Investigating EFL Students' Engagement in Online English Classes at Taif University

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Abstract

Academic success is strongly correlated with Student engagement. In Saudi Arabia, curriculum development has been undertaken to improve English as a foreign language (EFL) course; however, EFL students still have trouble cooperating, especially in online classes. The study aims to (1) investigate students' engagement in online courses and (2) provide online students' perspectives on the value of the student engagement strategies for enhancing learning. The Student Course Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ) and the Online Engagement Strategies Questionnaire (OESQ) were used as reliable measurements; a survey was conducted with 197 EFL students studying Online English language courses. The findings demonstrate that both male and female EFL students are quite engaged and some engagement strategies that were rated most important based on students' perceptions. The study will help generate recommendations to improve EFL practices and develop online EFL classes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus has caused school and university closures worldwide. Since all educational institutions have been closed in Saudi Arabia, the transition from "traditional" to "online" schooling has happened quickly. "Madrasati" and "Blackboard" platforms have been employed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to adapt its educational system for distance learning (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). Online education is a desirable educational alternative because it gives students ease and flexibility. However, keeping students engaged is a primary challenge in online classes.

Student engagement is defined by Axelson and Flick (2010) as how active students are in their learning experience and how they feel to their peers, classes, and departments. It is related to students' happiness, perseverance, and academic success (Meyer, 2014). The obligations of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and students are intrinsically tied to a successful online learning process since high-quality learning outcomes frequently depend on student engagement. Student engagement has emerged as a crucial concept connected to a number of educational outcomes, including achievement, attendance, behaviour, and dropout/completion. (Finn, 1989; Jimerson et al., 2003; Jimerson et al., 2009). Given the beneficial links between student engagements, course satisfaction, persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999; Kuh et al., 2008; Mimouna, 2021), and academic achievement (Carini et al.,

2006), programs to increase student engagement in classrooms have been the main priority for higher education institutions.

1.1.Statement of the problem

Although online learning communities can provide numerous benefits, their efficacy is not guaranteed. In addition, enhancing students' engagement in a foreign language for meaningful reasons in and out of the class is one of the most significant difficulties facing online EFL education. Students may adopt a negative attitude and oppose changes given the virtual learning. It is important to note that few studies have been conducted on this specific subject in Saudi Arabia, and all of them have focused merely on the engagement dimensions. Therefore, studies on student engagement and strategies to enhance this engagement are needed, especially for virtual learning.

1.2.Research Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to (1) determine the level of involvement among male and female EFL students in online classes, (2) investigate the relationship between student engagement and feelings, and (3) present EFL students' perspectives on the most crucial student engagement strategies. Specifically, this study is based on the notion that many teachers struggle to keep students engaged. It explores how teachers can engage students in online classes by considering students' perceptions and how they would rate engagement strategies.

The current study intends to answer the following questions to fulfil the research objectives:

1. What is the engagement level among Male and Female EFL students in English online classes?
2. How do EFL students feel about their engagement in Online English classes?
3. Which strategies do students perceive are crucial to increase their engagement?

1.3.Significance of the Study

Since few studies have linked engagement dimensions and strategies with students' perceptions, this study will close this gap somehow. This study type has not been done before on general tertiary education. In addition, there is a lack of studies on the differences between male and female university students' engagement. The study would be an excellent way to understand the level of engagement among EFL students, differentiate between males' and females' engagement, and determine the most effective strategy to help students become more engaged than before. This study will lead to recommendations for enhancing EFL methodologies and developing online courses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term *engagement* has been discussed in various ways throughout the existing literature. It is a complex term that refers to students' patterns of behaviour, motivation, and cognition (Sharma & Bhaumik, 2013). While there is universal agreement that student engagement leads to beneficial outcomes, Harris (2008) contends that defining the notion is difficult since there is a dispute about student engagement. Since there is no single definition of student participation, it is not easy to assess it. (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). Some researchers view student engagement to be a multi-dimensional concept with three major dimensions: emotional, behavioural, and cognitive (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). As a result of this complication, there is a continuous discussion about which data is best for measuring

engagement (Carter et al., 2012). There are many techniques available for measuring student engagement in traditional classroom settings as well as online learning environments. The majority of these tools emphasize student self-report data (Carter et al., 2012).

