THE IMPACT OF ONLINE TEACHING ON STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN WRITING DURING THE PANDEMIC OF COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has dramatically changed the process of teaching, as educational institutions replaced in-person teaching with online teaching to ensure educational continuity while managing the spread of the contagious disease. Drawing on the multifaceted concept of engagement, engagement is addressed as a sole construct. The present study adapted Student Course Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ) to explore the impact of online teaching through Blackboard on English as foreign language (EFL) college students' engagement in writing. The study sample included 148 students. The results of the present non-experimental study generally indicated that online learning through Blackboard positively influenced the engagement of Saudi EFL learners. However, it is essential to note that the students showed a high level of engagement in terms of skills engagement. In contrast, the levels of engagement were moderate for the other three elements of engagement: Emotional, participation/interaction, and performance. The findings also demonstrated that the students perceived the learning experience positively. The participants valued the various virtues offered by online learning platforms, specifically Blackboard. Consequently, it is recommended that using Blackboard features such as blogs, breakout groups, and videoconferencing will help foster educational practices locally and internationally.

Keywords: COVID-19, EFL Learners, Course Engagement, Online Learning, Student Course Engagement Questionnaire, EFL Writing.

INTRODUCTION

The whole world has witnessed an unexpected, mandated shift to online schooling, almost overnight, in the past year, due to the most challenging situation that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic (Daniel, 2020). According to United Nations (2021), educational institutions in 191 countries were forced to cease face-to-face interaction and rapidly implement almost complete-remote learning. Saudi Arabia was no exception; in-person teaching and learning were suspended in all schools and universities and replaced by online learning. The new official way of online learning was decided based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Health. Remote learning was proven to be capable of overcoming educational challenges introduced by disasters and natural crises. Four years earlier, the government had gone through a similar experience of having to cease face-to-face instruction and move toward remote learning for the sake of people's safety in the Saudi Southern war zone (Rajab, 2018). Furthermore, universities were not totally novice to the idea of online learning. Universities like Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) has implemented online learning (Electronic Learning and Distance Teaching) since 2014. Since its establishment, the Deanship of Electronic

Learning and Distance Teaching at IMSIU has provided programs for bachelor's degrees in Islamic Studies, Arabic Language, and Economics and Administrative Sciences, using the platform of Blackboard. Since the beginning of the crisis, the deanship has paid outstanding efforts to educate instructors and students about Blackboard and promote e-learning. Such efforts were very helpful for the university, making it worthy of winning the institutional accreditation for the quality of teaching granted by the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) (IMAMU, 2021).

Since the sudden and rapid transition, university instructors spared no effort to continue delivering their courses using the available tools, applications, and Learning Management Systems (LMSs), such as Zoom, Webex, Edmodo, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Blackboard respectively. Blackboard was the only official LMS used in universities prior to and during the pandemic (Alsuhaibani, 2021). The platform of Blackboard is described as modern, user-friendly LMS. It provides synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication, such as virtual classrooms, emails and blogs. It creates a learning environment that helps both instructors and learners to attend virtual classes, participate in online discussions, upload their assignments, get feedback, and take their exams (Khafaga, 2021). According to Whitmer et al. (2016), the virtues of availability, in-time feedback, skill-building tracking, and improved communication distinguish Blackboard and help overcome the problems other platforms encounter. As a result of these virtues, learning via Blackboard largely assimilated a face-to-face environment (Almekhlafy, 2020).

