

**Enhancing Students' Engagement in Online Classroom Setting At Imam
AL-Kadhum College
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the student's engagement in online classroom settings at Imam AL-Kadhum College during Covid -19 pandemic. A questionnaire was designed and administered to 114 students, comprising of 64.9% juniors and 35.1% seniors. The responses were analyzed to determine the challenges faced by the students, the effectiveness of the strategies employed, and suggestions for improving student engagement during online classes.

The findings of the study revealed that students faced challenges in maintaining focus during online classes, with 51.8% of respondents indicating difficulties in staying focused. However, the use of interactive tools such as polls, quizzes, and discussion boards, clear instructions and expectations, and incorporation of group work were identified as effective strategies for promoting engagement. The results also showed that 64.9% of students believed that communication, cooperation, and collaboration tools could be used to enhance student interaction and engagement during online classes.

In addition, 60.5% of respondents believed that breaks of different varieties, including movement and music, should be incorporated into online classes. The study recommends the use of interactive tools, clear instructions, and expectations, the incorporation of group work and collaboration, and the use of technology to foster communication and cooperation among students. The inclusion of frequent breaks and breaks of different varieties is also recommended to improve student engagement and focus.

Keywords: Enhancing, Engagement, Online classroom settings.

Introduction

The use of technology in education has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, with online learning becoming a popular mode of instruction in higher education institutions. As online learning is becoming a common method of delivering instruction in universities, the need to understand how to enhance student engagement in online classroom settings is essential. In Iraq, the use of online learning has grown rapidly, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced universities to shift to online instruction.

This study aims to explore the student's engagement in online classroom settings at Imam AL-Kadhum College during Covid -19 pandemic. The rapid advancement of technology has led to the integration of online learning in higher education institutions worldwide. The shift towards online education has become more prevalent in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which

has forced many universities to move their classes online. However, online education poses new challenges for both students and teachers, one of which is student engagement. Student engagement is an important aspect of learning as it is directly related to student achievement and satisfaction. In the online classroom, student engagement is a complex and multidimensional construct that encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of student participation. The current study aims to explore student engagement in online classroom settings from the students' points of view in Iraq. Iraq is a country that has been facing many challenges in the education sector, including the impact of war and political instability. The implementation of online learning in Iraq has been hindered by a lack of infrastructure and technological resources. Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of students who are learning online in such a context.

The problem statement of this study is that student engagement in online classroom settings is a complex and multidimensional construct that is affected by various factors such as student characteristics, teaching strategies, and technology. Despite the increasing use of online learning in higher education institutions, there is a lack of research on student engagement in online classrooms from the students' points of view in Iraq. The objective of this study is to explore student engagement in online classroom settings from the students' points of view in Iraq. The research question that guides this study is: How do Iraqi EFL students perceive their engagement in online classroom settings? The study population for this research is Iraqi EFL students who are enrolled in higher education institutions in Iraq. The study sample for this research is the 4th-year students at the IKC college, department of English, morning study. The sample was chosen because it represents students who are in the final stages of their education and are about to enter the workforce.

This sample was also chosen because the college offers both morning study, which allows for a comparison of student engagement in different settings. In summary, the current study aims to explore the student's engagement in online classroom settings at Imam AL-Kadhun College during Covid -19 pandemic. The study seeks to understand the experiences of students who are learning online in a context that is characterized by a lack of infrastructure and technological resources. The study will provide valuable insights into how to enhance student engagement in online classrooms in Iraq.

1. Literature Review

The literature review will explore the current research on student engagement in online classroom settings, with a focus on studies conducted in the context of Iraq or other similar countries. One key aspect of student engagement in online classrooms is the use of interactive and collaborative learning activities. Studies have shown that such activities can increase student engagement and motivation, as well as improve learning outcomes (Kirschner, Strijbos, Kreijns, & Beers, 2004; Wang, Chen, & Liang, 2014). For example, a

study by Al-Hussein and Al-Somali (2018) found that the use of collaborative writing activities in an online EFL course in Iraq resulted in higher levels of student engagement and satisfaction.

