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Student Engagement and Withdrawal in Synchronous Online FSP in Algeria: A Systemic Approach

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Abstract

This study examines the nature and dynamics of student engagement in synchronous French for Specific Purposes (FSP) at the University of Batna 1 (Algeria), within the context of post-COVID-19 digital transformations. Grounded in a systemic approach, the study draws on the multidimensional engagement theory and the Community of Inquiry framework. It also incorporates the interactionist perspective on language learning and conceptualizes withdrawal as a systemic regulator. The research employs an adapted and validated version of the Live Online Classes Engagement Scale (LOCES) with 144 undergraduate economics students. The results reveal high overall engagement ($M = 3.91/5$), a finding that is counterintuitive given contextual constraints. The analysis highlights a clear hierarchy of dimensions: instructional engagement ($M = 4.25$) and behavioral engagement ($M = 4.05$) constitute a core, while social, emotional, and technological dimensions act as moderators. The withdrawal dimension emerges as an integrated antagonistic regulator, negatively correlated with all positive forms of engagement (r from $-.37$ to $-.57$) and loading negatively onto a single latent factor ($-.704$). Correlations and confirmatory factor analysis suggest that positive forms of engagement mutually reinforce each other, whereas withdrawal signals latent disinvestment. These findings, rooted in the Algerian university context, highlight the systemic nature of engagement and emphasize the importance of active pedagogical practices and institutional vigilance regarding withdrawal signals.

Keywords: Student engagement, withdrawal, synchronous online FSP, Algerian higher education, Live Online Classes Engagement Scale (LOCES).

Introduction

Over the past two decades, higher education has undergone profound transformations due to the widespread adoption of digital learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as an unprecedented accelerator, imposing a massive shift to distance education and revealing new opportunities alongside major challenges concerning student motivation, participation, and sustained engagement (Bao, 2020). In synchronous formats, which require real-time presence, these challenges are particularly acute: students must simultaneously mobilize cognitive, relational, and digital skills while regulating their attention in response to screen fatigue (Bailenson, 2021; Fauville et al., 2021) and potential social isolation (Martin & Bolliger, 2018).

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Student engagement, recognized as a key factor in persistence and academic success (Tinto, 1993), is particularly critical in language learning contexts (Bergdahl, 2022). Language learning is not limited to the acquisition of declarative knowledge but fundamentally relies on interaction, the co-construction of meaning, and active participation in communicative exchanges (Long, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). In synchronous environments, behavioral engagement—such as speaking up, turning on the microphone, and responding to prompts—is not merely an indicator of participation. Rather, it is through these behavioral manifestations that learners mobilize the multimodal resources of the environment and co-construct meaning (Hampel & Stickler, 2012), a process at the heart of language development. Consequently, any form of withdrawal or minimal participation is likely to weaken this process.

In this perspective, engagement takes on additional significance in the field of French for Specific Purposes (FSP). FSP addresses non-specialist language learners, for whom language mastery is primarily a tool for their future profession (Mangiante & Parpette, 2004). In the Algerian university context, the post-pandemic generalization of distance learning has made synchronous FSP courses a key site for examining engagement dynamics. Students from scientific and business fields must navigate the dual challenge of acquiring specialized knowledge through a second language while engaging in a fully online learning environment, thereby intensifying the demands placed on their engagement.

Despite the growing importance of synchronous FSP instruction, empirical research remains limited in this specific context. To the best of our knowledge, no study to date has provided quantitative evidence on student engagement in synchronous FSP courses in the Algerian context. This absence of local studies is consistent with a broader trend, as engagement dynamics in synchronous FSP courses remain largely unexplored in the Francophone literature. The ways in which students mobilize different dimensions of engagement, the interrelations among these dimensions, and the potential role of withdrawal as a regulatory mechanism remain largely unexplored, particularly in the Francophone literature. This lack of empirical evidence highlights a clear research gap and underscores the need for systematic investigation into engagement dynamics in online FSP contexts.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a systemic approach to student engagement capable of accounting not only for its positive manifestations but also for the tensions and regulatory processes that shape it. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing adapted pedagogical frameworks, supporting learner motivation, and addressing withdrawal phenomena. The study specifically aims to examine student engagement in synchronous FSP courses at the University of Batna 1 by identifying the factors that structure it and the relationships among its different dimensions.

Theoretical Framework: A Systemic Approach to Engagement in Synchronous FSP

To construct our analytical framework, this study primarily builds on the multidimensional model of student engagement proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004), which provides the core conceptual foundation for understanding engagement as a set of interrelated dimensions. To account for the specificities of synchronous FSP contexts, this framework is complemented by additional theoretical perspectives. The Community of Inquiry model (Garrison et al., 2000) informs the role of technological mediation and online presence; the interactionist perspective (Long, 1996) highlights the constitutive role of interaction in language acquisition; and the educational interface framework (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) provides a basis for conceptualizing withdrawal as a regulatory mechanism in response to systemic tensions. This section proposes a conceptual framework that integrates these different perspectives into a systemic approach. The aim is to move beyond an additive view of engagement dimensions to account for the dynamic interactions among its components, as well as the regulatory mechanisms that permeate it, foremost among which is withdrawal.

Engagement as a Multidimensional Construct (Fredricks et al., 2004)

Student engagement has been recognized, since the foundational work of Fredricks et al. (2004), as a multidimensional construct comprising three interrelated dimensions. The cognitive dimension refers to the learner's intellectual investment, learning strategies, and metacognitive reflection. The emotional dimension encompasses affective reactions toward the learning environment—interest, boredom, sense of belonging, anxiety—which condition persistence and investment. The behavioral dimension, finally, is manifested through observable actions: participation in activities, attendance, compliance with instructions, and perseverance in the face of difficulties.

This framework, originally developed for face-to-face instruction, remains the reference point for understanding engagement. However, its application to synchronous digital environments requires adjustments to account for the reconfigurations induced by technological mediation.

Engagement in Synchronous Context: Reconfigurations and Challenges

In synchronous online courses, the absence of physical co-presence and technological mediation reconfigure the expression of the three dimensions of engagement. The emotional dimension becomes both more difficult to foster—due to the lack of non-verbal cues—and more decisive for learner persistence (Tu et al., 2025). The behavioral dimension takes on new forms: activating the microphone, turning on the camera, participating in the chat. Yet, these manifestations do not always overlap with genuine involvement. Händel et al. (2022) show, for instance, that camera activation is only weakly correlated with oral participation, revealing a possible dissociation between visible presence and actual engagement. Similarly, Dixon and Syred (2022) highlight differentiated uses of digital tools, as students seek to balance participation with the preservation of their privacy.

