Engagement Strategies in Online Academic Lectures: A Corpus Analysis of YouTube Lectures by Indian and Pakistani ESL Teachers

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ABSTRACT:

The study investigated the use of engagement markers by Indian and Pakistani lecturers on YouTube to simulate interactivity. The study aimed to identify the types of linguistic engagement markers most frequently used by Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers in YouTube academic lectures and to compare the patterns of engagement marker usage between Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers, along with the examination of the functions of engagement markers in initiating, maintaining, and reinforcing learner engagement within lecture discourse. Moreover, the study was based on a mixed-method corpus approach using Sinclair's corpus linguistics theory and Hyland's interactional metadiscourse marker as the theoretical foundation of the study. Corpora of 30,000 words each (Indian and Pakistani lectures) were collected for analysis by using AntConc. The findings of the study revealed the distinct ways of using engagement markers by Indian and Pakistani lecturers, as the focus of one was on interaction and the other was on understanding. The study concluded that engagement was a complex construct that could be influenced by various factors. The study provided a more particular and situation-specific perspective on digital pedagogy.

Keywords: Engagement markers, ESL context, Discourse Analysis. Online lectures.

1 Introduction

The transformation in the practice of online education has changed the way academic content will be provided. In ESL, in particular, YouTube provides its users with the opportunity to learn easily and flexibly. Educators in India and Pakistan are turning more to YouTube as a means to educate varied student audiences. However, this shift in face-to-face classrooms to virtual lectures comes with an important pedagogical question, which begs an answer: how can educators ensure deep learning engagement without face-to-face interaction? A potential solution can be seen in the role of strategic deployment in the activities of linguistic engagement markers, devices that can induce learners to communicate in the discourse and mimic interaction. They are inclusive pronouns, rhetorical questions, instructions, and appeals to common ground of knowledge (Hyland, 2005). These markers constitute assistance in committing the communicative gap of online displays in presentation speeches to enable the feeling of a dialogue and participation even in monologic lectures (Evison, 2013). The studies involving MOOCs revealed that engagement markers (e.g., the frequency and relevance of

posting and the intensity of interaction) were better predictors of academic achievement than were emotional constructs (e.g., stress or sentiment) (Tao et al., 2022). Although measurement of stress and relaxation concerning students can be subtle (Thelwall, 2017), using tools such as TensiStrength, the effects of these tools on learning outcomes are not that significant when compared to engagement-driven strategies. This highlights the fact that language use among educators is crucial in connection with learners. Engagement markers are used according to the cultural and pedagogical conventions in the South Asian ESL environment. Lecturers in India could give preference to elaborative questioning and organized presentation, whereas lecturers in Pakistan rely on direct appeals and culturally relevant examples (Sarangapani, 2020). Such differences of style have a wider background in educational traditions and favour laying out the specifics of engagement in scholarly discourse.

Corpus analyses of spoken academic language revealed that turn-openings, self-mentions, and inclusive pronouns can be valuable in forming rapport, structuring a complex piece of information, and guiding the learners through the text (Viana & O'Boyle, 2021). Such markers are seen as the key activity to keep the audience attentive in online lectures, where no real-time feedback is possible, and the sense of interactivity has to be achieved by other means. In addition, engagement indicators have interpersonal purposes other than content delivery. They assist lecturers to give authority, negotiate space with the audience, and disseminate knowledge successfully (Guo & Ibrahim, 2023).

This is specifically applicable in YouTube lectures, where the audience remains unseen and asynchronous, but they nonetheless expect clarity, connection, and relevance. This study investigates the use of linguistic engagement markers in YouTube academic lectures by Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers. It aims to identify the most frequently used markers, compare usage patterns across the two groups, and analyze how these markers function to initiate, maintain, and reinforce learner engagement.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study is grounded on the following objectives and is aimed at;