Playing a central role in the learning process and affecting linguistic gains and retention, students' engagement has been the concern of educators and researchers (Bryson & Hand, 2007). With the necessary transition to online learning, students' engagement can constitute a concern to language instructors. The term engagement has been addressed in various ways. Lately, student engagement has been conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon comprising three dimensions, i.e. namely behavioral, cognitive, and emotional (Lei et al., 2018). These dimensions refer respectively to the student's level of participation, use of self-regulated strategies, and emotional reactions. Engagement in learning can be realized as "the active participation in the learning process, and contributes to deeper and meaningful learning" (Huang et al., 2017, p. 96). According to Mackenzie (2015), the desired learning outcomes can be best achieved through a learning process in which students are actively engaged. When learners are more engaged in the learning process, they are more likely to maintain the knowledge longer and transfer it to further contexts. Engaging the students actively in the learning process remains the biggest challenge for teachers. Therefore, teachers need to modify their teaching procedures as well as classroom activities to engage students and, consequently, reach the desired learning outcomes (Rahayu, 2018).

Although online teaching has been the focus of EFL research lately, few studies have focused on students' engagement in online classes. Serag's (2013) study partially investigated the effect of online learning on students' engagement, reporting a positive impact of online learning on the level of engagement and performance. Likewise, Suharti, Suherdi, and Setyarini (2020) explored students' engagement in online EFL classrooms in a vocational school in Indonesia. The findings revealed that using online platforms for language learning leads to significant learning engagement. Sustani's (2020) study supports these findings to a certain extent. According to the results, EFL college students showed relatively high behavioral engagement, while cognitive and emotional engagements were not highly positive.

On the other hand, most papers have discussed students' engagement as a secondary matter (Banditvilai, 2016; Alzamil, 2021). Alzamil (2021) investigated students' views towards online learning compared to their face-to-face learning of the speaking skill. According to him, the participants "appreciated the benefits that online learning offer, but felt it could not replace face-to-face learning" (p.19). Such an attitude could be partially traced back to the direct and clear comparison drawn between face-to-face and online learning. Moreover, during the first few weeks after the suspension when the study was applied, instructors were having difficulties accommodating to the change, resulting in poor outcomes as related to online learning. Sahin-Kizil (2014) reported students' positive attitude towards online learning within blended learning. According to her, it "creates efficient learning environment" (p. 1). Likewise, Girik Allo (2020) has reported that learners perceived online learning as good and helpful in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Little attention has been paid to student engagement with online learning of writing. The few studies on engagement in L2 writing classes mainly highlight engagement with feedback, whether through online (Lili &Yu, 2020) or face-to-face teaching (Han & Hyland, 2015). Furthermore, the study of students'

engagement in online classrooms remains scarce in the context of Saudi Arabia. Oraif and Elyas (2020) explored the engagement of EFL students in secondary schools in online learning using a designated school platform. Using the Student Course Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ), the results clearly showed a high level of student engagement. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, the present study is the first study to examine students' engagement in the writing course in e-learning using Blackboard.

With the previous background considered, the present study attempts to contribute to the field by shedding light on EFL college students' engagement in online learning through Blackboard, specifically in teaching writing. Therefore, it attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do EFL university learners engage in an online writing course during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do EFL university learners perceive online instruction in the writing course?

METHOD

A mixed-method approach was adopted for the current research. Questionnaires were consequently used as the data collection tool, and these were in English. Questionnaires were used to measure the level of engagement among most of the students from the original population. The questionnaires were distributed by the course tutor during classroom time, in the final class at the end of the second term, in May 2021. The duration of the term was 12 weeks, excluding the testing weeks. In the selected writing course, the process approach was adopted, with the learners having to write multiple drafts and the teacher providing them with feedback. The writing class was taught online, once weekly via Blackboard.

