 14 via Zoom (35–45 minutes each), semi-structured interviews explored EFL learners' engagement orientations and reflections on engagement ups and downs in their DMC

experiences. Interviews also provided the opportunity to clarify and expand data arising from the self-ratings and journal reflections. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, resulting in a total of 22 interview transcripts.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in order to address two major research questions: (1) In what ways did learners' engagement vary across DMC episodes spanning 14 weeks? (2) What factors led to these variations?

Self-ratings were plotted in line graphs for each participant, showing weekly engagement trajectories and intra-session fluctuations calculated as mean engagement at each of the three time points (start, halfway, and end). These visual and statistical graphs highlighted patterns of sustained engagement, spikes, or decline.

Using inductive coding, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2007) of the interview data and reflective journals comprised the following stages: Steps included open coding, grouping codes into themes reflecting emotional, cognitive, and social factors affecting engagement (e.g., task relevance, peer support, emotional resonance), and analytical memoing. To facilitate reliability and trustworthiness, a second researcher double-coded 20% of the data, and member checking involved a preliminary sharing of the emerging themes with the participants to gain their confirmation of them.

This qualitative multiple case approach allowed a comprehensive understanding of engagement during DMC experiences, integrating self-reported intensity, reflective accounts, and personal narratives to capture the dynamic nature of engagement in EFL learners.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Engagement Trajectories of EFL Learners Experiencing DMCs

The analysis of weekly self-reported data delivers rich insight into the dynamic, context-sensitive nature of DMC learners' engagement. Each of the five participants—Aliya, Ben, Carla, David, and Elena—depicted distinct but changing patterns of engagement reflecting interactions between emotional, cognitive, and social factors (Figure 1).

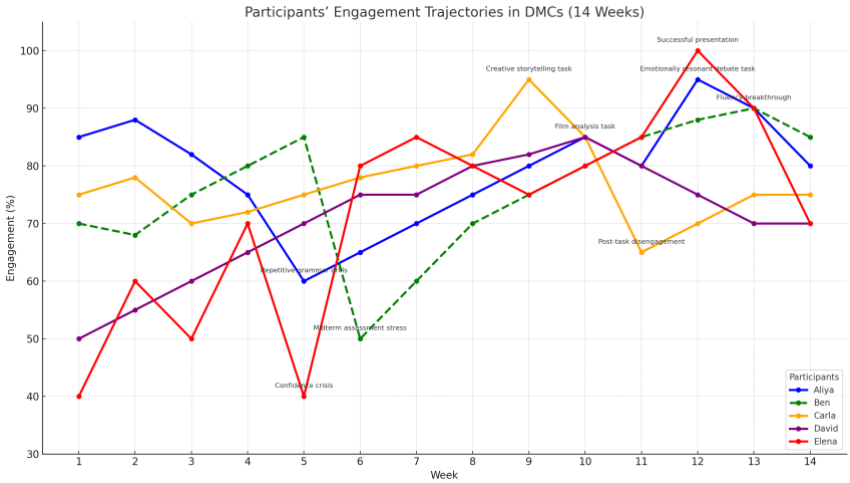


Figure 1. Participants' Engagement Trajectories in DMCs (14 Weeks)

Aliya's engagement profile revealed a highly variable but persistent pattern over the 14 weeks. Her initial level of engagement started at a fairly high level (85%) in Week 1, with some increase in Week 2 (88%) but then a consistent downtrend between Weeks 3–5, at its lowest level (60%) in Week 5. This slippage directly correlated with a sequence of repetitive grammar practice exercises she found uninteresting and mentally draining. Gradual improvement then occurred between Weeks 6–10, with her engagement increasing from 65% to 85%. Interestingly, the peak level of engagement occurred in Week 12 (95%) on an emotionally resonant debate activity that permitted self-expression and

peer feedback. During the concluding weeks (Weeks 13–14), there had been a gentle drop (ending at 80%), but nonetheless revealed a fairly high level of sustained effort. Aliya's profile points to the benefits of emotional resonance and task novelty in reinvigorating engagement after lapses in engagement.