Another important factor in student engagement in online classrooms is the use of technology. Research has shown that the use of technology, such as learning management systems (LMS) and virtual reality, can improve student engagement and motivation (Li, Liang, & Liang, 2013; Wang, Chen, & Liang, 2014). For example, a study by Al-Hussein and Al-Somali (2018) found that the use of a LMS in an online EFL course in Iraq resulted in higher levels of student engagement and satisfaction. Additionally, the role of the instructor in online classrooms is crucial for student engagement.

Studies have shown that instructor presence, including communication and feedback, can improve student engagement and satisfaction (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Wang, Chen, & Liang, 2014). A study by Al-Hussein and Al-Somali (2018) also found that the instructor's presence and feedback in an online EFL course in Iraq were positively related to student engagement and satisfaction. However, research on student engagement in online classrooms in Iraq and other similar countries is still limited. There is a need for further studies to investigate the specific challenges and opportunities for student engagement in online classrooms in these contexts. In summary, the literature suggests that interactive and collaborative learning activities, the use of technology, and instructor presence are key factors in enhancing student engagement in online classrooms. However, more research is needed to fully understand the specific challenges and opportunities for student engagement in online classrooms in Iraq and similar contexts (Ahmed, 2017).

2. The Tool

2.1 The Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information on college students' experiences with and suggestions for improving online classes in the Department of English. Their feedback was important in helping us understand the challenges students face in online learning and to develop effective strategies to enhance student engagement and success.

Here is an explanation for each question:

Q1: How do you feel about participating in online classes?

This question aims to understand the overall sentiment of students towards online classes. By understanding how students feel about online classes, we can assess the level of engagement and motivation for learning that students have in this format.

Q2: What suggestions do you have for improving student engagement during online classes?

This question aims to gather feedback from students on what strategies they believe would help improve their engagement in online classes. The question is

open-ended to allow students to provide a range of suggestions that they believe would be effective.

Q3: Do you find it difficult to stay focused during online classes?

This question aims to understand the challenges that students face when it comes to staying focused during online classes. By understanding these challenges, we can develop strategies to help students stay engaged and motivated.

Q4: What activities have you found to be most beneficial for engaging your curiosity and interest in class topics?

This question aims to gather information on what activities students find most effective in engaging their interest and curiosity in class topics. This feedback can be used to develop more engaging and effective teaching strategies.

Q5: Do you have any ideas for how technology can be used to make online classes more interactive?

This question aims to gather feedback from students on how technology can be leveraged to improve student engagement in online classes. By understanding what technology tools students believe would be effective, we can develop more engaging and effective teaching strategies.

Q6: Are there any particular features that could capture and sustain your attention during an online class session?

This question aims to gather feedback from students on what features would help them stay engaged and focused during an online class session. By understanding what features are most effective, we can develop more engaging and effective teaching strategies.

Q7: Are there any tools that could be used to foster communication, cooperation, and collaboration with fellow classmates in an online setting?

This question aims to gather feedback from students on what tools they believe would be effective in fostering communication, cooperation, and collaboration with fellow classmates in an online setting. This feedback can be used to develop more effective strategies for facilitating communication and collaboration in online classes.

Q8: Do you think that online classes should include frequent breaks or breaks of different varieties (e.g., movement, music) in between content-based activities?

This question aims to gather feedback from students on the importance of taking breaks during online classes. By understanding how students feel about taking breaks and what types of breaks are most effective, we can develop more effective strategies for managing student engagement and motivation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

A total of 114 college students from the Department of English participated in the study, of which 64.9% were junior students and 35.1% were senior students. The sample consisted of 58.8% female and 41.2% male

students. In terms of study time, 51.8% were enrolled in morning studies , while 28.5% enrolled in evening studies.