1. To identify the types of linguistic engagement markers most frequently used by Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers in YouTube academic lectures.
2. To compare the patterns of engagement marker usage between Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers.
3. To examine the functions of engagement markers in initiating, maintaining, and reinforcing learner engagement within lecture discourse.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What types of linguistic engagement markers are most frequently used by Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers in YouTube academic lectures?
2. How do the patterns of engagement marker use differ between Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers?
3. How do these engagement markers function to initiate, maintain, and reinforce learner engagement in the lecture discourse?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Engagement in Academic Discourse

As education increasingly moves into online spaces, especially in contexts like YouTube academic lectures, the idea of "engagement" takes on new meaning. The traditional way of measuring classroom engagement was through eye contact, student responses, or body language. However, in the virtual classroom where the audience remains invisible and feedback is either delayed or lacking, teachers have to use language and tone to keep the students mentally and emotionally engaged. The involvement of learners in the academic settings is often defined as the interest, attention, and participation which a student dedicates towards a learning process. This interaction must be formed by using conscious linguistic techniques in an online lesson, especially in ESL learning. According to

Hyland (2005), the use of such features as inclusive pronouns, rhetorical questions, and direct instructions can be used to create a feeling of dialogue, although the communication flow is one-way only. These linguistic decisions are not accidental and are influential in the sense that they make lectures less distant. Academic discourse, in particular, the academic discourse in digital form, requires more than sufficient delivery of the content. Lecturers should pretend to converse, make the viewer feel that they share something, and engage the viewer to avoid losing consciousness. Evison (2013) points out that lecturers can use turn-openings and self-references to make the audience feel a part of them. In YouTube lectures, this is often done through phrases like "You might be wondering..." or "Let's think about this together," which subtly invite the listener into a dialogue.

2.2 Dimensions of Engagement: Behavioural, Cognitive, and Emotional

Engagement has largely been defined in three dimensions, namely, behavioural, cognitive, and emotional (Li & Lerner, 2013). These classes are usually intersecting, yet they have their own role. Behavioural engagement means that he/she is watching the entire video, commenting, or making notes. Although those might be hard to trace with YouTube-based education, increasing literature depicts that those behaviours, once observable, are closely related to academic performance (Tao et al., 2022). Regular attendance is also a strong predictor of student success in MOOCs and other online platforms compared to emotional measures, such as stress or motivation (Thelwall, 2017). Cognitive engagement, however, is more concerned with what goes on in the mind of the learner, the amount of effort he or she is exerting towards learning and applying something. In an ESL lecture, a teacher might pause and ask, "What do you think this phrase could mean in a different context?" or even give a little quiz in the middle of the video. These are not just some teaching tricks but tactical steps in helping the learners stay on thought with the information (Guo & Ibrahim, 2023). Students can very easily watch passively without learning such prompts. Emotional involvement is usually not put into focus when writing academic works, but it is probably the binding force that keeps it all together. When students feel a connection with the teacher or the topic is relatable, they become more engaged. With the South Asian consideration, instructional methods are often culturally driven in terms of authority and warmth. Indicatively, Sarangapan (2020) observes that Indian lecturers might place a lot of emphasis on a structured and exploratory style, which helps the learners think critically. By comparison, the Pakistani teachers can be more dependent on direct appeals or storytelling, which tells about the aspects of the life experience of students. These are not just a matter of style; these are what condition the emotional attachment of learners to the content and the instructor.

2.3 Technology, Language, and the Future of Engagement

It is worth mentioning that the definition of engagement is getting transformed with technology. Recently, there have also been studies outlining how student engagement can be indicated by written work or other forms of interaction in forums when using machine learning and natural language processing (Toti et al., 2021). It is now possible to have systems that can determine whether there is a sense of urgency or confusion with the language of students, and to this end, the educators will be aware of whether intervention is needed or not. Nevertheless, not even the most technologically advanced applications can substitute the human factor, which is conveyed in the voice and tone of the teacher, the wording he/she uses. That is why engagement markers are considered an ongoing essential component of the teaching and learning process. As it relates to the digital form of education, and more so, on sites such as YouTube, the importance of language is magnified. As demonstrated by Hyland (2005) and other scholars, these markers not only improve interpretation but also generate some form of relationship between the instructor and the student.