Ben's engagement profile showed an impressive ability for motivational rehabilitation following affective setbacks. Starting at an interim level (70%) in Week 1, Ben saw a fall in Week 2 (68%), but then progressively increased in line with increasing effectiveness in terms of task management at the task level, peaking in Week 5 (85%). But in Week 6 (50%), there came an abrupt and severe drop during midterm, with increasing stress levels coupled with decreasing self-efficacy. Ben showed consistent resilience in spite of this; he gradually bounced back in Weeks 7-10, finally stabilizing at 85%. There was a peak in Week 13 (90%), following the noted fluency breakthrough and rise in self-confidence. There was no final decline in his score (Week 14: 85%). Ben's line is indicative of the recovery-type engagement plot, where there is initial withdrawal following affective setbacks, but later sustained improvement based on task effectiveness and internal motivational re-accommodation.

Carla exhibited a task-sensitive engagement pattern characterized by noticeable spikes and troughs corresponding to the perceived value of instructional activities. Starting at 75% in Week 1, she gradually increased her engagement through Week 8 (82%). A dramatic surge was recorded in Week 9 (95%) during a creative storytelling task, which she reported as personally meaningful and imaginative. This moment of peak engagement was followed by a decline in Weeks 10 and 11 (down to 65%), likely a consequence of post-task disengagement and lack of novelty in subsequent assignments. Recovery occurred during the final weeks, with her engagement stabilizing around 75%. Carla’s engagement pattern reflects her strong affective connection to creative

tasks, and her responsiveness to fluctuations in perceived relevance and novelty of content.

David's engagement proceeded in a cumulative and steady upward direction, indicative of cumulative motivation-building process. He started at a relatively low level (50%) during Week 1, yet increased in successive weeks to 85% in Week 10. This increase was closely tied to the provision of personalized learning materials and a movie analysis activity involving his area of interest. After this high point, there was an evident dip (75% in Week 12 and 70% in Week 14) possibly due to rising academic fatigue toward the semester's end. David's overall trajectory showed clear internalization of learning objectives over time. His trend represents the positive effect of personalization, consistent attainment of goals, and task congruence in maintaining long-term engagement in DMCs.

The most emotionally fluctuating pattern of engagement was exhibited by Elena. Her initial level of engagement began at low levels (40% in Week 1), gradually increased in Week 2 to 60%, decreased again in Week 5 to 40% as she reported a crisis of self-confidence. A remarkable one-week recovery in Week 6 (80%) was followed by relatively high participation in weeks 7-11. A turning point in her academic self-concept was experienced after delivering an outstanding presentation reviewed in Week 12 (100%). A slight drop was experienced during the last two weeks, finishing at 70%. Elena's engagement trajectory is characteristic of increased emotional sensitivity and peer support, as well as positive experiences in terms of increasing confidence, playing a critical role in stabilizing the level of engagement.

3.2. Analysis of Factors that Influence Engagement Trajectories

The analysis of the findings demonstrates that the engagement trajectories of EFL learners experiencing DMCs indicate how emotional, social, as well as contextual facets dynamically impact persistent sustained engagement based on their line chart patterns as well as weekly self-reporting.

3.2.1. Aliya's Influencing Factors:

Emotional Engagement of Tasks: Aliya's peak in Week 12 (95%) in an emotionally captivating debate activity illustrates the impact of affectively laden activities on engagement. Aliya notes:

"Week 12's debate was exhilarating! I felt understood and acknowledged by my classmates. It wasn't just about words—it was about having my viewpoint heard. I've never felt so ready before!" (Week 12)

Disengagement Due to Monotony: The dip in Week 5 depicts responsiveness to routine, drill-style teaching, indicating a low tolerance for cognitively unstimulating tasks. She adds:

"I kept thinking, why are we still doing these same exercises? I wasn't learning anything new—it felt draining." (Week 5)

Socially Driven Recovery through Peer Collaboration: Her re-engagement following disengagement during the middle phase was supported through socially interactive activities, indicating high dependency on peer interaction for re-engagement.

Aliya expresses: "Collaborating on the group project reminded me again why I love learning in groups. We laughed, argued, and encouraged one another." (Week 7)

Emotional Reflexivity: The findings reveal that her capacity for rebounding implies an ability for reflection in order to review and re-balance her emotional as well as motivational states according to task requirements.

"I knew I was zoning out, so I tried to focus on what made me excited again—like topics that matter to me." (Week 10)

The findings show that Aliya's engagement pattern illustrates the ways in which emotional investment, peer endorsement and novelty in tasks are strong re-engagement drivers in a DMC. These may imply that students like Aliya are supported in tasks that promote conversation, agency, and emotional involvement, as opposed to formal, format-driven practice, especially if tasks engage both interpersonal relationship and personal significance.

