

ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENTS IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOM: A SERIOUS CONCERN

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ABSTRACT

After an initial shock and fear, teachers, professors, coaches, and educators in educational institutions have progressively collaborated to innovate strategy to reduce a complete stop in classes around the world, as well as to find new ways to involve students online since March 2020. The Virtual Classroom is an e-learning activity that allows teachers and students to provide and access of education through online, predominantly via the Internet. Regardless of geographic location, it provide remote students with distance education opportunities through web-based online learning services, as well as groundbreaking training resources for teachers to teach remotely from anywhere at any time through online classes and courses. It also allows them to share, engage, and collaborate with one another through multiple online sources such as webinars, video conferences, web meetings, live streaming, instant messaging, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and online training courses from any location without having to meet face-to-face. Despite the multitude of literature on the benefits of virtual classrooms, the dilemma of how to successfully engage students in online classes raises more questions than answers. In this research paper the importance of student engagement in virtual classroom as well as strategies for engaging students in virtual classrooms is being discussed.

KEYWORDS: virtual classroom, student engagement, e learning

INTRODUCTION

After an initial shock and fear, teachers, professors, coaches, and educators in educational institutions have progressively collaborated to innovate strategy to reduce a complete stop in classes around the world, as well as to find new ways to involve

students online since March 2020. The Virtual Classroom is an e-learning phenomenon which allows educators and students to provide and access online education, primarily through the Internet. Regardless of geographic location, it provide remote students with distance education opportunities through web-based online learning services, as well as groundbreaking training resources for teachers to teach remotely from anywhere at any time through online classes and courses. Additionally, it enables them to share, interact, and collaborate with one another through webinars, audio and video conferences, web presentations, live streaming, text messages, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and online training courses from any location without necessarily being physically presented face-to-face. Despite the multitude of literature on the benefits of virtual classrooms, the dilemma of how to successfully engage students in online classes raises more questions than answers. Since students are isolated from their teacher by a computer screen, online learning brings new challenges as compared to conventional classroom learning. How do we engage our students in topic, learning and evaluation activities? How do we avoid feelings of resentment or alienation and keep them motivated? These questions are often posed by online teachers to retain the same level of engagement they see and experience in their face-to-face classrooms.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT MEANING AND CONCEPT

Positive participation of a student in the learning environment is described and referred as student engagement.

Student engagement is a term used to describe an individual's interest and enthusiasm for school, which impacts their academic performance and behavior (Gallup, 2013).

"Student Engagement" is better interpreted as a connection between the student and the learning environment elements which includes the school's environment, Peers in the classroom, Curriculum, interaction between educator and learner.

Student engagement is a multidimensional (multifaceted) construct that can be measured with all the dimensions dynamically interrelated. Student engagement typically includes three dimensions:

- **Behavioral engagement:** focusing on participation in academic, social, and co-curricular activities
- **Emotional engagement:** focusing on the extent and nature of positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school
- **Cognitive engagement:** focusing on students' level of investment in learning.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Research has demonstrated that engaging students in the learning process increases their attention and focus, motivates them to practice higher-level critical thinking skills, and promotes meaningful learning experiences. Instructors who adopt a student-centered approach to instruction increase opportunities for student engagement, which then helps everyone more successfully achieve the course's learning objectives

It's also no secret that students who are engaged in their classes are more successful and perform better than their uninterested counterparts

When asked what they liked least about their classroom learning experience, students listed "**boring**" by far and wide as the number one contributor to disengagement

"No learning happens until students agree to become engaged with the material."

Student engagement is necessary for students to gain knowledge and skills to succeed in post-secondary programs and future careers (Wang & Eccles, 2012a, 2012b).

Understanding student engagement is essential for schools that want to promote positive youth development (Li & Lerner, 2011).

VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS

Acc. to Wang & Newlin (2012) Virtual classroom is an online learning environment, where delivery format goes by a number of names: e-learning, Internet learning, distributed learning, networked learning, tele-learning, virtual learning, or web-based learning (WCET, 2004).

According to UNESCO since the outbreak of COVID-19 began, 1.37 billion students in 138 countries have been affected by school and university closures. About 60.2 million teachers and university lecturers have left the classroom. Since the whole country is on lockdown, e-education is the only option left. To connect with students, university faculties are creating accounts on online video conferencing sites such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Classroom and e- platforms to connect with students (Jahangeer 2020).

Virtual classrooms have a number of benefits that have been addressed by several researchers over the time. Any virtual process takes place in the corresponding virtual space, which has properties identified by the presence of similar signs and virtual objects. As a result, the virtual educational space necessitates the presence of educational process resources and subjects such as virtual students and virtual teachers.