The literature identifies several categories of challenges in these contexts: insufficient learner-instructor interaction, limited peer interactions, restricted interactions with pedagogical content, and technological constraints (connection quality, tool proficiency, screen fatigue). Nevertheless, the work of Wang et al. (2023) indicates that synchronous engagement is primarily influenced by pedagogical practices and learner characteristics, with technical dimensions playing a more indirect role. This finding suggests that technological challenges, while real, can be mitigated through appropriate instructional design.

Technological Mediation: The Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison et al., 2000)

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, developed by Garrison et al. (2000) to analyze asynchronous, text-based online learning environments, provides a complementary framework for conceptualizing the conditions of learning in digital contexts. It distinguishes three presences that interact to support the educational experience. Social presence refers to learners' ability to project their personality and establish affective relationships at a distance. It conditions the sense of security necessary for taking linguistic risks. Cognitive presence corresponds to the processes through which learners construct meaning via interaction and reflection. Teaching presence, finally, structures activities, provides scaffolding, and regulates interactions. This model complements the dimensions proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004) by making explicit the environmental conditions that enable them: social presence supports emotional engagement, cognitive presence partially overlaps with cognitive engagement, and teaching presence is a major determinant of perceived instructional engagement.

The Specificity of French for Specific Purposes (FSP): Contributions of the Interactionist Perspective

The issue of engagement in synchronous contexts takes on particular significance in the field of French for Specific Purposes (FSP) for theoretical reasons. The interactionist perspective in second language acquisition (Long, 1996) posits that learning emerges from the negotiation of meaning and the production of output (Swain, 2005). In synchronous contexts, behavioral engagement—speaking up, responding to interventions, requesting clarification—is therefore not merely an indicator of participation; it is constitutive of the acquisition process itself. Moreover, learners in FSP are non-specialists in the language, enrolled in diverse disciplinary programs. Their relationship to learning is instrumentalized by professional needs (Mangiante & Parpette, 2004), which can both support engagement, through perceived relevance, and weaken it, if the cognitive load becomes too heavy.

Withdrawal as a Systemic Regulator (Kahu & Nelson, 2018)

The literature often treats disengagement as the simple opposite of engagement, or as a binary state. A systemic approach invites a more nuanced conceptualization. Following Kahu and Nelson (2018), we consider withdrawal as a regulatory mechanism that enables learners to adjust their investment in response to the tensions and demands of the environment. From this perspective,

withdrawal is not the absence of engagement, but a particular modality of the learner's relationship to the environment that can serve multiple functions: protection against language anxiety, regulation of cognitive load, signaling discomfort in an unsupportive environment, or a strategy for preserving privacy (Dixon & Syred, 2022). This conceptualization resonates with the observations of Händel et al. (2022) regarding the dissociation between visible presence and actual involvement.

Synthesis: An Integrative Systemic Model

The articulation of these theoretical contributions makes it possible to construct an integrative framework specifically adapted to the context of synchronous FSP. This framework, synthesized in Figure 1, posits that engagement in synchronous FSP is a dynamic system characterized by:

- **A core:** instructional and behavioral engagement, strongly interconnected through mutual influence. Instructional engagement structures the learning environment; behavioral engagement generates the opportunities for interaction and output that are constitutive of language acquisition.

- **Modulating dimensions:** social, emotional, and technological engagement maintain bidirectional relationships with the core. They play a modulating role: social engagement conditions the sense of linguistic security; emotional engagement regulates risk-taking; technological engagement mediates access to the other dimensions.

- **An antagonistic dimension:** withdrawal is integrated as a regulator in a negative bidirectional relationship with the core. It signals tensions within the system and calls for pedagogical vigilance.

- **A specific context:** the entire system is embedded within the framework of synchronous FSP, which highlights the constraints and resources specific to this field: mediated learning, interactional demands, and a non-specialist audience.

Figure 1.

Proposed Conceptual Framework of Student Engagement in Synchronous FSP

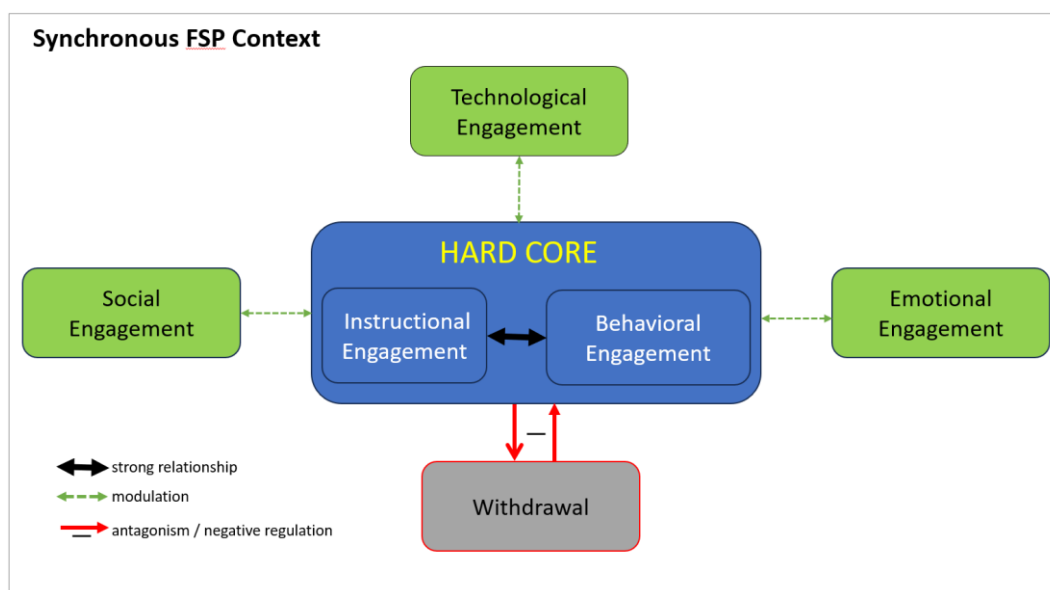


Figure 1 – Legend

- The solid black double-headed arrow represents the strong mutual influence between the two dimensions of the core (instructional and behavioral).
- The green dashed double-headed arrows illustrate the bidirectional modulating relationships between the core and the social, emotional, and technological dimensions.
- The two solid red arrows pointing in opposite directions—one from withdrawal to the core and the other from the core to withdrawal—accompanied by a negative sign, symbolize the antagonistic and regulatory relationship between withdrawal and the core.