The questionnaire was adopted from Oraif and Elyas (2021), who originally adapted it from Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, and Towler (2005) SCEQ format. The scale measures four essential items related to engagement in classroom learning. However, the questionnaire is used at the university level in the current study. The Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.913 in Oraif and Elyas's (2021) description of the scale. In their 23-item measure, Handelsman et al. (2005) divided engagement into four factors, demonstrating high internal consistency in their study, with a coefficient alpha of between .76 and .82. The authors labeled the first factor, 'skills engagement' since it reflected student engagement through skills practice. Meanwhile, the second factor was labeled 'emotional engagement', relating student engagement to emotional involvement with the class material. The third construct, 'participation/interaction engagement', identified learner engagement through classroom participation and interactions with instructors and peers. Finally, the fourth factor, related student engagement to performance in class, is referred to as 'performance engagement'. However, the open-ended questions in Part 1 of the original questionnaire were changed in the current study to fit the research purpose and gain a deeper understanding of the existing situation on the writing course at IMSIU. Therefore, the following question being added: "Does your teacher allow collaborative work during the online writing class?" (see Appendix B). An expert in Applied Linguistics checked the suitability of the questions in terms of content, and they were found to be suitable.

Participants

Regarding the sampling procedure, a convenient sample was recruited, with three teachers agreeing to collect data from their classes. Seven out of 14 sections of the writing course were involved. A total of 148 students agreed to participate, representing 48% of the whole population, which consisted of 379 university students, enrolled in the final level of a writing course in the Department of English Language and Translation at the College of Languages and Translation, IMSIU, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The participants were all female students, as the education system in Saudi Arabia requires gender separation in governmental educational institutions. The students were between 20 and 23 years old (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants' Characteristics (n=148)

	Categories	No	%
Age	20-21	56	34%
	22-23	92	56%

Data Collection and Analysis

Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the survey was created electronically using Google Forms, and the link was given to the teachers prior to class time. The teachers then provided the learners with the corresponding link. The questionnaire took around 10 minutes to complete and send. After distributing the form, one of the researchers joined the session to introduce the purpose of the questionnaire. She remained until the participants finished to ensure that the items were clear and easy to grasp and to answer the students' inquiries. After ensuring that all the participants had successfully submitted their responses, the researcher left the session. The data were kept confidential and anonymous, as the participants did not include their names. They also signed a consent form, which assured them that none of the research data collected and included would affect their grades for the course.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26 was used to analyze the data after it had been coded. On the other hand, the qualitative data were analyzed through Microsoft Excel using percentages and frequency. Quantitative normally distributed variables were presented as means and standard deviation (SD). Qualitative variables were expressed in terms of frequency and percentages. The Wilcoxon and Kruskal-Wallis tests were also conducted to explore the statistical significance of differences in the level of engagement between two or more than two groups, respectively. In addition, Pearson's correlation was calculated to identify the significance in the association between quantitative variables -a $p\text{-value}<0.05$ was considered as an indication of statistical significance. As for open-ended questions, content analysis was used for conducting the analysis. Codes were checked by another expert in the field and changes were made based on his recommendation.

Consequently, this study investigated a single existing case among female university students from the Department of English Language and Translation at the College of Languages and Translation at IMSIU. The questionnaires were mainly used to help investigate the phenomenon in depth (Thomas, 2017). Based on the results drawn from the data, recommendations were subsequently made to improve current university teaching practice in KSA, specifically in English writing classes. The process approach was followed in delivering the course. During the course, learners were writing multiple drafts. The instructor gave feedback for each draft. While several types of essays were taught in the course, students were meeting their teacher once weekly through an online environment using Blackboard. Blackboard was used to deliver lectures, discuss ideas through discussion boards, submit assignments, implement in-class activities, and conduct tests.

RESULTS

To answer the first question: 'What is the level of students' engagement in online English writing classes?', descriptive data were calculated for each factor. Skills engagement was found to be a characteristic of the EFL learners in the online writing classes. In contrast, emotional engagement was moderately characteristic of this sample, as were participation/interaction engagement and performance engagement (see Tables 2-5).