2.4 Engagement Markers in Discourse Studies

The markers of engagement come into play in teaching conversations, especially at places where people do not interact physically. The environments of online education, e.g., recorded talks, MOOCs, are the scenarios where the above aspects of language are vital in order to implement conversation, concentration, and facilitation of the speaker. Rhetorical questions, imperatives, use of inclusive pronouns, and calls to commonality are some of the engagement markers. Their goal is higher than the stylistics, but instead it is more pedagogical, which helps in engaging the learners not only cognitively, but also emotionally in the learning process. Some research efforts highlight the relevance of these signs in web-based lectures. These indicators are employed in estimating, even though there is live interaction, which is no longer the case in asynchronous sites like YouTube.

The principles could be clearly observed in the real-life examples of video-based teaching. To take one such example, Dastjerdi et al. (2017) examined the problem of the integration of rhetorical strategies into the discourse of lectures that keep the learners concentrated and comprehend the information presented in them. It was also found that the feature frequently occurred at the beginning and end of the lecture, which can be defined as a cognitive anchor used by the learners to work with complex materials. The other idea worth mentioning is that the engagement strategies tend to be adapted based on the nature of the content as well as the audience. Abusham (2018) also confirms that it is especially productive to work with repetition and paraphrasing when it comes to ESL learners. Such practices enable learners to have enough time to internalize information, as the comprehension also becomes reinforced with the aid of a language framework. Although such strategies might not be specifically identified as engagement markers, they play the same role of maintaining the focus of the learners and giving them numerous access points into the material.

The application of rhetorical questions is well documented in past research. These questions, according to Han (2002), not only evoke a thought but also an imitation of a classroom conversation. It is also an effective engagement force of cognitive alignment that comes with a shared experience. According to Wang (2021), there are sufficient instances of an instructor including such phrases in their teaching, as you may remember, or we all know this scenario, to establish a connection with learners. These expressions create a feeling of common context and perception, which helps learners to feel emotionally attached to the text. Collectively, engagement markers serve to act as a mediator between the teacher and learners. They are particularly critical of platforms that are asynchronous in nature, and therefore, feedback is suboptimal or absent. According to studies which were presented in recent educational conferences, in case of using these markers in a proper way, they can promote comprehension, retention, and learner satisfaction (Heine & Kaltenböck, 2022; Salih, 2023).

2.5 Teacher Talk and Discourse Strategies in ESL Contexts

The teachers' language use is equally significant in ESL teaching as compared to the content being taught. The purpose of teacher talk in this setting can be divided into several functions, which include presenting the material, demonstrating how it should be used, bringing attention back to the students, and verifying comprehension. Rahayu and Suharti (2023) state that ESL teachers who work online typically use strategies such as verbatim, rephrasing, and simplification of structure to increase clarity. Such strategies not only make content more assimilable in the brain but also lower the cognitive burden on language-learning novices. The second similar risk is the clarification of specific types of explicit framing notices that can be used by a teacher to organize the discourse and assist a learner in digestible pieces of information, i.e., like, let us repeat this, or as I have said before. Furthermore, Karimova et al. (2023) and Lopez-Burton (2014) note that in language lectures, short narratives or personal stories are frequently

used to introduce grammar or vocabulary so that they can make sense. The stories serve better than just entertainment; they give the learners a practical illustration of applying language in real life, and the repetition, paraphrasing, and guided prompts help reinforce the understanding (Shino, 2022).

Also, there is a frequent expectation of confusion among students in the teacher's talk in ESL situations. It can be seen in such examples as "This could be a bit challenging" or "No need to worry when you find this sound confusing to a beginner" that reduce the stressful perception and help avoid demoralization of the learner (Sana & Atta, 2024). The other effective tool of engagement is directive language in a classroom, as instructors can instill moments of concentrated learning by using phrases like pay attention to this term or underline this phrase. Expressions like the slide to the east, the diagram is given, etc., make learning more effective since it promotes two channels, audio and visual (Turel, 2023). One more pattern, which has most often been noted, is the strategic utilization of pauses and pacing. When the teacher introduces newly learned terms or concepts, he or she slows down or pauses and repeats them in different examples. Such pacing as (C. Ondoy et al., 2024) stated reflects the class-based scenario where instructors inherently behave to wait for the cues of understanding transferred in this instance to online-related limitations.