Operationalization of the Model

To empirically test this model, we draw on the Live Online Classes Engagement Scale (LOCES) developed by Koçak and Göksu (2023). This scale has the advantage of operationally translating the complexity of the construct into six dimensions: social, instructional, technological, emotional, behavioral, and withdrawal—corresponding exactly to the components of our theoretical model. Table 1 details the correspondence between each LOCES dimension and its theoretical underpinnings, illustrating the coherence of our integrative approach.

Table 1

Correspondence between LOCES Dimensions and Theoretical Underpinnings

LOCES Dimension	Main Theoretical Underpinning	Function in the System
Social	Social presence (Col)	Conditions the sense of linguistic security
Instructional	Teaching presence (Col)	Structures the environment and guides learning
Technological	Technological presence / Environment (Col)	Mediates access to the other dimensions
Emotional	Emotional dimension (Fredricks et al., 2004)	Regulates risk-taking and persistence
Behavioral	Behavioral dimension (Fredricks et al., 2004) + Interactionism (Long, 1996; Swain, 2005)	Generates opportunities for acquisition
Withdrawal	Systemic regulation (Kahu & Nelson, 2018)	Signals tensions and the need for adjustment

This integrative theoretical framework and its operationalization through the LOCES form the basis for the research questions and hypotheses presented in the following section.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the integrative theoretical framework presented in the previous section and the systemic model of engagement in synchronous FSP (Figure 1), we formulate the following research

questions and hypotheses. These aim to explore the structure, relationships, and dynamics of engagement within the specific context of the University of Batna 1.

Q1. What is the overall level of student engagement in synchronous FSP courses in Algeria?

H1. Student engagement in synchronous FSP courses may be fragile due to multiple constraints. These include cognitive fatigue, potential social isolation, challenges of technological mediation, and the dual cognitive demands of language and disciplinary learning. We therefore hypothesize that the mean overall engagement score will fall significantly below the scale's median threshold (set at 3), reflecting the fragility of engagement in this context.

Q2. How are the different dimensions of engagement—instructional, behavioral, social, emotional, technological, and withdrawal—ranked in this context?

H2. In accordance with our systemic model, which distinguishes a core and modulating dimensions, we hypothesize a clear hierarchy:

- Instructional and behavioral dimensions, directly linked to teacher action and observable participation, are expected to have the highest means.
- Social and emotional dimensions, more dependent on the quality of remote relationships and the sense of belonging, are expected to occupy an intermediate position.
- The technological dimension, often perceived as a constraint, and withdrawal, reflecting potential disinvestment, are expected to show the lowest levels.

Q3. What relationships exist among the positive dimensions of engagement (instructional, behavioral, social, emotional, technological)?

H3. In line with the systemic approach, which posits dynamic interactions among the components of engagement, we hypothesize that these dimensions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Significant positive correlations are expected among all these dimensions, with the strongest links likely observed between:

- Emotional and behavioral engagement, reflecting the affective-participatory dynamic: a student who feels emotionally secure will be more likely to speak up and expose themselves in L2.
- Social and emotional engagement, reflecting the role of belonging in fostering a positive affective climate.

Q4. How does withdrawal interact with the other forms of engagement?

H4. In accordance with the conceptualization of withdrawal as an integrated antagonistic dimension within the engagement continuum (Kahu & Nelson, 2018), we hypothesize:

- A structural opposition: withdrawal should be negatively correlated with all positive dimensions of engagement.

- Integration into the same latent construct: withdrawal should load on the same factor as the other dimensions, but in the opposite direction (negative loading), confirming that it is not a separate phenomenon but an antagonistic component of the same system.

Methodology

Study Context

In Algerian higher education, French for Specific Purposes (FSP) holds a particular position: it addresses non-specialist language learners, for whom mastery of French constitutes a tool for their future profession. The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly transformed its teaching, as it did for other subjects within discovery and transversal teaching units (UE), now delivered entirely online. This evolution reinforces the role of synchronous digital environments in students' academic pathways and makes the study of FSP particularly relevant for analyzing student engagement. Indeed, this discipline involves diverse cohorts from non-linguistic fields, for whom active participation in virtual classes is a condition for success. This configuration exposes students to a triple cognitive load—disciplinary, linguistic, and digital—which makes the analysis of their engagement particularly heuristic.

It is precisely to explore these dynamics that the present study was conducted at the University of Batna 1 (Algeria), with third-year undergraduate students in economics enrolled in the French module during the first semester of the 2025-2026 academic year. This module is delivered entirely online in the form of synchronous tutorials, with one weekly session of 1.5 hours (1 credit, coefficient 1). This arrangement offers a valuable opportunity for observing and analyzing student engagement in a synchronous FSP context.

Participants

All students enrolled in the module were invited to participate via an online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, corresponding to a self-selection sampling procedure. Of the 200 enrolled students, 144 responded to the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 72%. All participants attended the same FSP course taught by the same instructor, which allowed us to control for the effect of the instructor variable on engagement.

Regarding demographics, the sample comprised 98 women (68.1%) and 46 men (31.9%). The dominant age group was 20–25 years, accounting for the vast majority of participants (134 students, 93.1%). The remaining age groups were underrepresented: under 20 years (9 students, 6.3%) and 26–30 years (1 student, 0.7%). This distribution reflects the typical undergraduate population, characterized by a female majority and a strong concentration in the age group corresponding to the first cycle of university studies.

Data Collection Instruments

The Live Online Classes Engagement Scale (LOCES)

To explore the dynamics of engagement in synchronous FSP, this study employed the Live Online Classes Engagement Scale (LOCES), developed and validated by Koçak and Göksu (2023) with Turkish university students. This scale was specifically designed to measure student engagement in synchronous online courses and is based on a multidimensional structure articulated around six dimensions: social, instructional, technological, emotional, behavioral, and withdrawal. The questionnaire comprises 46 items distributed across these six dimensions, with responses collected on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). However, its use in the Algerian context required linguistic and contextual adaptation, which is detailed in the following section.

