



# Student Engagement Level and Attributions to Classroom Silence in Business English Learning

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**Abstract.** Business English is a vital part of English for Specific purposes (ESP). With the rapid development of economy, trades between China and the overseas countries and regions grows. Thus more talents with professional business ability and proficient English are needed. Universities are cultivating students majoring in Business English, yet there emerges many learning problems, especially silence in the classroom. Student engagement level is a significant indicator to test whether students are engaged or not in the classroom. Therefore, it is imperative to test the student engagement level and figure out the attributions to classroom silence in Business English learning. The purpose of this study is to examine student engagement level in Business English studies. 362 valid answers were collected. Respondent demographic information was collected in the questionnaire. The study applied Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student Form (UWES-SF) from three aspects: vigor, dedication, and absorption to assess student engagement level through SPSS. Data revealed that student engagement level is relatively low and the main causes covered are: (1) students had little motivation or time-management ability; (2) they had little interest and sense of fulfillment; (3) there were little teacher-student interaction in class. This study, with an empirical method to estimate classroom engagement level and to figure out the elements of classroom silence, provides empirical literature for future studies, and offers a referential guides for the instructors and students who are teaching or learning Business English.

**Keywords:** student engagement level, attributions to low student engagement level, Business English, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student Form (UWES-SF)

## 1 Introduction

Lecture is the typical teaching format in English teaching. Business English classes are also run in a teacher-centered way and provide little teacher-student interaction or student-student interaction. In consequence, students have no interests or opportunities to participate in the class. This, in return, makes it tough for instructors to activate students and assess student classroom performance.

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Student engagement is an important indicator for instructors to assess classroom performance in Business English learning, and it can “forecast positive education outcomes such as learning and skills development<sup>[1]</sup>”. It was defined as “the student’s involvement in education-related activities that are closely attached to institutional efforts for creating an effective educational environment<sup>[2]</sup>”.

There has been long on theoretical debates but short on empirical evidence concerning the dimensionality of engagement<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, to activate students in the Business English classes, this study employed Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student Form (UWES-SF) to examine student engagement level from the following three aspects: vigor (VI), dedication (DE), and absorption (AB). The study will also figure out the reasons why students are of a low engagement level in class.

## 2 Date Collection

The questionnaire, spined by UWES-SF<sup>[4]</sup> was conducted among college students who were majoring in Business English. Demographic information was collected, which included: gender, grade, scores of the English courses in the College Entrance Exam (total score: 150), sense of school belonging, and personal character (see Table 1). A total of 362 college students were surveyed, including 163 male and 199 female. All the answers were valid. Students were undergraduates, including 81 freshmen, 95 sophomores, 97 juniors, and 89 seniors. 168 of the students (46.42%) respondents felt no sense of school belongings. And 194 the students (53.59%) respondents were introversive.

**Table 1.** Demographics for student respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	163	45.03
	Female	199	54.97
<b>Grade</b>	Freshman	81	22.38
	Sophomore	95	26.24
	Junior	97	26.8
	Senior	89	24.59
<b>Scores of the English courses in the College Entrance Exam (Total score: 150)</b>	<75	44	12.15
	75-89	77	21.27
	90-104	47	12.98
<b>A sense of belonging at school</b>	105-119	74	20.44
	120-134	72	19.89
	135-150	48	13.26
<b>Character</b>	Yes	168	46.41
	No	194	53.59
<b>Total</b>	Extroversive	168	46.41
	Introversive	194	53.59
<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>	

### 3 Student Engagement Level in Business English Learning

The questionnaire based on UWES-SF was operated to examine the student engagement level in the Business English classes. All items are scored on a five-point Likert Scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. The questionnaire consisted of three constructs, with 17 items in total. The three constructs were vigor, dedication, and absorption (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Student engagement level in Business English learning.