Virtual learning is a mechanism that is focused on achieving a goal. As a result, virtual learning is described as the process and outcome of subjects and objects engaging.

In Virtual Learning, interactive education development is realized as a digital educational resource. If the virtual learning is informative, the learner's main problem is not only the availability of the knowledge, but also the understanding of how to use this material. As the outcomes of virtual learning (like every other form of learning) obtain the requisite amount of knowledge, skills and professional skills.

Research Findings on Virtual Classroom

Despite the fact that e-learning arrived late in India, it is rapidly gaining popularity. India may have noticed the West's progress in implementing e-learning and is attempting to duplicate it. The Ministry of Human Resource Development has been working for several years to achieve the goal of making education available to all citizens of the country. Many parts of the world continue to be in the dark about e-learning (Malik, 2009).

Muirhead (2004) pointed out the challenges of online teachers creating cooperative, meaningful learning atmosphere. This disparity in interpretation often leads to a lack of interest on the part of instructors in recognizing student emotions and feelings further leading to the disengagement in the learning process.

In general, students are excited about taking virtual courses (Ku & Lohr, 2003; Knowles & Kerkman, 2007; Parker & Martin, 2010; Huss & Eastep, 2013; Mosquera, 2017). Many factors contribute to their positive attitude toward virtual classes, including the ease with which they can communicate and access classes at any time and from anywhere (Ku & Lohr, 2003). Unfortunately, virtual lessons "took longer than they [students] expected" (Knowles & Kerkman, 2007). Furthermore, some students are alienated and disappointed as a result of virtual classes (Ku & Lohr, 2003).

According to Parker and Martin's (2010) analysis, certain characteristics of the virtual class do not produce significant results. Since students tend to work alone, the sense of group, for example, "was not statistically important" (Parker & Martin, 2010).

Canchala (2010) reflects on the students' backgrounds and learning processes while using virtual programs. She admits that students are apprehensive about taking virtual classes because their "level of English is very high". Furthermore, Mosquera (2017) discovered that students who take virtual classes have digital and time management issues, but would want to take virtual classes in the future.

Using virtual classes has some drawbacks (such as the distraction caused by social networks and other entertainment sites (Mosquera, 2017) and benefits (such as being in a familiar environment) (Ku & Lohr, 2003; Mosquera, 2017; Indreica, 2014; Bogdan & Brindusa, 2018). Many positive and negative factors influence students' attitudes and expectations, such as the flexibility to learn anywhere, and the challenge to follow online courses (Bogdan & Brindusa, 2018).

REASONS OF STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS

Instructors' lack of awareness of online students

The challenge of engagement in online classes is not just for students but also for teachers and course designers. Sometimes, students' and teachers' individual expectations change dramatically and cause the learners to be confused and unsatisfactory in overall poorly developed classes. In order to design online courses, educational designers must consider how a student perceives matters online. The

literature available indicates that it is becoming extremely difficult for online teachers to sustain a coherent learning climate relative to face-to-face classes.

Tallent-Runnels et al. (2006) stresses that science courses are more compliant. Teachers should, for instance, be more educated in discussion reactions about the psychological aspects of the student reactions. Understanding why students respond in the way they do can help teachers change discussions and engaging ways to make lessons more versatile and friendly for learners.

Use of technology limits in the faculty: Prensky (2001) coined the word "digital immigrants" to describe instructors who are unable to keep up with or understand the digital native community's language, saying that "our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an ancient language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language".

Ng (2012) notes that educators are responsible for sensitizing educational technology in digital indigenous peoples so that they are used to promote structured learning for digital indigenous peoples. This is shown by the fact that children need to be introduced and encouraged to speak languages or to use equipment to help them learn informally. She also claims that, once they are explicitly exposed to digital natives, they are less likely to explore themselves or to use education technologies.

Ng (2012) found that educators need to be informed of the advantages and possibilities of different technical resources for teacher education and student learning, based on the results of the research. Digital indigenous people may have serious shortcomings in their understanding of technology, though they are familiar with technology and the Internet. Therefore, their teachers require continuous guidance before they get to know education technology (Ng, 2012). This need for educators' technical skill is not met, however, because instructors who teach online courses are not technically skilled.