3.2.2. Ben's Influencing Factors:

Pressure of performance (stress due to evaluation): The trough at Week 6 (50%) is due to midterm-associated stress, demonstrating the effect of high stakes testing on engagement

"The midterm crushed me. I felt so unprepared—like all my progress vanished overnight. My confidence hit rock bottom." (Week 6)

Goal Proximity: His peak in Week 13 coincided with perceived fluency break-throughs, illustrating the motivating nature of perceived progress indicators of fluency and hence supporting literature on DMC on goal-clarity as well as markers of progress

"That week I had a proper conversation with one of the native speakers without struggling—it felt like it had all paid off." (Week 13)

Recovery through Self-Regulation: In spite of difficulties, Ben showed persistent motivational resiliency based on internal goal salience in recovering from troughs. Ben's gradual rehabilitation after setbacks is indicative of robust self-regulatory ability as well as internal motivation.

"I just reminded myself, "Focus on small victories." By breaking down tasks into steps, I regained momentum again. It wasn't easy, but I fought my way back in."

Temporal Sensitivity: Fluctuations in his pattern that correspond with academic calendar stresses reveal context-sensitive regulation of his engagement. Highlighting his path of comeback via the dashed lines in his engagement graph

is in line with the DMC model of long-term flow motivation with frequent but brief relapses.

"Deadlines are two-edged swords. They get on my nerves, but knowing the term was coming to an end motivated me to keep going strong."

The findings indicate that Ben's engagement trajectory illustrates that whereas academic pressure may sometimes interrupt motivation, students whose purpose is clear and who are goal-focused are likely to rebound. Thus, it is suggested that scaffolding goal monitoring and encouraging reflection might enhance such students' resilience. It is clear that Ben's path emphasizes the value of making clear indicators of progress as well as support structures at the points of stress. Then, these findings suggest that making frequent formative feedback occur, coupled with phrasing evaluations as opportunities for growth, can possibly support sustained engagement better.

3.2.3. Carla's Influencing Factors

Creative Task Engagement Spikes: Carla's spike in engagement of 95% was recorded for Week 9's creative story task, reflecting autonomy and imagination driving her engagement.

“The story writing exercise was enchanting! I was able to create characters and worlds. It didn't even feel homework-y—it was pure enjoyment.” (Week 9)

Sudden Declines following Peak Activities: A dramatic drop in Week 11 suggests inability to maintain engagement following highly cognitive and affective-stimulating activities, probably owing to insufficient follow-up or resolution.

"Now that the story's high was over, the next assignments seemed dull. I couldn't stop measuring everything to that creative high. It was difficult to remain engaged."

Emotional Orientation toward Task Content: Her pattern indicates a profound emotional orientation toward task content as opposed to procedural learning.

"I'm only interested in doing something that gets an emotional reaction out of me. If it's not emotive or creative, I tune out."

Preference for Innovation: Engagement of Carla changes concurrently with task novelty, suggesting an orientation toward variety and creativity for sustained engagement.

"I require surprises in order to remain engaged. When tasks become predictable, my enthusiasm plunges."

The findings demonstrate that Carla's engagement is influenced by fluctuations in perceived task significance and creative expression. Her path illustrates the necessity of situating richly emotional, student-focused tasks and sequencing peaks in engagement with equally significant activities to forestall disengagement. Carla's path also illustrates the necessity of sequenced scaffolding of tasks—where highly emotional or provocative tasks should be followed by reflective or consolidative tasks in order to stabilize one's enthusiasm. The drop following the peak indicates the necessity for improved emotional and cognitive closure.

3.2.4. David's Influencing Factors:

Personalized Content as a Catalyst: A consistent increase started with the use of customized learning materials, rising to a peak (85%) at Week 10 in an activity involving an analysis of a movie based on his domain of interest.

"Doing an in-depth analysis of my favorite movie in Week 10 really changed everything. It was as if the course was tailored to me."

Delayed Engagement Initiation: David began at 50%, indicating low engagement until Week 4. Low initial engagement reveals challenges in engaging in standard lessons tasks prior to establishing personal value

alignment. This initial period coincided with broad content without personal relevance.

"The initial weeks were bland. I didn't see what grammar principles had to do with achieving what I had in mind. I almost quit."

Cognitive Engagement Rather Than Emotional Reactivity: In contrast to others, David lacked precipitous fluctuations, indicating reflective and consistently developing pathways of engagement. David's pathway depicts a goal-oriented and cognitively maintained pattern of engagement, in contrast to emotionally reactive pathways.