Adaptation and Translation

In its original version, the LOCES was designed to assess student engagement during a specific online class session (“in the live class”). The items were formulated in the past tense (e.g., “I was happy to see my friends”, “The lecturer taught the lesson in a comprehensible way”). For the purposes of our study, which aims to capture engagement as a stable tendency rather than a momentary state, we adapted the instrument. The objective was to measure students’ perceived engagement globally, referring to all online French sessions attended during the semester.

This adaptation involved reformulating the items to reflect the overall experience of the course. The wording was modified to include expressions such as “during the online French sessions” or “in the sessions”. Furthermore, verb tenses were adjusted to the present or present perfect to reflect a cumulative experience. For example, the original item “I was happy to see my friends in the live class” was adapted and translated as “I am happy to see my classmates during the online French sessions”. This modification was intended to capture a stable tendency of engagement, less subject to circumstantial variations (isolated technical problems, temporary fatigue, etc.) and more representative of the overall relationship students maintain with the learning environment. It thus aligns with a systemic approach in which engagement is understood as a durable phenomenon.

A back-translation procedure was implemented to ensure semantic equivalence. The adapted English version was translated into Arabic by an English teacher (native Arabic speaker), then independently back-translated by a second English teacher. Comparison revealed no major discrepancies. The Arabic version was pre-tested with five students. The adapted English version and the administered Arabic version are presented in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Reliability of the Adapted Version

The internal reliability of the LOCES scale adapted to the Algerian context was verified using Cronbach’s alpha and McDonald’s omega, the latter being considered a more robust indicator of

reliability in factor analysis contexts as it relies on less restrictive assumptions and better reflects the factorial structure of the data (Goodboy & Martin, 2020; Hayes & Coutts, 2020). The results (see Table 2) show excellent overall consistency, both for alpha ($\alpha = 0.944$) and omega ($\omega = 0.987$) across all 46 items. By dimension, coefficients ranged from 0.742 to 0.935 for alpha, and from 0.753 to 0.973 for omega, indicating satisfactory to excellent reliability for each subscale. The calculation based on composite scores of the six dimensions also confirmed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.866$). These results validate the robustness of the instrument in the studied context.

Table 2
Reliability Indices of the Adapted LOCES Version

Dimension	Number of Items	McDonald's ω	Cronbach's α
Social	5	0.753	0.742
Instructional	12	0.956	0.911
Technological	5	0.965	0.859
Withdrawal	3	0.824	0.786
Emotional	10	0.927	0.916
Behavioral	11	0.973	0.935
Total (scale)	46	0.987	0.944

Construct Validity: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To test the factor structure of the adapted version of LOCES (Koçak & Göksu, 2023), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using JASP software (version 0.95.4) on the 46 items. The DWLS (Diagonally Weighted Least Squares) estimation method was chosen, as it is particularly suitable for ordinal data (five-point Likert scale). The tested model specified six correlated factors corresponding to the dimensions of the scale: Social, Instructional, Technological, Withdrawal, Emotional, and Behavioral.

The results (Table 3) indicate a very good fit of the model to the data. The χ^2/df ratio is 1.46 ($\chi^2(974) = 1421.806, p < .001$), below the recommended threshold of 3. Incremental and absolute indices are all satisfactory: CFI = .959; TLI = .956; GFI = .984. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .057 (90% CI [.050–.063]), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is .074, both below the acceptable threshold of 0.08.

Table 3
Fit Indices of the Six-Factor Model

Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
χ^2/df	1.46	< 3
CFI	.959	> .90
TLI	.956	> .90
GFI	.984	> .90
RMSEA [90% CI]	.057 [.050–.063]	< .08
SRMR	.074	< .08

The examination of standardized factor loadings revealed that all items had high and statistically significant coefficients ($p < .001$). Table 4 presents the range of loadings for each dimension, confirming that each item is a strong indicator of its construct. Inter-factor correlations were examined and are reported in the Results section (see Table 6), confirming the expected relationships among engagement dimensions.

Table 4
Range of Standardized Factor Loadings by Dimension

Dimension	Range of Loadings
Social	.508 – .800
Instructional	.667 – .974
Technological	.791 – .894
Withdrawal	.627 – .891
Emotional	.526 – .913
Behavioral	.766 – .905

Note. All loadings are significant at $p < .001$.

Overall, these results attest to the construct validity of the adapted LOCES version in the study context. The six-factor structure, including withdrawal as a full-fledged component, appears relevant for measuring student engagement in synchronous FSP in Algeria. These findings confirm that the factor structure of the adapted version is robust and well-suited to our context.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms from November 18 to 20, 2025. To avoid any bias related to the presence of the FSP instructor, the link was distributed by a colleague from another module, who orally presented the objectives of the research and invited students to respond outside class hours. The homepage of the form outlined the ethical guarantees: anonymity of responses, no impact on grades, freedom to participate, and the right to withdraw at any time without justification. Returning the completed questionnaire was considered implicit consent. Completion took approximately 10 minutes.

Statistical Analyses

Data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 25). To address the research questions, several analyses were conducted. First, a one-sample t-test was performed to compare the mean global engagement score with the median value of the scale (H1). Second, a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA), followed by Bonferroni post-hoc tests, was used to compare the means of the six engagement dimensions (H2). Sphericity was tested using Mauchly's test; when violated, the Greenhouse–Geisser correction was applied. Third, Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the relationships among the positive engagement dimensions (H3), as well as between the withdrawal dimension and the other dimensions (H4). To further test the theoretical conceptualization of

withdrawal as an integrated antagonistic component within the same system (H4), a principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the scores of the six dimensions. While CFA validated the six-factor structure of the adapted LOCES, the PCA served as a complementary method to illustrate the antagonistic relationship between withdrawal and the positive engagement dimensions, consistent with the systemic approach. The significance threshold was set at $p < .05$.