Liu, Gibby, Quiros, and Demps (2002) discuss the difficulties that faculty face in keeping up with the rapidly changing and ever-evolving technologies that are needed to build successful online course designs. They point out that while instructional design courses provide students with a thorough understanding of the theoretical aspects of the

topic, they do not provide the skills and experience necessary for realistic technology applications. Another important factor that contributes to unsuccessful online course designs is the faculty's level of trust and familiarity with online classes and using technology in the classroom.

According to the findings of a case study conducted by Osika, Johnson, and Buteau (2009), this may be due to a number of factors, including faculty perception that online courses are inferior to face-to-face courses in terms of learning efficiency. Many professors do not agree that online course delivery can be used as a full-time mode of instruction. A significant number of faculty members in the study group expressed concern about the institution's lack of funding, suggesting that this was a major factor in making online courses unappealing to them. Young (2004) cites a national survey conducted by the Educause Center for Applied Research in 2004 that found students to be extremely disappointed with how teachers used, or did not use, technology. According to Young, students have complained that professors often perform poorly due to technology, suggesting that certain professors are better off using the chalkboard.

Teachers and students who are digitally illiterate

The most significant constraint is teachers' need to adapt their teaching methods to the instrument. Institutions that provide distance learning programs and e-courses already have access to e-learning resources, and the syllabus is likely to include online video lectures and research materials in pdf and doc format.

Full-time students and teachers lack digital network profiles, and the majority of them have never used the system before. Setting discussion is more dynamic in a physical classroom, and course instructors can more easily stimulate input from students, but in online courses, teachers must find more innovative ways to keep the conversation interesting.

High - speed internet access

It's particularly difficult to hold classes for students who have gone home during the crises. Students from urban families are more likely to have internet access, while

students from rural families are more likely to have an internet connection. Just 28% of students from rural households are likely to have access to the internet at home.

Though Kashmir does not have access to 4G internet, students face a double whammy of slower internet, making it difficult for them to keep up with their peers in other states. With 2G internet, college institutions are having trouble reaching out to students.

Students have been placed under a lot of pressure, from dealing with simple problems like internet access and India's notoriously unreliable power supply to more complicated issues like e-tests and e-exams. The students in their final year are the most affected. They haven't finished the course yet, so placement training and applications to universities for higher education have come to a halt.

Availability of devices

On issues related to online education, the University of Hyderabad conducted an in-house survey with around 2,500 students. Despite the fact that 90% of respondents own a smart phone, about a third of them can only access online classes infrequently or not at all. Surprisingly, among the concerns expressed regarding online learning, 40% cited unreliable connectivity as a major deterrent, while 30% cited the cost of data. Uncertain energy supply was cited as a major concern by 10% of respondents.

Access to the internet does not always indicate that a household has internet access at home; in fact, fewer than half of all households with internet access own a computing device. Although some students and teachers have access to cell phones, only a small percentage of students and teachers have access to computers and laptops. Teaching on a mobile phone is extremely difficult; for example, holding lectures for 50 students on a mobile phone is difficult in and of itself, and teachers would be unable to see their students.

According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, cell phones are used by about 78 percent of India's 1.3 billion people, but only about 57 percent in rural areas. Nearly 68 percent of students in higher grades have access to a smartphone, so they have a more phased and online approach. As soon as a child enters class 12, he or she starts to prepare for board exams or competitive exams.

STRUGGLE OF PARENTS

For schoolchildren, e-education has proved to be a novel experience, and their parents, more than they, are struggling to make them grasp the e-assignment. Many students have not yet obtained their school course materials, and they are finding it difficult to keep up with virtual learning activities without textbooks. According to parents, e-education isn't benefiting their children much, and they're afraid that with too many school days missed, students won't have enough time to study for exams.

Cell phones are rare among school students aged four to twelve, and they have no knowledge of how to use them. Teachers typically communicate with students through their parents' phones, which involves parents in the process and takes their time. The majority of parents who work from home struggle to balance their work and their children's education.

CONCERNS ON PRIVACY

Zoom, a teleconference app that is quick and easy to use, has seen exponential growth in the last two months. However, the convenience has been accompanied by increased scrutiny and a slew of security flaws. People who are worried about their privacy are finding it difficult to use such apps. Of course, the present situation was unforeseen. However, we must still be ready for such occurrences. The problem isn't a few weeks of online instruction and tests. The real question is why, in this digital age, our educational system is so behind. The need for e-education isn't limited to such circumstances; our educational planner must incorporate more technical advancements into the curriculum.

While some of the above obstacles are beyond the control of the instructor and the learner, the following techniques may be used to engage learners in the teaching learning process.

STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Student engagement is influenced by both the student and the instructor. For example, a student may be very engaged one semester but not the next; another student may enjoy some classes but be bored in others. Engagement of student is becoming more widely recognized as a key to addressing problems like low achievement, loneliness and alienation, and high dropout rates.

ACTIVE LEARNING PLAN

"This isn't an online lecture classroom, "This is an active online learning area." The University of California professor Conrad clarifies in Berkley. It has been noted that teachers often go through extensive online explanations about the definition to address the lack of physical presence, leaving students passive, boring, and eventually distracted. In the online class, the 'active participation' should be well-planned and will allow the learner of interaction opportunities and practical, experiential learning. The following tactics will help create possibilities for greater engagement of learners with content and peers.

Using IT tools, software and services

Ormrod Jeanne Ellis, professor of psychology of education at Northern Colorado University, talks about four fundamental study needs based on all main educational theories, from behavior, social cognitivism and constructivism. These are excitement, abilities, self-determination and connectivity. (Saint-Georges, 2012). He says a teacher can meet most of these needs in an online class through gamification and technology. Technology is an important tool for customizing learning to the level, interest, academic and social needs of learners. Rich documents, pictures, videos and audios as well as games are a challenge for learning. As digital natives, students consider online classes to be 'reading as education' and set themselves continuous new learning goals. It also encourages students, as many times as they want before proceeding to the next level, to learn at their own speed.

Give an option to students

Traditional lessons are taught and decide what, where, how, and how much the instructor takes. The instructor will improve the motivation and interest of the students in an online class by enabling them to choose 'how to study.' The selection of activities will vary from audio and video podcasts, interviews, surveys, research projects, quizzes, games, illustrated and graphic reports, news reports and the production of radio and television shows, etc. The learners may be asked to choose and collaborate on the task, depending on the abilities and skills that need to be taught or strengthened

Learning through collaboration

Bandura's theory of social learning shows children learn by observing and imitating others. Can we build learning opportunities that enable Banduras to replicate in an online class the four principles of social learning — focus, retention, replication and motivation? Yes, the physically distancing norms caused by this viral outbreak could flow through online peer-collaboration and peer-assessment.

On shared networks such as Google Docs, Google Drive, Google Hangouts, Slide Share, Minecraft, Kahoot, Mural, Voice Thread, Edmodo, Skype, etc, teachers may host their asynchronous assignments to help students collaborate, talk, listen to other groups, reflect, evaluate peers and make this an engaging learning experience.

Feedback technology

Feedback provides recommendations for improving the processes found in hindsight, asking students how the task completed can be improved. Studies reveal that teachers' recommendations and commentaries are hardly revisited by students. The feed forward model focuses on the future and gives insights into what a learner or professor might do with the task on hand differently. Teachers share the evaluation criteria, informing and subsequently marking the students on what they expect. A beneficial result of feedback technology is the continuous reflection and self-assessment of the learners' results. Feedback will ensure better learning results in online mode, since a teacher has a premium time to teach.

Performance of Teacher Guide

The lock-down constraints are shutdown, relieving teachers from their sound administrative tasks, allowing them to concentrate on developing their online learning plans in an innovative way. Knowing that classes are open to public scrutiny and parental scrutiny, teachers have realized their best online courses. However, changing to an online teaching mode is an enormous challenge for teachers. To date they have succeeded in absorbing a range of challenging and soft skills. Daily study and positive and timely feedback will certainly enable them to develop their skills. It would also be a smart strategy to ask what they need to know and to coordinate tailored strategies to better meet their learning differences.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to provide a quick overview of how educational researchers have thought about student engagement in online environments, as well as how educators might think about it when designing and delivering online courses. It hoped to demonstrate in concrete terms what type of performance in this field and how instructors would be able to determine when people are engaged. When comparing the three 'perspectives' mentioned above, it is clear that there are several common themes: It's common to need more than one approach; it's important to consider both staff and student viewpoints of the content presented online; it's also important to consider not only what students are expected to do, but how their thought is questioned. However, the paper's final piece of advice to academic workers may be summarized as follows: the online environment needs to be enhanced by encouraging three forms of interaction: student-student, teacher-student, and student-teacher. Consider developing online exercises and experiences that can facilitate cognitive involvement in addition to behavioral engagement. The greatest gift one teacher will ever receive is what they didn't ask for, but rather something they need to fulfill their own purpose, which is for their work to serve as a stepping-stone for someone else. A teacher may need resources to promote student-centered learning rather than resource development. Measuring engagement online can be difficult, but a variety of methods will allow you to obtain an idea of it.

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