2.6 Online Lectures and the Digital Medium

Digitalization of education has altered the rules of teaching/learning discourse. (Hao, 2023) The change brings new possibilities and challenges to ensure that the student is attentive, motivated, and understands. Yang et al. (2023) stress that when providing digital lectures, the educators need to pre-plan for ambiguous language that might confuse the learners. Moreover, Respati et al. (2024) supported this argument that the combination of the senses of sight and hearing strengthens the activity and enhances recollection, specifically in a domain that may be more complicated or abstract. It is easy to become disinterested because of poor sound, no visual aids, or a poorly organized presentation (Chan et al., 2022; Consoli & Curle, 2024). According to clarity, pacing, and screen design are vital, and digital learners will have more playback control and may tune out in case of overwhelm (Villegas & Abo, 2025).

Past literature has viewed engagement strategies, but this study is unique in this regard, as it observed the modern digital platform and also compared the differences between Indian and Pakistani lecturers to understand the cultural differences and strategies used by both to engage the audience. Moreover, this study was designed to identify the types of linguistic engagement markers most frequently used by Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers in YouTube academic lectures and to compare the patterns of engagement marker usage between Indian and Pakistani ESL teachers. In addition to this, the study examined the functions of engagement markers in initiating, maintaining, and reinforcing learner engagement within lecture discourse.

3 Methodology

This study is based on a mixed-method corpus-based approach (Jacobs & Isaac, 2024) to explore how ESL lecturers from India and Pakistan use language to engage learners in asynchronous YouTube lectures. The central focus is on identifying and interpreting engagement markers, linguistic features that help simulate interaction and sustain attention in a non-interactive setting. This design allows for a deeper understanding of how lecturers craft their delivery to foster a sense of connection, despite the absence of live audience feedback.

3.1 Corpus Compilation

To build the dataset, a custom corpus of approximately 60,000 words will be compiled, split evenly between Indian and Pakistani ESL lectures. These lectures will be selected from YouTube based on their relevance to academic English instruction, clarity of speech, and pedagogical intent. Only monologic lectures will be included, meaning those delivered by a single speaker without conversational exchange. Each lecture will be transcribed to ensure precision. Non-verbal elements and timestamps will be

excluded to maintain textual clarity. The final corpus will be formatted as plain-text files compatible with AntConc, a widely used corpus analysis tool developed by Anthony (2004).

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in a dual theoretical framework combining Sinclair's Corpus Linguistics Theory and Hyland's Metadiscourse Model. Sinclair (1991) emphasized that meaning in language emerges from patterns of co-occurrence rather than isolated lexical items, which justifies the use of corpus tools like AntConc to identify engagement markers based on their frequency and distribution across spoken academic discourse. Complementing this, Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse, particularly its interpersonal dimension, provides a nuanced lens for analyzing how speakers use engagement markers such as inclusive pronouns, directives, and rhetorical questions to build rapport, guide interpretation, and involve listeners in the discourse. Together, these frameworks offer both a methodological foundation and an interpretive perspective: Sinclair's theory facilitates the empirical identification of linguistic patterns, while Hyland's model explains the communicative strategies and relational functions embedded within those patterns.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis will be done by using AntConc, and the corpus will be examined for linguistic features that function as engagement markers. These include inclusive pronouns (we, you), rhetorical questions, imperatives, and references to shared knowledge. Frequency lists, concordance lines, and collocation data will help identify recurring patterns and contextual usage. Once identified, engagement markers will be interpreted through the lens of Hyland's metadiscourse model. The study will explore how these markers help lecturers establish authority, invite participation, and foster a sense of shared experience. Attention will be paid to both form and function, considering how markers contribute to broader engagement strategies. This ensured that the analysis is both data-driven and contextually rich, revealing not just what linguistic features are used but also how they work to engage learners in digital academic settings.