"I'm not a fan of emotional peaks. Consistent progression is more important. Each week, I measured myself, and that propelled me forward."

David's participation illustrates a slow-burning DMC in which intrinsic goals have taken precedence over affective situational influences. This finding reveals that David's slow-burning path is consistent with long-term DMC construction, in contrast to short-term flurries. David's case illustrates autonomy-supportive materials, personal relevance, and learning path progression through successive build-up of learning experiences. This finding implies that David and others like him might not demonstrate short-term motivational bursts, yet they can achieve extended engagement through systematic integration of individualized learning strategy and long-term scaffolding of goals.

3.2.5. Elena's Influencing Factors:

High Emotional Reactivity: Elena showed large fluctuations—starting at 40%, increasing to 100% in Week 12, and decreasing in Week 14—indicating emotional instability.

"Oftentimes, I just felt so overwhelmed that even attempting seemed out of reach… especially when I feared messing up in front of other people."

Moments of Crisis and Recovery: Her lowest point at Week 5 was due to a crisis of confidence, while her peak at Week 12 was after an impeccable peer presentation, reflecting emotional dependence upon validation.

"In Week 5, I was terrified in front of an audience during one presentation. I said to myself, 'I'm not meant for this.' Yet by Week 12, acing that speech gave me back my confidence."

Peer and Teacher Support: Peer support and appreciation reinitiated Elena's engagement, highlighting the external reinforcements for motivational restoration.

"Encouragement from my team in Week 5 helped rescue me. They were reminding me I was not isolated."

Increased Emotional Reflexivity: In spite of turmoil, she showed an ability to reflect and rebound, possibly indicating emotional sensitivity can be two-faced—both an asset and a liability.

"I have learned to turn emotions into fuel. When I'm low, I look back at previous victories for encouragement."

These findings suggest that Elena's engagement trajectory emphasizes emotionally safe climates, consistent feedback, and scaffolding for developing confidence. Her engagement flourishes in social approval and falters in bouts of doubt and criticism. Thus, this finding implies that such learners need to have positive environments in which to re-instate confidence and have emotional safety prioritized.

In summary, across the five cases, various themes recur:

- **Task meaningfulness, task resonance, and emotional reflexivity** were key for peak engagement, key drivers of engagement, particularly for Aliya and Elena, who depended primarily upon emotionally rich or socially satisfying tasks. (Aliya, Carla, Elena). Also, highest emotional

reflexivity manifests as resilience promoting recovery following low points (Aliya, Elena, Ben).

- **Stressful academic milestones**, such as assessments. It's normal for stressful academic landmarks, e.g., examinations, to trigger dips (Ben, Elena, Carla).
- **Personalization and goal alignment** (self-regulatory strategies, progress markers, personal goal salience) facilitated long-term engagement (David, Ben).
- **Task sequencing and design** (novelty, creativity, and post-task closure) have an instrumental role in maintaining engagement—underscoring the importance of careful sequencing of impactful tasks. (Carla, Elena).

The findings reveal that EFL learners experiencing DMCs experienced fluctuations in parallel with external stressors (e.g., examinations, monotony, feedback), yet differed in recovery courses in terms of internal vs. external motivational resources.

The trajectories of engagement among the five participants offer rich support for the non-linear and dynamic nature of learner engagement in DMCs over long-term periods. While some participants (e.g., David, Aliya) had non-linear, fluctuating, or ascending trends fueled by affectively salient tasks and goal alignment, others (e.g., Elena, Carla) showed trends heavily influenced by affective states and situational variance. Emotional reflexivity proved to be an enabling as well as catalytic force, allowing for recuperation and long-term perseverance. Aliya and Elena depended upon social validation and affectively rich tasks, while David and Ben flourished from self-management and individually tailored purpose alignment. Carla's profile highlighted creative expression and careful orchestration of affectively demanding tasks. Crucially, all participants demonstrated recovery and re-engagement from troughs in

their trajectories, frequently triggered by meaningful, creative, or collaborative tasks.

3.4. Summary Table of Influencing Factors

Table 2 presents a synthesized overview of the engagement profiles of each learner by highlighting their peaks and dips throughout the 14-week period. These data are obtained from moment-to-moment self-ratings made three times in each lesson.