Table 2. Descriptive data for the students' skills engagement

No	Items	Mean	SD	Per.	Level of Engagement
9	Coming to class every day	3.65	1.607	73%	Characteristic of me
8	Listening carefully in class	3.55	1.536	71%	Characteristic of me
3	Doing all the homework problems	3.52	1.459	70%	Characteristic of me
5	Looking over class notes between classes to make sure I understand the material	3.46	1.552	69%	Characteristic of me
6	Being organized	3.46	1.548	69%	Characteristic of me
2	Putting in effort	3.40	1.510	68%	Characteristic of me
4	Staying up to date with the readings	3.38	1.380	68%	Moderately characteristic of me
7	Taking good notes in class	3.34	1.504	67%	Moderately characteristic of me
1	Making sure to study on a regular basis	3.25	1.504	65%	Moderately characteristic of me
	Skills engagement	3.45	1.278	69%	Characteristic of me

Table 2 illustrates the students' level of skills engagement in their online English writing classes. In general, skills engagement was found to be characteristic of these learners (mean=3.45, SD=1.27). The item 'Coming to class every day' ranked first (mean=3.65, SD = 1.607), followed by 'Listening carefully in class' (mean=3.55, SD=1.536), which was also characteristic of the learners. The level of engagement was moderately characteristic in the final measure 'Making sure to study on a regular basis' (mean=3.25, SD=1.504).

Emotional Engagement

Table 3. Descriptive data for the students' emotional engagement

No	Items	Mean	SD	%	Level of Engagement
5	Really desiring to learn the material	3.24	1.470	65%	Moderately characteristic of me
3	Finding ways to make the course interesting to me	3.15	1.475	63%	Moderately characteristic of me
2	Applying course material to my life	3.05	1.385	61%	Moderately characteristic of me
4	Thinking about the course between class meetings	3.04	1.363	61%	Moderately characteristic of me
1	Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	2.96	1.365	59%	Moderately characteristic of me
	Emotional engagement	3.09	1.219	62%	Moderately characteristic of me

Table 3 demonstrates the students' level of emotional engagement in their English writing classes. It reveals that, in general, the participants' emotional engagement in their online English writing classes was moderately characteristic (mean=3.09, SD=1.219). The item 'Really desiring to learn the material' ranked first (mean=3.24, SD=1.470), followed by 'Finding ways to make the course interesting to me' (mean=3.15, SD=1.475). Finally, the item 'Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life' (mean=2.96, SD=1.365) came last. All these descriptive statements are indicated as being moderately characteristic of the learners.

Participation/Interaction Engagement

Table 4. Descriptive data for the students' participation/interaction engagement

No	Items	Mean	SD	%	Level of Engagement
4	Participating actively in small-group discussions	3.55	1.614	71%	Characteristic of me
1	Raising my hand in class	3.52	1.603	70%	Characteristic of me
6	Helping fellow students	3.49	1.496	70%	Characteristic of me
2	Asking questions when I don't understand the instructor	3.26	1.570	65%	Moderately characteristic of me
5	Going to the instructor to review assignments or tests or to ask questions	3.20	1.548	64%	Moderately characteristic of me
3	Having fun in class	3.03	1.467	61%	Moderately characteristic of me
	Participation/interaction engagement	3.34	1.312	67%	Moderately characteristic of me

Table 4 shows the students' level of participation/interaction engagement in online English writing classes, which was generally found to be moderately characteristic of the learners (mean=3.34, SD=1.312). The item 'Participating actively in small-group discussions' came first (mean=3.55, SD=1.614). It was followed by 'Raising my hand in class' (mean=3.52, SD=1.603), where participant engagement was also found to be characteristic. Finally, the item 'Having fun in class' (mean=3.03, SD=1.467) came last, where the level of participation engagement was found to be moderately characteristic of the learners.