Results

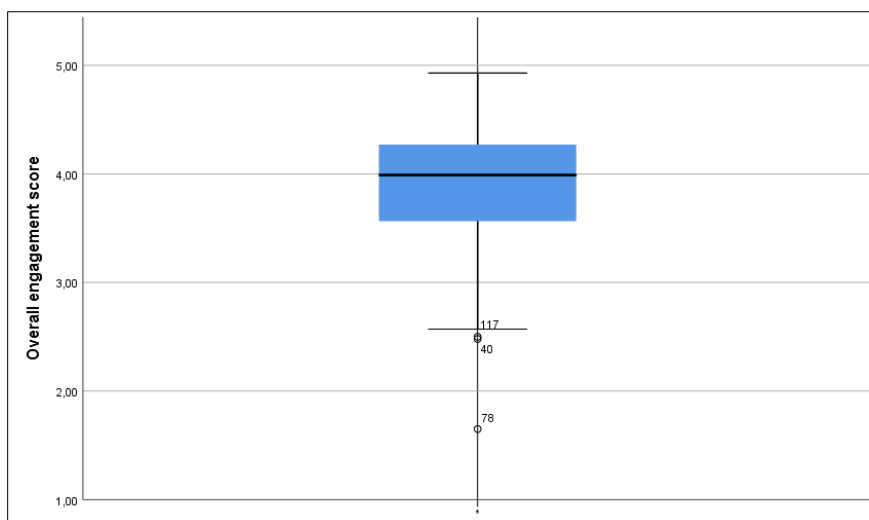
This section presents the study's results, organized according to the research hypotheses.

Overall Level of Student Engagement (H1)

Hypothesis H1 posited that students' overall engagement in synchronous FSP courses tends to be low. However, the results of the one-sample t-test show a mean score of $M = 3.91$ ($SD = 0.57$), significantly higher than the median threshold of the scale ($t(143) = 82.74$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.82, 4.00]). These results refute H1 and indicate that, despite pedagogical, technological, and social constraints, engagement levels observed in this sample were relatively high. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of scores: the median is clearly above 3, with moderate variability and a few outliers that do not alter the observed central tendency.

Figure 2

Boxplot of the Overall Engagement Score



Variability Across Engagement Dimensions (H2)

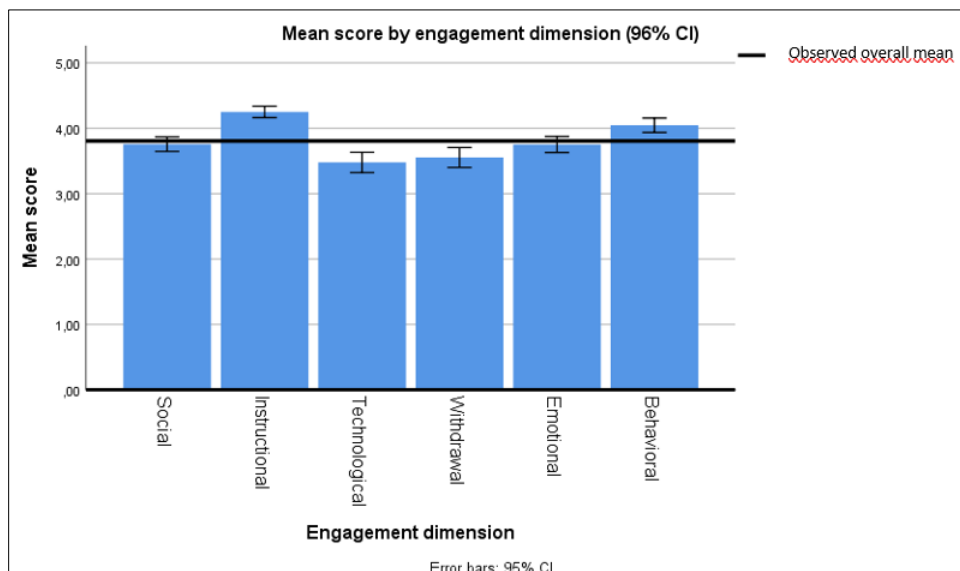
Descriptive statistics reveal a clear differentiation among the dimensions of engagement (see Table 5). The instructional dimension shows the highest mean, followed by the behavioral dimension. The social and emotional dimensions occupy an intermediate position, while the technological and withdrawal dimensions appear weaker.

Table 5
Means and Comparisons of Engagement Dimensions

Dimension	M	SD	95% CI [LL, UL]	Significant Comparisons
Instructional	4.25	0.53	[4.16, 4.34]	> Social, Emotional, Technological, Withdrawal
Behavioral	4.05	0.67	[3.94, 4.16]	> Social, Emotional, Technological, Withdrawal
Social	3.76	0.68	[3.65, 3.87]	< Instructional, Behavioral
Emotional	3.75	0.74	[3.63, 3.87]	< Instructional, Behavioral
Technological	3.48	0.94	[3.32, 3.63]	< Instructional, Behavioral, Social, Emotional
Withdrawal	3.55	0.93	[3.40, 3.71]	< Instructional, Behavioral

To verify whether these differences were significant, a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted. Since Mauchly’s test of sphericity was violated ($W = .365, \chi^2(14) = 142.32, p < .001$), the Greenhouse–Geisser correction was applied ($\epsilon = .724$). The main effect of dimension was significant, $F(3.62, 517.50) = 44.64, p < .001, \eta^2p = .238$, indicating that the means differed across dimensions. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons confirmed that the instructional and behavioral dimensions were significantly higher than the others, while the technological and withdrawal dimensions were significantly lower. These results confirm H2: engagement dimensions manifest in differentiated ways, with a clear hierarchy between positive forms of engagement and the tendency toward disengagement (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Mean Scores by Engagement Dimension



Correlational Structure of Engagement Dimensions and the Role of Withdrawal (H3 & H4)

Pearson correlations were computed to examine the relationships among all six engagement dimensions. The results, presented in Table 6, reveal a clear pattern: all positive dimensions of

engagement (social, instructional, technological, emotional, behavioral) are significantly and positively interconnected, while the withdrawal dimension shows significant negative correlations with all positive dimensions.

Table 6.
Pearson Correlations Among All Engagement Dimensions

Dimension	1. Soc	2. Ins	3. Tech	4. Emo	5. Beh	6. With
1. Soc	—					
2. Ins	.55**	—				
3. Tech	.50**	.50**	—			
4. Emo	.70**	.63**	.60**	—		
5. Beh	.67**	.56**	.44**	.80**	—	
6. With	-.44**	-.52**	-.37**	-.57**	-.52**	—

Note. 1 = Social; 2 = Instructional; 3 = Technological; 4 = Emotional; 5 = Behavioral; 6 = Withdrawal
All correlations are significant at the .01 level.