Grade

114 responses

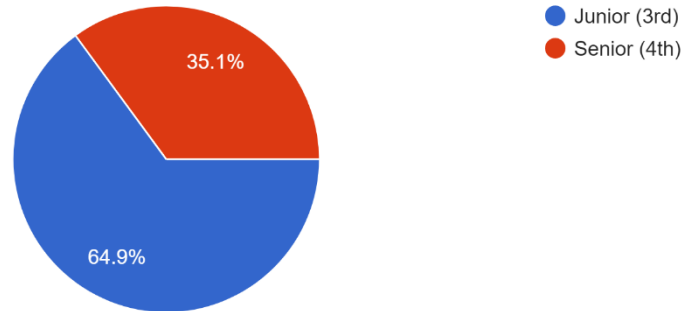


Figure 1: Respondents' distribution according to grade

Gender

114 responses

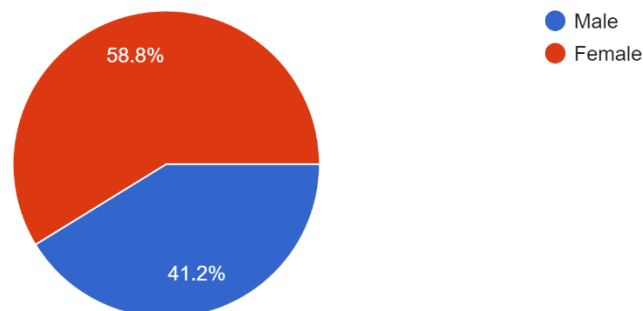


Figure 2: Respondents' distribution according to gender

Study

114 responses

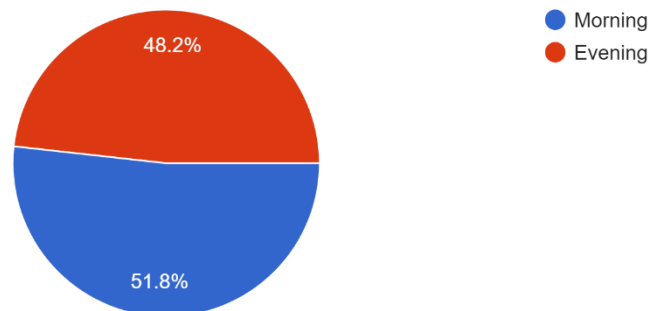


Figure 3: Respondents' distribution according to study (morning/evening)

Regarding the first question, "How do you feel about participating in online classes?", the study found that the majority of the respondents had a positive attitude towards online classes, with 73.7% indicating that they were satisfied with online classes.

How do you feel about participating in online classes?
114 responses

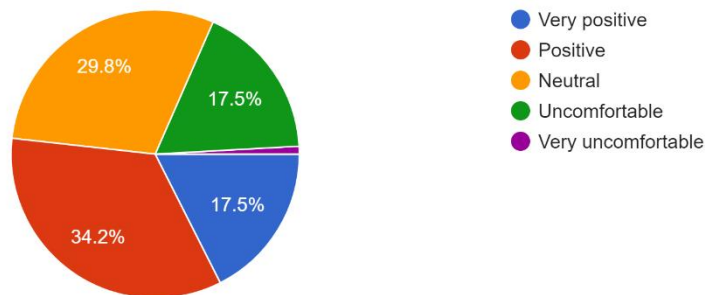


Figure 4: Question No.1

For Q2, When asked about suggestions for improving student engagement during online classes, respondents provided several suggestions. The most common suggestions included using interactive tools such as polls, quizzes, and discussion boards (92.1%), encouraging participation by calling on students by name and allowing time for discussion (83.3%), providing clear instructions and expectations (80.7%), and using visuals such as videos and slides to break up the monotony of a long lecture (79.8%).

Regarding Q3, "Do you find it difficult to stay focused during online classes?", just over half of the respondents (51.8%) indicated that they found it difficult to stay focused, while 28.1% were unsure, and 20.2% reported that they did not find it difficult to stay focused.