Performance Engagement

Table 5. Descriptive data for the students' performance engagement

No	Items	Mean	SD	%	Level of Engagement
3	Being confident that I can learn and do well in the class	3.38	1.544	68%	Moderately characteristic of me
2	Doing well in the tests	3.25	1.322	65%	Moderately characteristic of me
1	Getting a good grade	3.24	1.325	65%	Moderately characteristic of me
	Performance engagement	3.29	1.272	66%	Moderately characteristic of me

Table 5 illustrates that, in general, the students' level of performance engagement in their online English writing classes was moderately characteristic (mean=3.29, SD=1.272), with 'Being confident that I can learn and do well in the class' ranking first (mean=3.38, SD=1.544). It was followed by 'Doing well in the tests' ranking second (mean=3.25, SD=1.322), where performance engagement was also indicated as moderately characteristic, and 'Getting a good grade' ranked lowest (mean=3.24, SD=1.325). The level of engagement was, likewise, moderately characteristic of the participants.

Further, an analysis of the correlations illustrated in Table 6 demonstrated a relationship between all the factors of student engagement. It was found that, in general, the students' level of engagement in online English writing classes was moderately characteristic (mean=3.29, SD=1.160), with skills engagement ranking first (mean=3.45, SD= 1.278). While participation/interaction engagement ranked second (mean=3.34, SD=1.312), performance engagement ranked third (mean=3.29, SD=1.272), and finally, emotional engagement ranked the lowest (mean=3.09, SD= 1.219). All these types of engagement were indicated as moderately characteristic of the learners; however, the learners were positive about their experience.

Table 6. Correlations and descriptive data on the students' engagement factors

Factors	Mean	SD	%	Skills Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Participation/ Interaction Engagement	Performance Engagement
Skills engagement	3.45	1.278	69%	-	.788**	.901**	.759**
Emotional engagement	3.09	1.219	62%	.788**	-	.799**	.638**
Participation/ interaction engagement	3.34	1.312	67%	.901**	.799**	-	.774**
Performance engagement	3.29	1.272	66%	.759**	.638**	.774**	-
Overall engagement	3.29	1.160	66%	.946**	.881**	.953**	.870**

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

To answer the second research question, 'How do EFL university learners perceive online instruction of the Writing Course?', the descriptive data was analyzed in terms of frequency and percentages of participant responses.

Table 7. Descriptive data on the students' performance engagement

Variables	Variables	No	%
Does your teacher allow collaborative work in the online writing class?	Yes	147	90%
	No	17	10%
Does your writing teacher provide you with any additional study material (e.g., links, videos, etc.?) via the online environment?	Yes	116	71%
	No	48	29%
How do you feel about attending online writing classes?	Pleased	115	70%
	Displeased	49	30%

As Table 7 shows, the majority of the participants (90%) agreed that the teachers allowed collaborative work. Moreover, most of the participants (71%) agreed that the teachers provided learners with additional material. Furthermore, a majority of the participants (70%) were pleased about attending online classes. To obtain a clearer understanding of the participants' general views of the online learning experience, the frequency and percentages of the participants' reasons for being pleased or displeased were calculated and are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Reasons for being pleased/displeased about attending online writing classes

Reasons for being displeased	Examples	No.	Per.
No real-life contact	…because in the real class it is better to have contact with the teacher, correct my essay, and learn from my mistakes	11	7.4%
	Because there is no face-to-face interaction, this makes it difficult for the teacher to know whether the students have understood or not		
Difficulties to learn	I don't feel like I am learning well, especially in spelling	4	2.8%
	It's not clear for me and sometimes I find it difficult to understand		
Difficulties in understanding	It is hard for me to understand all the subjects	4	2.7%
Boring	It's boring, and we can't communicate well	4	2.7%
Technical Problems	Poor connection can cause problems, such as missing exams	3	2.1%
	The Blackboard corrections and plagiarism checker were unfair. Also, Internet problems and timing were challenging		