Positive Interconnections (H3)

Consistent with hypothesis H3, all positive dimensions of engagement are significantly and positively correlated, indicating that these dimensions are associated with each other. The strongest links are observed between emotional and behavioral engagement ($r = .80, p < .001$), reflecting a dynamic of reinforcement between affective involvement and active participation. Social engagement is also strongly correlated with emotional engagement ($r = .70, p < .001$) and behavioral engagement ($r = .67, p < .001$), suggesting that the sense of belonging fosters affective investment and engaged behaviors. Instructional and technological dimensions show moderate but significant correlations with all other positive dimensions (ranging from .44 to .63), confirming their contribution to the overall systemic synergy.

Negative Opposition of Withdrawal (H4 – first part)

In line with hypothesis H4, withdrawal is negatively correlated with all positive dimensions of engagement. Coefficients range from -.37 (with technological) to -.57 (with emotional), confirming a clear statistical opposition between withdrawal and positive engagement.

Integration of Withdrawal into the Same Latent Construct (H4 – second part)

To further test the theoretical conceptualization of withdrawal as an integrated antagonistic component of the same system (rather than a separate construct), a principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on all six dimensions, with withdrawal in its initial coding. The PCA revealed a unifactorial structure explaining 63.6% of the total variance. As shown in Table 7, the five positive dimensions load strongly and positively onto this single factor (loadings ranging from .704 to .910), while the withdrawal dimension loads negatively (-.704). This result suggests that withdrawal loads

negatively on the same factor as the positive dimensions, indicating directional opposition within a shared statistical structure.

Table 7
Factor Loadings from PCA Including Withdrawal

Dimension	Loading on Factor 1
Social	.815
Instructional	.784
Technological	.704
Emotional	.910
Behavioral	.846
Withdrawal (raw scores)	-.704

Taken together, these results lend support to both H3 and H4. The positive dimensions of engagement form a coherent, interconnected system, while withdrawal emerges as an integrated antagonistic component within the same underlying construct.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the nature and dynamics of student engagement in synchronous FSP within the Algerian university context, mobilizing an original systemic approach. The results provide a nuanced and counterintuitive view of the phenomenon, suggesting the relevance of our model and opening both theoretical and practical perspectives. Below, we discuss the main findings.

High Overall Engagement: The Surprise of a Structuring Context

Contrary to hypothesis H1, which postulated low engagement, students exhibited relatively high overall engagement, significantly higher than the median threshold. This counterintuitive result invites us to move beyond an overly pessimistic view of the constraints of synchronous FSP and to question the conditions that make this engagement possible.

Several complementary explanations can be advanced. The particularly high instructional dimension suggests that teaching quality and scaffolding may have compensated for potential fragilities. In FSP, where learners depend heavily on teacher guidance to navigate between disciplinary content and language competence, clear pedagogical framing can act as a security factor that liberates engagement rather than constraining it. This finding aligns with Heilporn et al. (2025), who show that engagement can remain high in hybrid or online modalities provided pedagogical practices are adapted. It is also consistent with Wang et al.'s (2023) conclusions on the predominant role of instructional practices in synchronous engagement, with technical dimensions exerting only an indirect influence.

The post-COVID context may have normalized digital formats, reducing their potentially anxiety-inducing effect. Recent work (Baeza & Hinostroza, 2025) shows that synchronous

environments can become engaging when socio-emotional and pedagogical aspects are fully integrated. This nuances Bergdahl's (2022) observations on the complexity of online disengagement, highlighting the moderating role of local contexts and instructional practices. Finally, the instrumental motivation inherent to FSP (Mangiante & Parpette, 2004)—learning directly connected to students' future profession—likely sustained engagement despite imperfect technological or social conditions.

The Hierarchy of Dimensions: The Instructional–Behavioral Core

The confirmation of H2 (instructional > behavioral > social/emotional > technological/withdrawal) illuminates engagement's internal structure and lends support to our systemic model (Figure 1). The preeminence of instructional engagement confirms the teacher's central role: in FSP, clear, well-paced instruction reduces the cognitive load of processing language and content simultaneously, freeing attentional resources for active participation. This is consistent with Vaughan (2014), who links engagement to pedagogical interaction quality, and with Wang and Huang's (2024) systematic review, which identifies pedagogical strategies as the most effective lever for maintaining attention, far ahead of technical solutions. Wang (2025) also points to teacher empathy as a key engagement factor, alongside learner self-control and the learning environment.

The strong link between instructional and behavioral engagement suggests that students respond to scaffolding with behavioral investment—speaking, completing tasks—which is precisely the vector of L2 learning (Swain, 2005). This synergy appears to form engagement's "core". The intermediate position of social and emotional dimensions indicates that belonging and affectivity, while present, are not primary drivers. This nuances Tu et al. (2025), who attribute a central role to emotional engagement in predicting behavioral intentions. In our context, the emotional dimension appears to function more as a modulator—reinforcing engagement without being its source. This may reflect FSP's utilitarian nature (Mangiante & Parpette, 2004): instrumental motivation may override affects in the decision to engage. The technological dimension's relative weakness indicates that technology, while potentially an obstacle, is not a sufficient engagement lever, a finding that aligns with Wang et al. (2023) on the indirect role of technical dimensions. The digital tool is necessary but insufficient; it requires pedagogical and social framing. As for withdrawal, its relatively high mean reminds us that disengagement remains a latent threat, a point we develop further below.

Positive Interconnections and the Negative Association of Withdrawal

The correlational analysis (Table 6) reveals two complementary patterns that together are consistent with the systemic nature of engagement. First, all positive dimensions are significantly and positively interconnected, with the strongest link between emotional and behavioral engagement. This indicates that engagement is not an aggregate of independent components but a coherent system where investment in one dimension tends to reinforce others. This finding is consistent with research

on affect in language risk-taking (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz, 2001): positive affect — pleasure, interest, belonging— appears to be closely associated with active participation. The high social-emotional correlations further support the role of belonging in constructing a positive affective climate, with social presence (Garrison et al., 2000) emerging as a key lever for emotional and behavioral engagement. These results are consistent with Baeza and Hinostroza (2025), who emphasize integrating socio-emotional knowledge and instructional strategies to foster online presence.

Second, withdrawal is negatively correlated with all positive dimensions, with coefficients ranging from moderate to strong. This lends support to the first part of H4: withdrawal appears to stand in structural opposition to positive engagement. However, as the PCA results in the following section will show, this opposition does not mean withdrawal is a separate construct—rather, it operates within the same system.