4 Results

4.1 Types of Linguistic Engagement Markers Used by Indian and Pakistani ESL Teachers

The quantitative analysis revealed notable contrasts in both the frequency and distribution of engagement markers across the two sets of lectures. Indian lecturers employed a total of 2,515 engagement markers, representing 8.38 percent of the total words, with a frequency of 83.83 occurrences per 1,000 words. Pakistani lecturers, by comparison, used 1,209 engagement markers, accounting for 4.03 percent of the corpus, with a frequency of 40.30 occurrences per 1,000 words. The frequency data clearly indicate that Indian lecturers rely on engagement markers at more than double the rate of Pakistani lecturers, underscoring a heavier emphasis on simulating interactivity and maintaining learner attention.

Table 1: Comparison of engagement makers

	Pakistani Lectures	Indian Lectures
Engagement Markers (Count)	1209	2515
Engagement Markers (%)	4.03	8.383333
Occurrence per 1000 words	40.30	83.83

In addition to frequency, dispersion also provided very helpful insights, as Indian lectures had a dispersion value of 0.407, indicating that common engagement markers are reasonably distributed in the flow, but some clustering exists there. The value of dispersion in Pakistani lectures was, however, quite low at 0.209, which shows strong clumping where the markers are not spread everywhere over the lectures. This highlighted that the Indian lecturers use more markers and they incorporated them uniformly, thus spreading markers evenly in their lectures, as opposed to the pattern of the Pakistani lecturers; the latter tend to focus the markers at certain points, especially at their introductions or their transitions, and then make other parts with minimal or no interactive language.

Figure 1. Dispersion of engagement markers in Indian lectures

Figure 2. Dispersion of engagement markers in Pakistani lectures

4.2 Patterns of Engagement Marker Use in Indian and Pakistani ESL Lectures

The general trends in the markers used underlined the differences in cultures in offering pedagogical instructions. The reliance of Indian lecturers on rhetorical questions, pronouns inclusive of the rhetorical ones, and appeals motivating the listener was relatively evenly distributed throughout the lecture. Such markers commonly presented a rhythm of repetitiveness of question, confirmation, and reassurance. For example, where one of the lecturers posed the question, "Do you want to learn English? Whether you like it or not. Say not so. I do not care to know. Do you want to learn English, really?" the discourse prompted learners to examine self-thinking regarding self-goals and obligations. This was supported by community slogans such as "You all of you want to be successful? Yes (Crowded Voice)" that carried the motivational plea on the individual thinking into a communal dreaming. Since these markers were spread to various locations throughout the lecture, the learners saw different reminders to keep them active through the lecture, regardless of when they felt. This balance can be seen in the dispersion value of 0.407, as the markers of engagement were not distributed completely regularly in an even fashion, although it was common enough throughout the lecture to provide lasting interaction. Table 2 shows the most frequent engagement markers in Indian YouTube lectures.

Table 2: Frequent engagement makers by Indians

Type	Freq
you	923
we	482
your	174
should	85
let	75

go	69
use	67

Pakistani lecturers, on the other hand, used markers of engagement more tightly and in clusters. The most frequent use of rhetorical questions and discourse signals was at the start of a topic or a transition in the talk, and was not used throughout. As observed in the lectures, "First, we talk about that curriculum and philosophy of education …", "Now what is early childhood education … what are three things? The child, the context and environment, and the knowledge and understanding of the child." Such markers led the learners through a logical progression of thoughts, but were not likely to be stated over and over again in a lecture. Such centrality in clustering can be seen in the dispersion value, which results in 0.209, manifesting that there was a heavy concentration of markers at particular sections, leaving longer gaps in lecture discourse devoid of interaction signals. Consequently, lectures delivered by Pakistani lecturers tended to be more expository and less dialogic as they were more focused on either sounding or seeming clearer and more chronological than on continuous interaction. Table 3 shows the most frequent engagement markers in Pakistani YouTube lectures.