Distraction	I can't focus with the teacher, hence, there are many distractions like WhatsApp. Moreover, I don't feel enthusiastic, since most of the girls don't participate and I can't see any faces. Therefore, I usually don't listen to the teacher if I know I've got a participation mark	2	1.4%
Group work	There is never enough time for group work; I prefer to work alone	2	1.4%
Not active	It is not active	2	1.4%
	The traditional environment makes me more active		
Anxiety	Because we do not have enough time to write our homework and tests, so the writing course sometimes causes anxiety	2	1.4%
No trust from the teachers' side	Because they always think the articles are taken from somewhere else, even if I am working on them	1	0.7%
Workload	Because they pressure us with a lot of assignments	1	0.7%
Difficulties in participation	It can be quite difficult to participate and engage during the class, which could affect the student's marks	1	0.7%
Hard to pay attention	It's hard to be attentive to the teacher all the time	1	0.7%
	It limits my focus in all subjects		

Reasons for being Pleased	Examples	No.	Per.
Usability	Easy and time saving	28	18.9%
	Saves the trouble of going to the university and it's easier than going to the university		
Comfortable Environment	I feel it makes us more comfortable.	19	12.9%
	Because I'm a shy person, so I feel more comfortable sharing my thoughts and ideas during online classes		
Helps in Writing	…because it develops my writing skills in many ways	13	8.8%
	I love writing classes because they help me to improve my writing		
Interesting	Interesting class	8	5.4%
distraction free	I can have my own time to write what I need without any noise	5	3.4%
	Online lessons make me focus more on the sound without distractions and help me be diligent		
Health safety	A safe life from the danger of the Coronavirus, saving time and effort, saving money in terms of transportation and more	4	2.7%
Clarity	Clarity	4	2.8%
	It's clear and Dr. [Teacher A] can deliver the information very clearly		
	Because it is clear, and I understand all the lessons		
Convenience	It's sufficient for me	4	%
	It is more convenient		
	It's convenient, I don't miss anything.		
Perfect	It's perfect	4	2.8%
	It's not bad		
Useful and easy to practice	It is useful	3	2.1%
	The one class makes us practice more and write more. Also, we do a lot of activities with the students		
Enjoyable	It is enjoyable	2	1.4%
	I love learning; that's why I enjoy the classes		
Flexibility	More flexibility - I can practice writing through my device	2	1.4%
	It's flexible		
Cooperative teacher	Because she [the teacher] is very cooperative with her students and explains her lesson with all sincerity	2	1.4%
Suitability to different learning styles	In the writing class, I don't feel that I need to study it in the traditional way	2	1.4%
	Online classes fit my lifestyle because I'm not a traditional student. If I had the choice, I would take all of my classes through the Internet		
Teacher's feedback	The teacher is obliged to look at our writing	1	0.7%

Table 8 displays the participants' positive and negative views of the online class. Most of the negative views were related to a lack of immediate contact with the teacher. On the other hand, most of the positive views were due to the learners finding the online environment easy and time-efficient to use.

To further understand the impact of collaboration in online classes, the effect of additional materials being provided via the online environment, as well as the participants' feelings about attending online writing classes, specifically in terms of different types of engagement, a correlation test was conducted (see Tables 9-11).

Table 9. Relationship between engagement and instruction in online English classes and collaborative work

	Does Your Teacher Allow Collaborative Work in the Online Writing Class?	N	Mean Rank	P-value
Skills engagement	No	17	83.7	0.910
	Yes	147	82.4	
Emotional engagement	No	17	84.1	0.880
	Yes	147	82.3	
Participation/interaction engagement	No	17	77.3	0.634
	Yes	147	83.1	
Performance engagement	No	17	84.4	0.858
	Yes	147	82.3	

Wilcoxon test

Table 9 illustrates that even though the learners indicated that their teacher allowed them to work collaboratively, no significant relationship was found between the collaborative work and any factors of engagement ($p<0.05$), meaning that collaboration may not have impacted on engagement.