Data	Items	Mean±SD	CITITC	Cronbach's $\alpha$ if Item Deleted
<b>Vigor</b>				
	VI-1 When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to the Business English class.	2.994±1.392	0.953	0.951
	VI-2 When I'm doing my Business English class work as a student, I feel bursting with energy.	2.796±1.118	0.732	0.955
	VI-3 As far as my Business English studies are concerned, I always persevere, even when things do not go well.	2.773±1.055	0.710	0.956
	VI-4 I can keep studying Business English for very long periods, such as 1.5 hours or more at a time.	2.848±1.061	0.700	0.956
	VI-5 I am very resilient, mentally, as far as my Business English studies are concerned.	2.818±1.116	0.761	0.955
	VI-6 I feel strong and vigorous when I'm studying or going to the Business English class.	2.820±1.093	0.706	0.956
<b>Mean=2.8415</b>				
<b>Dedication</b>				
	DE-1 To me, my Business English studies are challenging.	2.771±1.121	0.711	0.956
	DE-2 My Business English study inspires me.	2.804±1.100	0.719	0.955
	DE-3 I am enthusiastic about my Business English studies.	2.801±1.086	0.741	0.955
	DE-4 I am proud of my Business English studies.	2.782±1.099	0.714	0.955
	DE-5. I find my Business English studies full of meaning and purpose.	2.782±1.081	0.732	0.955
<b>Mean=2.788</b>				
<b>Absorption</b>				

AB-1 When I am studying Business English, I forget everything else around me.	2.779±1.092	0.721	0.955
AB-2 Time flies when I am studying Business English.	2.809±1.109	0.734	0.955
AB-3 I get carried away when I am studying Business English.	2.757±1.100	0.739	0.955
AB-4 It is difficult to detach myself from my Business English studies.	2.843±1.099	0.722	0.955
AB-5 I am immersed in my Business English studies.	2.826±1.053	0.719	0.955
AB-6 I feel happy when I am studying Business English intensely.	2.787±1.097	0.719	0.955
<b>Mean=2.800</b>			
<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha=0.958</math></b>			
<b>KMO=0.977</b>			
<b>M (VI, DE, AB) =2.810</b>			

With SPSS, the study analyzed the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient and KMO value. Data revealed that this questionnaire was of high reliability and validity since the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient= 0.958 and KMO value=0.977. This means that further studies could be continued.

Data showed that student engagement in Business English learning is low, for  $M=2.810$ . A mean score of 4 on a five-point Likert-type scale could be seen as engaged in the class. Mean score of vigor is 2.8415, dedication 2.788, and absorption 2.800. This demonstrated that undergraduates had low classroom engagement level in each construct.

Data were also analyzed to explore whether gender, grade, cores of the English courses in the College Entrance Exam, sense of school belonging, and personal character will lead to different student engagement in Business English learning. Results demonstrated that there were no significant differences (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** ANOVA from gender, grade, scores, sense of school belonging, and character.

Items	Gender		Grade		Scores		Sense of school belonging		Character	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
VI-1	0.664	0.575	1.457	0.228	1.459	0.203	0.005	0.944	1.875	0.172
VI-2	0.715	0.544	0.098	0.754	2.156	0.058	0.063	0.803	0.004	0.951
VI-3	0.210	0.890	0.351	0.554	1.441	0.209	0.093	0.761	1.947	0.164
VI-4	0.786	0.502	0.076	0.784	0.832	0.527	1.082	0.299	0.413	0.521
VI-5	0.605	0.612	1.230	0.268	1.099	0.361	0.518	0.472	0.101	0.751
VI-6	1.455	0.227	1.647	0.200	3.390	0.005**	0.000	0.987	2.339	0.127
DE-1	0.075	0.973	0.003	0.953	2.136	0.061	0.499	0.481	3.034	0.082