Table 3: Frequent engagement makers by Pakistanis

Type	Freq
Should	171
We	151
You	111
Must	36
State	35
Take	34

4.3 Functions of Engagement Markers

The functional analysis shows further that Indian and Pakistani lecturers have different pedagogical orientations. Engagement markers in Indian lectures were used to initiate and sustain emotional involvement and to reinforce learner motivation through consistent use across the discourse. The lecturers would start with active inquiries like, "Are you willing to know about English? … very good", setting a high tone of eagerness that would simulate instant response by the audience. This was being maintained with queries like: "Do you have Motivation? … Few are responding yes. Yes (Crowded Voice) Very good", and that kept up the rhythm of mass affirmation in the lecture. The scattering of markers continuously enticed the learners into a constructive frame of interaction, and hence, there was a reduced likelihood of loss of concentration. They were reinforced by action-oriented appeals, e.g., "Can you start the practice today … Could you just talk in English?". Behavioural engagement was linked to motivational rhetoric, and this was indicated by the words, "Can you do that? Yes (crowded voice)". The interaction between frequency and moderate dispersion produced a discourse environment that constantly reactivated the sense of involvement of learners.

On the other hand, the use of engagement markers in Pakistani lectures was very different, as the major task was to start new sections, outline conceptual discussions, and support the understanding with a summary. For example, the utterance "Now what about professional development in city schools … what are those

areas? Academics, corporate and business, and instructional technology …" illustrates the use of rhetorical questions not as genuine queries but as signposting devices that introduced categorized content. Similarly, concluding remarks such as "So this was all about the main point that we discussed. Thank you very much for being with me …" strengthened closure and summary rather than ongoing participation. The small dispersion value of 0.209 indicates that these functions were not used throughout the discourse, as they were concentrated at predictable points known as openings, transitions, and conclusions. Such clustering implies that the engagement was episodic but never continuous, and afterwards, the uninterrupted exposition. These results indicated that Indian lecturers used markers of engagement more often and more evenly throughout the lecture, thus promoting long-term affective and behavioural involvement. The engagement markers are used effectively enough to structure and convey the content, but are used more clustered and formally by Pakistani lecturers, creating bursts of cognitive engagement, but no regularity of flows of interaction. These contrasts raise the issues of the intersection between cultural pedagogical traditions and the linguistic approaches to control learner attention in online academic discourse.

5 Discussion

The study examined the use of engagement markers by Indian and Pakistani ESL lecturers in online academic lectures delivered on YouTube by comparing not only their frequency and distribution but also their pedagogical functions. The results demonstrated that Indian lecturers used engagement markers more frequently and with greater dispersion, while Pakistani lecturers used them less often and in more clustered ways.

5.1 Engagement in Digital Pedagogy

The results strengthened the argument presented by Hyland (2005) that the use of engagement markers is important to simulate a dialogue in situations where one lacks immediate audience feedback. In the usual classroom, the interaction could be done through the use of gestures, looking at each other, or random interaction. However, when speaking about online lectures, verbal markers are used as the main communication bridge to fill the gap (Evison, 2013). One of the ways in which lecturers seek to evoke a sense of constant interactivity is through high-frequency usage along with moderate dispersion of markers in Indian lectures. However, even though this strategy is in line, according to Dastjerdi et al. (2017), excessive use of rhetorical questions and motivational appeals will become rote-learning performance rather than genuine dialogue.

The tendency of Pakistani lecturers to cluster their engagement markers around the place of transition indicates another approach to pedagogy, placing importance on lucidity and divisions rather than on the constructed interactivity. This is in line with the fact that Guo & Ibrahim (2023) believe that the engagement markers not only enable the development of interpersonal rapport but also manage the authority and knowledge flow. Through the use of markers to introduce subjects as "Now what about early childhood education …", the epistemic role of structuring and providing logical information is conducted by the Pakistani lecturers. This is more of a cognitive model of engagement, whereby understanding is given precedence over motivation.