Table 10. Relationship between engagement and instruction in online English classes where the teacher provides additional materials for study

	Does Your Writing Teacher Provide You with any Additional Study Materials (e.g., Links, Videos, etc.) via the Online Environment?	N	Mean Rank	P-value
Skills engagement	No	48	71.0	0.046
	Yes	116	87.3	
Emotional engagement	No	48	75.0	0.190
	Yes	116	85.6	
Participation/interaction engagement	No	48	70.9	0.044
	Yes	116	87.3	
Performance engagement	No	48	74.0	0.137
	Yes	116	86.0	

Wilcoxon test

Table 10 illustrates that there is a significant relationship between the teacher providing students with additional study materials, through the online environment, and skills and participation/interaction engagement ($p<0.05$). In other words, it relates to the positive impact of using multiple resources on developing skills and participation.

Table 11. Relationship between engagement and instruction in online English classes and students' feelings about attending online writing classes

	How Do You Feel About Attending Online Writing Classes?	N	Mean Rank	P-value
Skills engagement	Displeased	49	64.5	0.001
	Pleased	115	90.2	
Emotional engagement	Displeased	49	68.2	0.012
	Pleased	115	88.6	
Participation/interaction engagement	Displeased	49	66.0	0.004
	Pleased	115	89.6	
Performance engagement	Displeased	49	73.3	0.102
	Pleased	115	86.4	

Table 11 illustrates that there is a significant relationship between students' feelings about attending online writing classes, and skills engagement, emotional engagement, and participation/interaction engagement ($p<0.05$). It can be interpreted as the learners mainly being pleased about attending their English writing classes online, because they are emotionally engaged, willing to improve through skills engagement, and experience participation/interaction engagement.

The different ways in which the teacher allowed the learners to work collaboratively in the online writing class deserves to be noted, based on the participants' responses (as in Table 12).

Table 12. Collaborative work in the online writing class

Variables	No	%
Group work and Breakout rooms	92	64.7%
Peer editing	38	26.7%
Class activities and discussion.	12	8.4%

Table 12 illustrates that the learners mainly performed tasks through group work (64.7%) and peer editing (26.7%), along with class activities and discussions (8.4%). However, these various types of collaborative work did not appear to have any impact on the students' engagement.

Regarding the types of additional material provided by the teacher, the learners' responses varied. The responses are classified and listed in Table 13.

Table 13. Additional materials provided by the teacher to the students

Variables	No	%
PowerPoint	44	39.6%
Videos	36	31.3%
Links	10	9.0%
Articles	13	7.2%
Additional information by the teacher	7	6.3%
Through text messages.	3	2.7%
Teacher's own references	1	0.9%
Feedback on errors that occur while writing articles	1	0.9%

Table 13 illustrates several types of additional material, which were introduced by the teacher on Blackboard. The PowerPoint presentation came at the top of the list (39.6%). It was followed by videos (31.3%), documents (9%) and links (9%). Such additional materials helped to raise the students' engagement, specifically skills engagement as well as participation/interaction engagement.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In light of the results aforementioned, the participants showed different levels of engagement in relation to the different constructs of learners' engagement in their online writing course. In particular, the learners showed significant engagement in skills practice. On the other hand, their responses showed a moderate level of engagement in terms of emotional involvement with class material, classroom participation and interaction with the teacher and peers in class activities, as well as performance in class. Such findings align with Sustani's (2020) findings, which showed highly positive engagement among students in one aspect, while the other aspects were not quite significant.

It is undeniable that most participants generally reflected on the online learning experience as being 'pleased'. Some participants highlighted that online learning and face-to-face learning are quite similar, and the information is delivered clearly through both modes. Such findings reconcile with Almekhlafy's (2020) results that learning through Blackboard highly resembles face-to-face learning. However, it contradicts Al-Nofaie's (2020) conclusion that online learning cannot fully replace face-to-face learning. Moreover, some of the participants reported that Blackboard constitutes an environment that is free from distractions. Such finding also contradicts Al-Nofaie's (2020) findings that learning at home is very distractive, to the extent that motivated students become anxious about achieving learning outcomes when learning at home. Such contradiction could be resolved by considering the timing of both studies. AlNofaie's (2020) study was held at the beginning of the lockdown, and the students as well as their families were novices to such experiences of complete online learning. Now, the students and their families have become more experienced and understood their profound and fundamental role in the process and act accordingly.