Items	Gender		Grade		Scores		Sense of school belonging		Character	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
DE-2	0.141	0.935	0.447	0.504	1.030	0.400	0.085	0.771	0.594	0.441
DE-3	0.399	0.754	1.028	0.311	1.038	0.395	0.293	0.588	1.494	0.222
DE-4	0.531	0.661	2.550	0.111	1.587	0.163	0.369	0.544	0.262	0.609
DE-5	0.051	0.985	0.199	0.656	0.923	0.466	0.381	0.537	1.694	0.194
AB-1	0.481	0.695	0.148	0.701	0.916	0.470	0.091	0.763	0.012	0.914
AB-2	1.341	0.261	0.085	0.770	1.628	0.152	0.080	0.778	2.315	0.129
AB-3	1.325	0.266	3.579	0.059	0.776	0.567	0.000	0.988	0.031	0.860
AB-4	2.203	0.087	0.641	0.424	1.879	0.097	0.059	0.807	1.691	0.194
AB-5	0.487	0.692	0.133	0.716	1.670	0.141	0.006	0.939	0.076	0.783
AB-6	1.200	0.310	0.125	0.724	0.714	0.613	2.450	0.118	0.972	0.325

## 4 Attributions to Low Student Engagement Level in Business English Learning

### 4.1 Lack of Motivation, Self-disciplinary and Time-management Ability

Previous studies showed that student engagement could be fostered by effective teacher communication behaviors and stimulated by student interest<sup>[5]</sup>. Interest could also be equated with learner empowerment, a motivation-based construct<sup>[5]</sup>. Motivation and interest are two inner power to activate the student. Students should have the willingness to participate in the class, and to express their ideas to engage themselves in the Business English class. However, data above illustrated that students had a low level of vigor to attend the Business class ( $M=2.841$ ). They cannot keep studying Business English for a long time, nor bursting with energies while studying Business English.

Lack of self-disciplinary and time-management ability was another pivotal attribution that leads to low classroom engagement level. Students would waste substantial time if they cannot manage their time properly. They do not know when to do the assignment, participate in the group discussion, express their opinions, nor communicate with others in class.

### 4.2 Lack of Interest and Sense of Fulfillment

Skills, emotion, performance, interaction, and attitude are also paramount factors resulting in low classroom engagement<sup>[6]</sup>. According to the data above, the Mean value of vigor is 2.8415, dedication 2.788 and absorption 2.8. The average of the whole survey is 2.81. These data revealed that students had very little vigor to study, that they could not dedicate themselves in class, and that they were easily bothered by the surroundings. This demonstrated that students learning interests should be aroused by the

instructors. Thus students would be willing to study and gradually, gain achievements in the learning process.

Business English, to some extent, was challenging. While studying Business English, students showed little interest in studying *Business English*, yet researchers acknowledge the crucial role of interest in the emotional aspects of language learning<sup>[7]</sup>. They also found little meaning and had little sense of fulfillment. They would not be proud of their Business English studies.

### 4.3 Lack of Teacher-student Interaction

The success of teaching depends to a large extent on the way teachers talk and interactions that occur between teachers and students<sup>[8]</sup>. However, a teacher-centered classroom is “the one where the teacher is controlling the student participation through some classroom activities and students have the chance to participate<sup>[9]</sup>”. In the Business English class, students could participate the class only in some of the classroom activities by interacting with their classmates or teachers. *Business English* is a highly professional class, which needs more discussion between the instructors and the students, and among students themselves. Through interaction and discussion, students would have a better and deeper understanding of the learning contents, which in return, will also leads to higher classroom engagement.

## 5 Conclusion

Student engagement level in the Business English study was relatively low. The possible causes included: lack of motivation, self-disciplinary and time-management ability; lack of interest and sense of fulfillment; lack of teacher-student interaction. Data suggested that teachers who are teaching *Business English* could arouse students interests, change teacher-centered classroom to student-centered one, offer more chances to students to express themselves and form sense of fulfillment, and have more teacher-student or student-student interaction.

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