5.2 Cultural Pedagogical Traditions

The contrast between the Indian and Pakistani lecturers reflected the differences in the regional educational culture. Sarangapani (2020) also noted that the Indian traditions of pedagogy have a tendency to prolong the focus on questioning, elaboration, and incentivizing rhetoric, being highly entrenched in the oral culture of teaching, which was also observed in the current study. The dependency of Indian lecturers on frequent repetition of questions such as "Do you have motivation? … Yes (crowded voice) very good" was considered the development of such traditions in digital space. These are the activities that developed affective participation, where the learners could develop a sense of aspiration and responsibility.

The more formal and structured use of the engagement markers by Pakistani lecturers, in contrast, exemplifies a pedagogical style of teaching that is considered to be authoritative and methodical. Moreover, it was also identified that self-references and signalling allow the reader to navigate extensively through texts in academic contexts (Viana & O'Boyle, 2021). This would appear to be consistent with the way that Pakistani lecturers use markers to support rather than engage the emotions. When the Pakistani lecturers cluster the markers at commencement and conclusion points, this structure of the speech gives their talks a causal, clearly-defined structure and establishes value in a long-standing tradition of teaching in academically inclined settings where the authority of the teacher has a top priority. Moreover, it should also be considered that these differences should not be considered as deficits but rather culturally contextualized ways of pedagogy. Similarly, it was investigated that rhetorical questions differ in traditions where they are appeals to consider and reflect in some cases (Han, 2002). In this respect, the questions used by Indian lecturers can be compared to a dialogic invitation, whereas the questions used by Pakistani lecturers serve as the guiding cues.

5.3 Frequency, Dispersion, and Cognitive Load

The findings also suggested that the dispersion of engagement markers had a very significant impact on learners' experience. The dispersion value of Indian lectures was moderate (0.407), indicating that markers were distributed throughout the lecture to avoid boredom and to enhance engagement. On the other hand, dispersion (0.209) of Pakistani lectures was minimal, which suggested significant clustering, and this highlighted the idea that breaking dense material with signposted breaks between them can be clustered in a way that helps learners process this material (Abushama, 2018). Nevertheless, such lengthy passages of marker-free exposition can possibly be dangerous in circumstances of asynchronous learning, with its subjectivity of attention (Consoli & Curle, 2024). On the other hand, constant prompts similar to those in Indian lectures could amount to less intellectual space to process information. As Thelwal (2017) warned, one should not merely count the number of prompts and think that the more options are present, the better it is, because overstimulation can lead to fatigue. The Indian style resonates with the results of (Tao et al., 2022) that more frequent interaction is a predictor of success, though without letter precision, it can easily fall into distraction. Therefore, frequency and dispersion suggest that the greater the number of markers, would not suggest that the pedagogy would be better, and the more concentrated the markers, would not make it worse.

5.4 Emotional Versus Cognitive Engagement

The comparison between the Indian and the Pakistani lectures shows varied emphases on the dimensions of engagement. It was argued that behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement often overlap, yet each plays a distinct role (Li & Lerner, 2013). Similarly, it was observed in this study that Indian lecturers' emphasis on motivational appeals, "You all of you want to be successful? Yes (Crowded Voice)", highlighted emotional and behavioural engagement that was used to inspire learners so that they could be motivated to take immediate action. Whereas Pakistani lecturers' emphasis on structuring content, "Now what about professional development in city schools … what are those areas? Academics, corporate and business, and instructional technology …" highlighted the cognitive engagement that helped learners to organize and retain information. It was evident that neither approach was without risks, as emotional engagement can boost enthusiasm but may be superficial if not linked to deeper processing, while cognitive engagement ensures clarity but may risk monotony and detachment if not supported by affective strategies. The combination of shared experience and cognitive alignment might appear to be underdeveloped in both styles (Wang, 2021), which is the best combination of engagement markers.