Withdrawal as an Integrated Antagonistic Regulator

The PCA results complete the picture by revealing withdrawal's deeper nature. The unifactorial structure explaining most of the variance, with positive dimensions loading strongly positively and withdrawal loading negatively (-.704), suggests that withdrawal is not a separate construct but an integrated dimension acting in directional opposition within the same continuum as positive engagement.

This provides empirical support for interpreting withdrawal as a systemic regulator (Kahu & Nelson, 2018): far from reflecting mere absence of engagement, withdrawal signals system tensions. Through this regulation, a withdrawing student manifests the difficulties they encounter—cognitive (overload), emotional (anxiety), social (isolation), or technological (connection instability). Our interpretation builds on previous observations: Dixon and Syred's (2022) adjustment strategies—where students negotiate exposure to preserve privacy—can be read as manifestations of this regulatory mechanism. Händel et al.'s (2022) dissociation between visible presence and actual involvement suggests that turning off the camera does not necessarily equate to disengagement.

Our findings enrich this work by showing that these behaviors appear not to be marginal but rather integrated into the same latent construct as positive engagement, representing its antagonistic counterpart. This also responds to Sun et al.'s (2025) methodological concerns, who call for finely capturing all dimensions of synchronous engagement, including its least visible manifestations. Practically, it invites interpretive vigilance: a high withdrawal score signals system tensions, not simple failure, calling for targeted instructional adjustments.

Pedagogical Implications and Perspectives

These findings shed light on the conditions for engagement in synchronous FSP within the Algerian university context and suggest several avenues for pedagogical action, grounded in the specific characteristics of this setting.

Supporting the Core

The centrality of the instructional and behavioral dimensions calls for particular attention to teaching quality and the stimulation of active participation. In this setting, where weekly contact time is limited and courses are delivered online, this involves designing sessions that clearly articulate disciplinary content and language competence, providing progressive scaffolding, and multiplying opportunities for oral interaction. Breakout rooms, collaborative activities, and individualized prompts are all levers for strengthening this core.

Addressing the Modulators

The social, emotional, and technological dimensions, while not central, play a role in fine-grained regulation. In the Algerian higher education context, marked by the post-pandemic generalization of distance learning, strengthening the social dimension, establishing group rituals (personalized welcome, informal exchange time) and valuing peer discussion spaces (forums, support groups) can consolidate the sense of belonging and mutual support. Furthermore, fostering a supportive classroom climate, where error is accepted and everyone feels recognized, can reinforce emotional engagement and, in turn, behavioral engagement. Supporting students in mastering digital tools and ensuring the technical quality of sessions can reduce technological barriers.

Interpreting Withdrawal as a Signal

Withdrawal, far from being a simple failure, should be understood as an indicator of tensions within the system. A student who withdraws (camera off, microphone muted, minimal participation) does not necessarily cease to be involved in learning; they may be expressing a need for regulation. Close attention to these weak signals, along with targeted interventions (individual interviews, pedagogical adjustments, technical support), can prevent a downward spiral into disengagement.

Contextualizing Pedagogical Action

The specificities of FSP—where non-specialists must simultaneously master disciplinary content, do so in a second language, and navigate a synchronous digital environment—expose learners to a triple cognitive load. This characteristic, inherent to synchronous FSP, takes on particular acuity in the Algerian context, where students have only limited time (1.5 hours per week) to develop their language skills in relation to their specialty. Therefore, pedagogical strategies cannot be mechanically transferred from other contexts; rather, a contextualized approach, sensitive to local needs, resources,

and constraints, is essential. This study provides empirical evidence that can guide the adaptation of pedagogical practices to the realities of Algerian higher education.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional and self-reported nature of the data limits causal inference, as it measures perceived engagement rather than actual engagement itself. Observational studies, analyses of digital traces (frequency of speaking, camera activation, chat participation), or in-depth interviews would allow these self-reports to be cross-referenced with objective behaviors.

The second limitation relates to the size and specificity of the sample, which was limited to a single cohort within a single discipline (economics). Interdisciplinary and cross-institutional comparisons would be necessary to test the generalizability of the model and examine the impact of contextual variables (field of study, academic level, digital infrastructure) on the hierarchy of dimensions. Furthermore, the sampling relied on a self-selection procedure, which may introduce volunteer bias: students who were more engaged or more comfortable with French may have been more inclined to respond. However, the high participation rate (72%) mitigates this risk and reinforces the representativeness of the sample within the target population.

The third limitation concerns the adaptation of the LOCES from a session-specific to a global measure. This modification, although justified by our systemic approach, may introduce a recall bias (students reconstructing their past experience). A replication of the confirmatory factor analysis on an independent sample would help confirm the stability of the factor structure of this adapted version beyond the specific context of this study.

These limitations open up several research perspectives. It would be relevant to explore, through mixed methods, the regulatory strategies that students implement in response to the tensions of the synchronous environment. How do they negotiate the balance between visible engagement and protective withdrawal? What are the thresholds beyond which regulatory withdrawal becomes chronic disengagement? Longitudinal studies would also allow for capturing the temporal dynamics of engagement, which is likely not stable but fluctuates across sessions and encountered difficulties. Finally, the implementation of intervention studies, testing the effect of pedagogical modifications on engagement and withdrawal, would enable a shift from a descriptive to a transformative logic.

Conclusion

This study examined the nature and dynamics of student engagement in synchronous FSP within the Algerian university context, by mobilizing a systemic approach combining classical dimensions of engagement, technology-mediated presences, and the regulatory function of withdrawal. The results support the relevance of this approach by revealing a hierarchical structure in

which the instructional and behavioral dimensions constitute a core, the social, emotional, and technological dimensions appear to play a modulating role, and withdrawal seems to act as an integrated antagonistic regulator within the same continuum.

These findings contribute to enriching the theoretical understanding of engagement in synchronous contexts and open avenues for pedagogical action: supporting teaching quality, fostering active participation, interpreting withdrawal as a warning signal, and contextualizing interventions. Beyond its limitations—self-reported data and a restricted sample—this research may lay the groundwork for future investigations into learners’ regulatory strategies and the temporal dynamics of engagement, thus potentially contributing to a better understanding of the specificities of FSP in digital environments.