Moreover, the students valued the virtues of online learning such as flexibility, affordability, convenience, suitability for shy students, usefulness, and in-time feedback. Such findings chain with many studies (Khafaga, 2021; Whitmer et.al., 2016; Banditvilai, 2016; Bin Dahmash, 2020), which have stressed that e-learning suits students' different learning styles and offers a flexible environment for independent learning. However, very few students reported some technical problems making them worry about exams and marks. This finding can be justified by Alsuhaibani's (2021) study, which found that the university has updated and improved Blackboard and incorporated several features since the beginning of the crisis. Besides, the university has offered many workshops to both instructors and students and legislated many policies regarding e-learning. Therefore, technical troubles no longer constitute an issue to many students.

The results further demonstrate that online learning through Blackboard has two significant features that helped raise the students' engagement: attending online and additional material. In fact, one of the reasons that made the participants pleased with the platform was the ability to attend virtual classes. It dramatically increased students' engagement as they found it a way to stay safe from COVID-19 during the pandemic. As the results of the present study indicate, many students stressed that e-learning saves time, effort, and money because it saves them the trouble of going to university to attend classes. With the use of synchronous and asynchronous tools, they were able to follow up with their instructors anytime and anywhere. The students were provided with a variety of additional material, including PowerPoint presentations, videos, documents, and links, helping them understand the information and pay attention to frequent errors in writing.

On the other hand, although the teachers implemented many collaborative activities, the results show that they do not have a significant statistical effect in improving the students' engagement. Thus, it is recommended that the teachers develop a more collaborative environment, for example, by using breakout groups on Blackboard. As Rahayu (2018) stressed, the teachers' styles mainly play a central role in engaging the students in activities, as they shape the learning process. According to him, the students heavily rely on their teachers to guide them in learning activities, affecting their involvement in the learning process and, consequently, their attainment.

Considering the results and discussion, it can be concluded that skills engagement is highly positive, while emotional, participation/interaction, and performance engagement are moderately positive. The participants of the study appreciated the virtues of Blackboard, primarily flexibility, affordability, convenience, and usefulness to different learning styles. They further indicated that e-learning through Blackboard constitutes an environment that is comfortable, rich with activities, and free from distractions. The fact that lessons are delivered online, along with various course materials provided to the students, noticeably influenced the students' engagement. However, the type of collaborative activities implemented do not play their central role in engaging the students. Therefore, it is recommended that the teachers work more on deciding and choosing more collaborative when the process approach is followed while implementing a writing course entirely online. To ensure that the students are actively involved in the learning process, the teachers' role in the learning process should be more engaging for the students; they should be guiding them throughout the activities to establish new, appealing, and helpful learning strategies. Using the features of Blackboard, videoconferencing may provide the students with more room to discuss and negotiate the meaning they are trying to deliver. Moreover, using breakout groups to implement peer-review may be another strategy to establish and maintain student online interaction and increase the students' engagement in writing courses especially when following the process approach.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the present study limitations, it is recommended that more research should be conducted on investigating the following: 1- Male students and comparing the results with the female students' results presented in the study, as this constitutes a limitation in this study; 2- Other newly officiated platforms, and comparing their features and challenges in order to obtain a comprehensive conceptualization of the central role platforms have in affecting the students' level of engagement; thus, attainment; 3- The students' perspectives need to be examined thoroughly using semi-structured interviews, a limitation in the current study because of the short time limitation the researchers had for data collection; 4- other skills like reading, speaking, and listening to find out the effect of teaching through Blackboard on students' level of engagement in such courses.

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