Table 2

Influencing Factors

Learner	Peak Engagement	Dip in Engagement	Key Influencing Factors
Aliya	Week 12 – Debate (95%)	Week 5 – Grammar drills (55%)	Emotional resonance, peer collaboration, emotional reflexivity
Ben	Week 13 – Fluency breakthrough (90%)	Week 6 – Midterm (50%)	Goal salience, self-regulation, performance pressure
Carla	Week 9 – Story writing (95%)	Week 10–11 – Routine tasks (60%)	Creative task orientation, affective connection, task continuity
David	Week 10 – Film analysis (85%)	Weeks 1–4 – Lack of personalization (50–60%)	Personalized content, cognitive engagement, goal internalization
Elena	Week 12 – Presentation (100%)	Week 5 – Confidence crisis (40%)	Emotional reactivity, peer/instructor support, reflective practice

Note. Percentages in the table represent the self-rated engagement of the students on the 10-point scale (1 = Not Engaged, 10 = Fully Engaged).

4. DISCUSSION

The present 14-week longitudinal case study sought to unravel the micro-dynamics of L2 engagement among five EFL learners experiencing DMCs. By examining these micro-dynamics over time, the study aimed to determine the micro-mechanisms that drive variability, as well as those that drive stability. Collectively, the findings provide strong empirical validation for the characterization of a DMC as a dynamic attractor system that supports long-term engagement dynamics, even as these dynamics adapt to micro-momentarities (Dörnyei et al., 2016; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2019). This study builds on previous research, illustrating that being engaged is, far from merely being a side effect of a DMC, actually is recognized here to be its defining processional marker, or 'the patterned organization of fluctuation' rather than a constant linear process (Mercer, 2019).

4.1. The Dynamic Stability of Engagement: Navigating the Attractor Basin

The first research question was to discover the engagement patterns of EFL learners. These patterns, through Aliya's socially-mediated trajectory, Ben's resilient rebound, Carla's creativity-driven patterns, David's steady accumulation, and Elena's emotionally tumultuous pattern, illustrate that there is no 'typical' pattern of engagement through a DMC. These graphs and qualitative accounts illustrate that even when a learner is going through an intense experience of a DMC, there is never a linear or constant level of engagement.

When viewed through the lens of DST, these patterns indicate that the learners' engagement is operating within a " basin of attraction." As illustrated in the diagram above, the DMC establishes a structural gravity, or basin, that keeps the behavior of the learner contained. Within this basin, variability is not an

anomaly but a defining feature of the system's self-regulation. Even where all five of these learners demonstrated oscillations—some of them quite strong and affectively driven, such as Elena's and Carla's, and others less strong and more cognitively controlled, such as David's—the key is that this oscillating behavior remained, nonetheless, within identifiable boundaries established by the DMC.

These findings corroborate the theoretical contention that variability is not necessarily at odds with DMCs (Henry et al., 2015; Pietluch, 2022). One of the key insights that can be derived from these findings is that temporary periods of dips, such as what was observed for Ben or Aliya's fatigue towards drill practice, did not serve as a precursor to disengagement for the long-term task. Instead, they represented adaptive recalibrations. These periods of low engagement index the affective disruption that serves to momentarily perturb the system but, fundamentally, fails to perturb the DMC. The subsequent recovery observed across cases aligns with Dörnyei et al.'s (2016) theorization of "re-ignition mechanisms," providing qualitative evidence that the stability of a DMC is dynamically maintained through a continuous process of oscillation and restoration.

4.2. Mechanisms of Maintenance and Recovery

Addressing the second research question, about the factors that impact this stability and variability, cross-case analysis shows that 'stability' is far from a static condition of effortless flow, yet a dynamic accomplishment, because the findings suggest that engagement is sustained through a dynamic process of internal 'self-regulation' and 'external scaffolding' that is driven by these 'three main mechanisms':

4.2.1. Active Micro-Stabilization and the Affective-Cognitive Continuum

These findings call into question the assumption that DMCs necessarily provide a buffer for learners against the phenomenon of disengagement. Instead, the active micro-stabilization process, whereby effort was continually deployed to readjust behavior towards goals after disruption, was evidenced among the cases. The micro-stabilization was done through two different paths, revealing a nuance often overlooked in monolithic descriptions of DMCs.