Do you find it difficult to stay focused during online classes?
114 responses

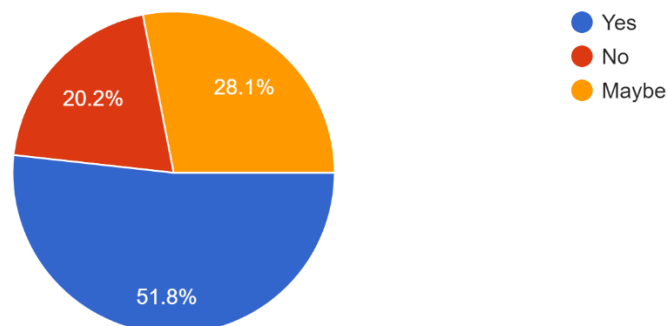


Figure 5: Question No.3

For Q4, "What activities have you found to be most beneficial for engaging your curiosity and interest in class topics?", the respondents reported that group discussions and debates, interactive online games or quizzes related to class topics, creative writing or storytelling activities, watching relevant videos or films, collaborating on group projects or presentations, role-playing activities or simulations, using real-world examples or case studies to illustrate class concepts, guest speaker presentations or interviews with experts in the field, and field trips or virtual tours related to class topics are the most beneficial activities.

In response to Q5, "Do you have any ideas for how technology can be used to make online classes more interactive?", the respondents suggested using interactive whiteboards, video conferencing software, online discussion forums, online polls and quizzes, online breakout rooms, online resources, gamification and other interactive elements, and social media and other communication tools.

For Q6, "Are there any particular features that could capture and sustain your attention during an online class session?", the respondents reported that interactive activities, real-life examples and case studies, use of visual aids, clear and organized presentation of information, opportunities for group work and collaboration with classmates, regular breaks, engaging and enthusiastic teaching style, integration of technology tools, and incorporation of student feedback and participation in the lesson are the features that could capture and sustain their attention during an online class session.

In addition, the study found that the majority of respondents (64.9%) believed that there were tools that could be used to foster communication, cooperation, and collaboration with fellow classmates in an online setting.

Are there any tools that could be used to foster communication, cooperation, and collaboration with fellow classmates in an online setting?

114 responses

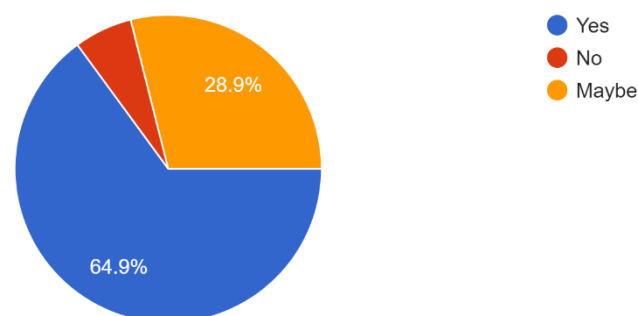


Figure 6: Question No.7

Finally, when asked if online classes should include frequent breaks or breaks of different varieties in between content-based activities, 60.5% of the

respondents agreed that they should include such breaks, while 24.6% were unsure and 14.9% disagreed.

Do you think that online classes should include frequent breaks or breaks of different varieties (e.g., movement, music) in between content-based activities?