Research and Publication Ethics

This study was conducted in accordance with internationally accepted principles of research and publication ethics. The author declares that the article has been prepared in line with scientific ethical standards and that none of the actions contrary to research and publication ethics have been carried out. This statement has been read and signed by the author.

Disclosure Statements

1. Contribution rate statement of researchers: Author 100%.
2. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A. Adapted English Version of the LOCES

Social Engagement

1. I am happy to see my classmates during the online French sessions.
2. I share my opinions with my classmates regarding the online French sessions.
3. A discussion atmosphere is created around the topics covered in the online French sessions.
4. I communicate with my classmates via voice calls, video calls, or messages during the online French sessions.
5. I communicate with the teacher during the online French sessions.

Instructional Engagement

6. The teacher provides appropriate feedback and comments during the online French sessions.
7. The teacher explains the lesson in a clear and understandable way during the online French sessions.
8. The teacher treats all students fairly during the online French sessions.
9. The teacher delivers the lesson at an appropriate pace during the online French sessions.
10. The teacher manages the session effectively during the online French sessions.
11. The teacher manages the session duration well during the online French sessions.
12. The contents of the online French sessions are generally related to the course objectives.
13. The contents of the online French sessions are related to what I have learned previously.
14. The font size and style on the screen are appropriate during the online French sessions.
15. The teacher's knowledge in the subject area is sufficient during the online French sessions.
16. The contents presented in the online French sessions are clear, explicit, and understandable.
17. The teacher has the necessary technical skills to manage online sessions.

Technological Engagement

18. The audio and video quality in the online French sessions is appropriate.
19. Voices are generally clear and understandable during the online French sessions.
20. The Internet connection speed is generally sufficient to follow the online French sessions without problems.
21. I do not experience any problems with the device I use to connect to the online French sessions.
22. The online learning platform system is practical and easy to use.

Withdrawal (Disengagement)

23. I sometimes feel that the teacher is teaching for themselves during the online French sessions.
24. I sometimes think about leaving the online French sessions.
25. I am often distracted during the online French sessions.

Emotional Engagement

26. I feel that the teacher considers me during the online French sessions.
27. I feel as if I am in a real classroom during the online French sessions.
28. The online French sessions are enjoyable.
29. The online French sessions are useful.
30. My desire to learn increases through the online French sessions.
31. I am satisfied with the online French sessions.
32. Successfully completing the online French sessions makes me feel good.
33. I look forward to the next online French sessions.
34. I do not notice how quickly time passes during the online French sessions.

35. I generally understand the topics covered in the online French sessions.

Behavioral Engagement

36. I attend the online French sessions willingly.
37. I attend the online French sessions prepared.
38. I attend the online French sessions on time.
39. I answer the teacher's questions during the online French sessions.
40. I take notes on what I consider important during the online French sessions.
41. I actively participate in the online French sessions.
42. I follow the general rules during the online French sessions.
43. I participate in the activities proposed during the online French sessions.
44. I make efforts to learn during the online French sessions.
45. I listen carefully to the teacher during the online French sessions.
46. I complete the tasks assigned during the online French sessions.

APPENDIX B. Administered Arabic Version of the LOCES

الانخراط الاجتماعي

1. أشعر بالسعادة عند لقاء زملائي في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
2. أشارك مع زملائي آرائي حول حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
3. يُنشأ جو من النقاش حول المواضيع المطروحة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
4. أتواصل مع زملائي عبر المكالمات الصوتية أو المرئية أو الرسائل النصية أثناء حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
5. أتواصل مع الأستاذ(ة) أثناء حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد

الانخراط التعليمي

6. يقدم الأستاذ(ة) ملاحظات وتعليقات مناسبة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
7. يشرح الأستاذ(ة) الدرس بطريقة مفهومة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
8. يعامل الأستاذ(ة) جميع الطلبة بعدل في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
9. يقدم الأستاذ(ة) الدرس بسرعة مناسبة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
10. يدير الأستاذ(ة) الحصص بشكل جيد في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
11. يدير الأستاذ(ة) المدة الزمنية للحصص بشكل جيد في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
12. محتويات حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد مرتبطة عادةً بأهداف المادة
13. ترتبط محتويات حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد بما تعلمته سابقاً
14. حجم ونمط الخط على الشاشة مناسب في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
15. معرفة الأستاذ(ة) في المجال الذي يدرسه كافية في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
16. المحتويات المقدمة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد واضحة وجلية ومفهومة
17. يتقن الأستاذ(ة) المهارات التقنية اللازمة من أجل تسيير حصص مرئية عن بُعد

الانخراط التقني

18. جودة الصوت والصورة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد مناسبة
19. الأصوات واضحة ومفهومة عادةً أثناء حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
20. سرعة الاتصال بالإنترنت مناسبة عادةً لمتابعة حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد دون مشاكل
21. لا أواجه مشاكل ناتجة عن الجهاز الذي استخدمته للاتصال بحصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
22. نظام منصة التعلم عن بُعد عملي وسهل الاستخدام

الانسحاب

23. أشعر أحياناً أن الأستاذ(ة) يدرّس لنفسه في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
24. أفكر أحياناً في مغادرة حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
25. كثيراً ما أكون مشتت الذهن أثناء حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد

الانخراط العاطفي

26. أشعر أنني محل اهتمام الأستاذ(ة) في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
27. أشعر وكأنني في قسم حقيقي أثناء حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
28. حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد ممتعة
29. حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد مفيدة
30. رغبتني في التعلم تزداد بفضل حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
31. أنا راضي عن حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد

32. إكمال حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد بنجاح يجعلني أشعر بالارتياح
 33. أتطلع بشغف إلى حصص الفرنسية القادمة عن بُعد
 34. لا أشعر بمرور الوقت أثناء حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 35. أفهم عادة المواضيع المطروحة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
- الانخراط السلوكي**
36. أحضر حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد بإرادتي
 37. أحضر حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد وأنا مستعد
 38. أحضر حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد في الوقت المحدد
 39. أجيّب عن أسئلة الأستاذ(ة) في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 40. أدوّن الملاحظات حول ما أراه مهماً في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 41. أشارك بفعالية في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 42. ألتزم بالقواعد العامة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 43. أشارك في الأنشطة المقدّمة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 44. أبذل جهداً للتعلم في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 45. أصغي بانتباه إلى الأستاذ(ة) في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد
 46. أنجز المهام المطلوبة في حصص الفرنسية عن بُعد

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