In the first place, there was a clearly affective pathway for learners such as Aliya and Elena, where engagement was necessarily bound up with emotional resonance. Their overcoming of "dips" was largely dependent on emotional reflexivity—the metacognitive process of identifying emotional dips and deliberately shifting attention back to the "joy" or "meaning" of the task (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Secondly, a cognitive-regulatory pathway was identifiable for David and Ben. These learners' processes were less subject to emotional turmoil, being driven instead by goal salience and progress markers. David's 'slow burn' pattern is suggestive of the fact that engagement in a DMC can be maintained through 'cognitive coherence' as effectively as through emotional contagion. This distinction is suggestive of the fact that, whereas 'the current' of a DMC is a universal phenomenon, 'the method of being in the current' is a matter of affective vs. cognitive regulatory processes.

4.2.2. The "Post-Peak Paradox": Task Architecture and Contrast Effects

One key and novel finding is that of "post-peak disengagement," exemplified most clearly through the case of Carla. Although the importance of novelty as a way to achieve engagement is aptly highlighted within the realm of DMC research (Muir, 2020), what is observable through the precipitous drop of engagement after the storytelling task in Week 9 is that there is a possible

"contrast effect". Highly stimulating tasks provide a high standard for engagement; this is then directly contrasted through routine instruction, the contrast generates a sense of comparative deprivation, leading to withdrawal.

This implies that for a DMC, the stability is contingent on the 'temporal architecture' of the curriculum. By 'scaffolded meaningfulness', engagement emphasizes a 'sequencing' that involves connecting high-intensity 'peaks' through such 'reflective or integrative activities' than sudden drops to routine drill." As seen in Aliya's dip during grammar drills, the DMC structure does not immunize learners against the "boredom" of misalignment; the lack of stimulation can temporarily serve the link between the learner and their visionary goal.

4.2.3. Social Scaffolding and the Friction of Assessment

Finally, the data exemplifies that DMCs are socially embedded systems. For Elena, a highly emotional learner, the "current" was understood to be partially externalized, existing through the combined energy of peers and teacher validation. This affirms the belief of "autonomous interdependence," where the learner depends on the social setting to recharge the motive-self-regulatory system of the learner (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

Nevertheless, there was also a disruption existing within the context, especially where assessment is concerned. Ben's "midterm dip" points to a tension between the intrinsic goal-oriented nature of a DMC and the external pull of academic assessment. The high-stakes testing situation had the potential of pulling the attention from "learning to 'performing'," thus momentarily contracting the attractor basin of engagement. However, Ben's recovery shows the system's ability to withstand a disruption, namely, the passing of the

threatening situation, after which the facilitative structure of a DMC made possible a strong rebound towards engagement.

4.3. Pedagogical Implications

These findings suggest that teachers must learn to normalize the experience of engagement variability as a natural aspect of DMCs, moving from a focus on maintaining high intensity to reconceptualizing the recovery from inevitable dips. Teachers should develop emotional reflexivity in their learners to better withstand motivational troughs. Instructional design is also essential; to preclude "post-peak" disengagement, high-intensity activities need to be preceded by activities that promote reflection, rather than being directly followed by mechanical practice. Moreover, to pinpoint unique engagement styles, different forms of support must be provided, where "affective" people require social validation, but "cognitive" people require autonomy and milestones. Finally, evaluation must be couched as a formative process, to keep the dynamic of the DMC's natural rhythm, rather than imposing a negative jolt of high-stakes testing.

4.4. Conclusion

This longitudinal multiple case study offers empirical evidence that engagement is a constantly fluctuating phenomenon within DMC experiences. Instead of a constant state of intensity, engagement is better understood through emotional, social, and cognitive regulatory processes, moving through peaks and troughs. This study differs from previous studies, moving from a theoretically understood importance of engagement to the necessity of its dynamic mapping. By contextualizing engagement as a fluctuating, multiple-componential phenomenon, continually being regulated and re-triggered, engagement is positioned as the very engine of a DMC, not a mere outcome.

Through the documentation of the engagement patterns of five EFL learners over a period of 14 weeks, this study shows that the stability of a DMC is made possible, not through the reduction of variability, but through the maintenance of directional momentum via sensitive self-regulation and responsive re-engagement processes. The findings show that affective resonance, emotional reflexivity, strategic task design, social facilitation, and learning pathways are essential components for maintaining engagement for the motivational currents. These insights add to the existing theories of DMCs by situatedly locating engagement as the processual agency through which the currents actualize themselves within everyday learning. Future research may include studying the patterns of engagement of different learning communities across different learning sites, researching the development of emotional reflexivity as a trainable competency, or studying the role of instructional design for systematically enhancing the recovery processes that can sustain a DMC, even after being interrupted.