114 responses

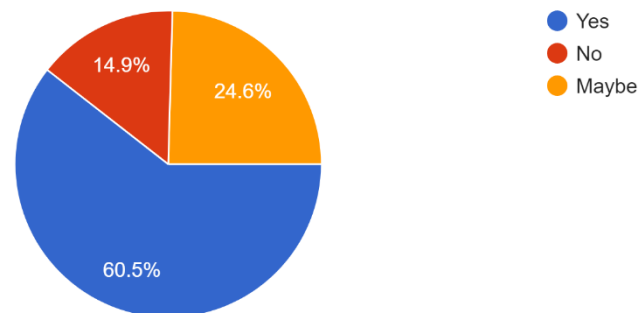


Figure 7: Question No.8

The findings suggest that while the majority of the respondents had a positive attitude towards online classes, they also faced challenges in staying focused and engaged. Respondents recommended using interactive tools, visuals, and group work to keep students engaged and suggested incorporating frequent breaks to prevent fatigue and maintain focus. The study also highlights the potential benefits of using technology to foster communication, cooperation, and collaboration in an online setting.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of the questionnaire indicate that college students in the department of English have mixed feelings about participating in online classes. While some students find online classes convenient and flexible, others find it challenging to stay focused during online classes. However, the students have provided a variety of suggestions for improving student engagement during online classes. These include using interactive tools, encouraging participation, providing clear instructions and expectations, using visuals, incorporating group work and collaboration, providing regular feedback, offering a variety of learning materials, addressing technical issues promptly, and being flexible and understanding of students' individual circumstances and needs.

It is also noteworthy that the majority of students expressed a desire for frequent breaks or breaks of different varieties in between content-based activities. This suggests that incorporating movement and music breaks could be a useful strategy for maintaining student engagement during online classes.

In addition, the results indicate that students believe that technology can be used to foster communication, cooperation, and collaboration with fellow classmates in an online setting. The majority of students also provided suggestions for how technology can be used to make online classes more interactive, such as using

interactive whiteboards, video conferencing software, online discussion forums, online polls and quizzes, online breakout rooms, and gamification and other interactive elements.

The findings suggest that there are multiple strategies that can be used to enhance student engagement and motivation in online classes. By incorporating a variety of interactive tools, providing clear instructions and expectations, offering a variety of learning materials and resources, and addressing technical issues promptly, educators can create a more engaging and effective online learning environment for their students.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of the study suggest that college students in the department of English generally have positive attitudes towards participating in online classes, but many find it difficult to stay focused during these sessions. The findings also indicate that various strategies can be employed to enhance student engagement during online classes, including the use of interactive tools, clear instructions and expectations, group work and collaboration, regular feedback and check-ins, and providing a variety of learning materials and resources. The use of technology, such as interactive whiteboards, video conferencing, and online discussion forums, can also foster communication, cooperation, and collaboration with classmates. Furthermore, incorporating breaks or different varieties of breaks in between content-based activities was also perceived as important by a majority of respondents.

The results of this study have practical implications for English teachers who are delivering classes online. By implementing the strategies identified in this study, teachers can enhance the quality of the online learning experience for their students, thereby promoting higher levels of engagement, participation, and learning outcomes. Overall, this study contributes to a growing body of literature on online learning and student engagement, and provides valuable insights for educators looking to optimize their teaching in an online setting.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Incorporate interactive tools: Teachers should incorporate interactive tools such as polls, quizzes, and discussion boards to keep students engaged during online classes.
2. Encourage participation: Teachers should encourage participation by calling on students by name, asking questions, and allowing time for discussion.
3. Provide clear instructions and expectations: Teachers should provide clear instructions and expectations for assignments and activities to ensure that students are aware of what is expected of them.
4. Use visuals: Teachers should use visuals such as videos and slides to break up the monotony of a long lecture and to maintain students' attention.

5. Incorporate group work: Teachers should incorporate group work and collaboration to promote social interaction and support learning.
6. Provide regular feedback: Teachers should provide regular feedback and check in on student progress to ensure that students are staying engaged and on track.
7. Offer a variety of learning materials: Teachers should offer a variety of learning materials and resources such as readings, podcasts, and online simulations to cater to different learning styles.
8. Address technical issues promptly: Technical issues should be addressed promptly to avoid frustration and disengagement.
9. Be flexible and understanding: Teachers should be flexible and understanding of students' individual circumstances and needs.
10. Provide breaks: Teachers should provide frequent breaks and breaks of different varieties to prevent fatigue and maintain focus.
11. Foster communication and collaboration: Teachers should utilize tools that foster communication, cooperation, and collaboration with fellow classmates in an online setting.

By following these recommendations, teachers can create a more engaging and interactive online learning environment for students, promoting better learning outcomes and improved student satisfaction.

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