5.5 Authority, Rapport, and the Teacher's Role

The research is also informative on how markers of engagement navigate authority in digital pedagogy. Indian lecturers tend to place themselves in the position of a fellow learner by saying something like: "Is my English alright? Do you want your English to be like mine?" This self-disclosure reduces hierarchical barriers and establishes rapport, as Lopez-Burto (2014) indicated that personal storytelling is a way to connect with the learners. However, it was observed that Pakistani lecturers consolidate authority by use of these engagement markers, especially closures like "So this was all about the main point that we discussed. Thank you very much for being with me …" which project finality and control, and these results were consistent with Karimova et al. (2023)'s observation that explicit framing reinforces epistemic authority. Moreover, both of these orientations are pedagogically useful, as relationship-based engagement markers could work better in encouraging reluctant learners, whereas authority-based engagement could be appropriate during situations that require academic depth and discipline. This conflict between authority and rapport mirrors the larger discussions in ESL pedagogy in regards to teacher to learner-centered discourse (Rahayu & Suharti, 2023).

In addition to this, the gap between Indian and Pakistani lecturers has a practical aspect of ESL pedagogical implications within the digital space. First, it shows that it is essential to adjust the engagement strategies to the medium. As in online lectures, face-to-face teaching cues do not exist, and speech is used as the main resource in simulating interaction (Heine & Kaltenböck, 2022; Hyland, 2005). It was observed in the study that Indian lecturers used a way that focused on dialogues, while Pakistani lecturers used another whose primary focus was cognitive support. Moreover, as discussed earlier, neither of the approaches should be dismissed as they highlight different affordances of engagement markers.

In addition to this, the results indicated that a blending approach could be the most viable approach. Shino (2022) noted the importance of the platform by means of repetition and rephrasing, whereas Turel (2023) pointed out the effectiveness of directive language when it comes to the focus of the learners. Furthermore, it was also investigated that Indian lecturers enhanced the specifics of their pedagogical approaches by utilizing a conversational style, while Pakistani lecturers preferred more motivational and affective statements to maintain the attention. The blended approach would help to maximize the effectiveness of learner engagement in online ESL settings, as suggested by C. Ondoy et al. (2024). Furthermore, the findings also highlighted the disadvantage of using extremes, as overuse of engagement markers influences the performativity, whereas underuse boosts disengagement. Moreover, it was also observed that pedagogy should rely on the expectancy of confusion in learners and must react to them using supportive discourse (Sana & Atta, 2024). The study observed that the use of engagement markers by Pakistani lecturers fulfilled the demand for clarity, while Indian lecturers' usage focused on sustaining attention in media-saturated environments.

6 Conclusion

The study revealed that engagement itself was a contested construct and was not just a simple story of effective or ineffective engagement. It was concluded that engagement was treated as an unquestioned virtue in online pedagogy, but was extremely important, as observed in this study. The study found that the frequent use of engagement markers by Indian lecturers could not guarantee meaningful dialogue, as it could lead to a collapse in performance by producing the illusion of interactivity without creating space for genuine reflection. Whereas the scarce and clustered use by Pakistani lecturers on one hand provided clarity and structure, but also risked reinforcing passivity by presenting students as recipients rather than participants. The difference highlights the lack of neutrality of engagement, but a pedagogical stance shaped by cultural traditions and institutional pressures. The study

also concluded that the algorithm of engagement in YouTube's lectures varies, as it was dependent on likes, comments, and viewing time rather than deeper cognitive investment. In such an environment, engagement strategies were shaped by algorithmic imperatives rather than pedagogical intent, which raised a serious concern that either teachers were using engagement markers to engage students or just to meet the demands of the capitalistic platform. This is further highlighted in online learning platforms, where the use of engagement markers was to increase visibility rather than learning. Furthermore, the study also concluded that the use of engagement markers is dependent on the politics of voice and the authority in ESL teaching, as the use of inclusive pronouns could democratize the relationship between teacher and learners, whereas formal structuring could restrict dialogue opportunities. The importance of this research is that it highlighted the idea that engagement is neither universal nor inherently progressive and is culturally embedded, pedagogically indecisive, and technologically constrained. Furthermore, this study provided a pathway on how ESL teachers can systematically engage with critical reflection of a linguistic approach to online learning through its combination of facilitating and limiting the learning, as it can help the educator to have a more particular and situation-specific perspective on digital pedagogy.

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