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Ethical Approval

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to ethical principles regarding confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Giriş

Yabancı dil öğreniminde motivasyonun ve öğrenen katılımının (engagement) dinamik doğası, son yıllarda ikinci dil edinimi (SLA) araştırmalarında giderek daha fazla önem kazanmıştır. Özellikle Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) olarak adlandırılan "yönlendirilmiş motivasyon akımları", bireylerin uzun süreli, yoğun ve hedefe odaklı motivasyonel süreçlerini açıklayan yeni bir kavram olarak dikkat çekmektedir (Dörnyei, Henry & Muir, 2016). DMC'ler, öz-belirleme kuramı (Deci & Ryan, 1980) ve L2 Motivational Self System çerçevesinde, bireyin özerklik, yeterlik ve ilişkisellik gereksinimlerinin karşılanmasıyla oluşan güçlü ve sürdürülebilir motivasyon akışlarını temsil eder. Öte yandan, öğrenen katılımı (engagement), motivasyonun davranışsal yansıması olarak kabul edilmekle birlikte, bilişsel, duyuşsal ve sosyal boyutlarıyla çok yönlü bir olgu olarak ele alınmaktadır (Mercer, 2019; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Ancak önceki araştırmalar çoğunlukla kısa süreli, tek oturumluk görevlerle sınırlı kalmış, DMC bağlamında uzun dönemli katılım dinamikleri yeterince incelenmemiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, DMC deneyimi yaşayan üniversite düzeyindeki İngilizce öğrenicilerinin katılım seyirlerini bir akademik yıl **boyunca** izleyerek, katılımın zamansal değişkenliğini, durağanlık ve dalgalanma dönemlerini belirlemek ve bu değişimlere etki eden faktörleri ortaya koymaktır. Araştırma şu iki temel soruya odaklanmıştır:

1. DMC deneyimi yaşayan ikinci dil öğrenicilerinin bir dönem boyunca katılım seyirleri nasıl değişmektedir?
2. Katılımın durağanlık ve değişkenlik dönemleri nasıl ortaya çıkmakta; hangi bilişsel, duyuşsal ve sosyal faktörler bu değişimi etkilemektedir?

Yöntem

Araştırma, DMC'lerin karmaşık ve bireye özgü doğasını anlamaya yönelik olarak nitel keşfedici çoklu durum çalışması (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2013) şeklinde tasarlanmıştır. Çalışma, Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinin Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu'nda yürütülmüştür. Katılımcılar, DMC'lerin üç temel özelliği olan hedefe yönelmişlik, olumlu duygulanım ve kolaylaştırıcı yapı unsurlarını taşıyan beş hazırlık sınıfı öğrencisinden (Aliya, Ben, Carla, David, Elena – takma adlar) oluşmuştur.

Veri toplama araçları:

- 14 hafta boyunca her derste üç kez uygulanan kendini değerlendirme ölçekleri (1–10 arası Likert),
- Haftalık yansıtıcı günlükler (yaklaşık 25.000 kelimelik veri),
- Dönem başı, ortası ve sonunda yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler.

Veri analizi

Nicel olarak haftalık öz-değerlendirmeler çizgi grafikleriyle görselleştirilmiş, zaman içindeki dalgalanmalar hesaplanmıştır. Nitel veriler (günlükler ve görüşme dökümleri) Braun ve Clarke'ın (2007) tematik analizi ile çözümlenmiş, ortaya çıkan temalar duygusal, bilişsel ve sosyal boyutlar altında sınıflandırılmıştır. Kodlamaların güvenilirliği için ikinci bir araştırmacı tarafından %20'si yeniden kodlanmış, katılımcı onayı (member checking) alınmıştır.

Bulgular

Katılım Seyirleri

Her katılımcının katılım profili, DMC'lerin dinamik, bireye özgü ve dalgalı doğasını yansıtmaktadır:

- Aliya: Duygusal olarak anlamlı görevlerde (ör. münazara etkinliği, %95 katılım) yüksek, tekrarlayan dilbilgisi alıştırmalarında (%60) düşük katılım göstermiştir. Duygusal yankı ve akran geri bildirimi, yeniden katılımın en güçlü belirleyicileridir.
- Ben: Akademik stresle (ör. vize haftası, %50) düşüş yaşamış, ancak öz-düzenleme ve hedef farkındalığı sayesinde toparlanmıştır (%90). Öz-yönetim ve hedef netliği uzun süreli katılımı güçlendirmiştir.

- Carla: Yaratıcı yazma gibi özerklik sağlayan görevlerde zirve (%95), monoton etkinliklerde düşüş (%60) göstermiştir. Görev yeniliği ve yaratıcılık, katılımın sürdürülebilirliği için kritik bulunmuştur.
- David: Kişiselleştirilmiş içerik (film analizi görevi, %85) ve bilişsel derinlik uzun vadeli katılımı beslemiştir. Duygusal değil, bilişsel olarak sürdürülebilir bir katılım örüntüsü sergilemiştir.
- Elena: Öz güven krizleriyle dalgalı bir seyir izlemiş (5. Hafta %40, 12. Hafta %100), ancak akran ve öğretmen desteğiyle yeniden katılım göstermiştir. Duygusal güvenlik, sosyal destek ve öz-yansıtma bu süreçte belirleyici olmuştur.

Katılımı Etkileyen Faktörler

Beş katılımcının verilerinden türeyen ortak temalar:

- Duygusal yankı ve anlamlılık (Aliya, Elena, Carla): Görevle kişisel bağlantı kurulduğunda katılım artmıştır.
- Stres kaynaklı düşüşler ve toparlanma (Ben, Elena): Akademik sınavlar geçici kopukluk yaratmıştır.
- Kişiselleştirme ve hedef uyumu (David, Ben): Öz-düzenleme ve ilerleme göstergeleri katılımı sürdürmüştür.
- Yaratıcılık ve özerklik ihtiyacı (Carla): Yenilikçi görev tasarımı katılımı güçlendirmiştir.
- Sosyal doğrulama ve akran desteği (Aliya, Ben, Elena): Olumlu geri bildirim yeniden motivasyon yaratmıştır.

Bu bulgular, DMC'lerin yalnızca bireysel hedeflere değil; aynı zamanda duygusal yankı, sosyal bağlam ve görev tasarımına da duyarlı olduğunu göstermektedir.

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Çalışma, DMC bağlamında katılımın doğrusal olmayan, dinamik ve bireye özgü bir süreç olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Öğrenenlerin katılım düzeyleri, duygusal rezonans, görev anlamlılığı, sosyal destek ve öz-düzenleme stratejilerinin etkileşimiyle sürekli değişmektedir. Bu sonuç, motivasyonun karmaşık dinamik sistemler kuramı (CDST) perspektifinden anlaşılmasını desteklemektedir (Larsen-Freeman, 2016).

Temel Sonuçlar

1. Duygusal rezonans (ör. kişisel anlam taşıyan görevler) DMC sürekliliği için temel belirleyicidir.
2. Yenilik ve bilişsel zorluk düzeyi, akış (flow) deneyimini destekleyerek uzun vadeli katılımı artırır.
3. Sosyal etkileşim ve akran işbirliği, motivasyonun sürdürülmesinde aracı rol oynar.

4. Duygusal refleksivite, öğrenenlerin duygusal dalgalanmalara karşı dayanıklılığını güçlendirir.
5. Kişiselleştirilmiş öğrenme yolları, bireysel hedeflerle uyumlu olduğunda kalıcı katılım sağlar.

Pedagojik Çıkarımlar

- Öğretmenler, öğrencilerin geleceğe yönelik vizyonlarını yapılandırabilecek duygusal olarak anlamlı görevler tasarlamalıdır.
- Programlar, yenilik ve çeşitlilik içeren görev dizileriyle monotonluğu önlemelidir.
- Akran desteği ve işbirlikli görevler, sosyal bağlılık ve aidiyet hissini güçlendirmelidir.
- Yansıtıcı günlükler ve öz-değerlendirme etkinlikleri, duygusal farkındalık ve öz-yönetimi geliştirebilir.
- Sürekli geri bildirim ve başarı göstergeleri, öğrencilerin ilerleme algısını destekleyerek motivasyon akımını sürdürür.

Sonuç

Bu araştırma, DMC'ler bağlamında EFL öğrenicilerinin katılım dinamiklerini uzunlamasına inceleyerek, motivasyon ve katılım ilişkisini derinlemesine açıklamıştır. Bulgular, dil öğretiminde duygusal, bilişsel ve sosyal bileşenlerin bütüncül biçimde ele alınmasının gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Öğrenen merkezli, esnek ve duygusal olarak destekleyici pedagojik yaklaşımlar, sürdürülebilir motivasyonel akımların oluşumuna katkı sağlayacaktır.