Kuh (2003) created the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to investigate students' engagement in traditional classroom settings by examining their emotions, abilities, performance, and interaction. Handelsman et al. (2005) designed the Student Course Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ) using a psychometric technique to obtain information from students' perspectives in order to quantify and measure their engagement in a certain class. The SCEQ measures students' engagement by asking students about their feelings and habits regarding learning, considering the four engagement dimensions: emotional engagement, skills engagement, participation\interaction engagement, and performance engagement.

If teachers want to increase learning outcomes and performance, they have to consider student engagement when designing their classes and choosing materials. According to Handelsman et al. (2005), identifying the extent of students' attention and engagement is beneficial for teachers when working with individual students or creating a captivating classroom environment. Many studies have found positive correlations between student engagement, course satisfaction (Wefald & Downey, 2009), perseverance (Berger & Milem, 1999; Kuh et al., 2008), and academic performance (Carini et al., 2006). Beck (2020) examined two sections of an undergraduate course, half of which were delivered online and the other in a traditional classroom format. The results demonstrated the significance of student interaction, whether the channel is online or traditional. Several studies in the literature showed the importance of student interaction is in improving learning, especially in the online context.

In Saudi Arabia, the need to research and explore students' participation in online classes has been identified as crucial, because this substantial transition in education due to the Coronavirus pandemic is a new phenomenon. Oraif and Elyas (2021) explored how engaged students were in online courses delivered through an authorized school platform in Jeddah. The SCEQ was utilized to explore the feelings of female high school students about online classes and measure their level of engagement. The findings revealed that by allowing students to put course content into practice, the online environment enabled them to become more self-sufficient and autonomous.

Teachers and students have experienced a number of obstacles as a result of the rapid move from traditional to online education. Lassoued et al. (2020) investigated the many ways that students pursued their education online. According to the findings, teachers and students faced self-imposed pedagogical, technical, economic, and organizational challenges.

Due to portable devices, students' feelings and interactions with a given course may alter, such as students' feelings of loneliness in online classes. Moawad (2020) conducted research on 2271 male and female students at King Saud University to see how pressure from online learning affected them during the coronavirus pandemic. Five hundred fourteen students were incredibly stressed and anxious in the sample population due to the quick switch from traditional face-to-face to online sessions. In contrast, a study conducted at King Khalid University aimed to assess academic members' satisfaction with the abrupt shift to web-based education, finding that the majority of the participants thought that giving lectures remotely was more flexible than delivering face-to-face lectures (Almaghaslah & Alsayari, 2020). Kaufmann and Vallade (2020) assumed that teachers have a significant role in maintaining climate. Additionally, most class resources appeared to be based on a teacher-

delivery-teacher-centred strategy, making the learning process boring (Lassoued et al., 2020). As a result, creative and innovative teaching in online courses is more important than ever.

According to Bao (2020), the effectiveness of online classes is dependent primarily on interactive and unique teaching and learning material, such as audio and video content and a detailed lesson plan. Santos et al. (2019) found that new pedagogical practices promote students' engagement, improve critical and creative thinking, reduce apathy, and contribute to peer learning. Accordingly, Rose et al. (2019) concluded that showing videos to chemistry students boosted their engagement with the content outside of class and helped them do better on exams. Al-Bogami and Elyas (2020) showed that iPad applications improved students' engagement. Graham (2014) claimed that the students did regularly access and know how to use social media and technology tools; the next step would be engaging them and involving them to participate in online platforms and far more active classes. Students would be encouraged to take an active role in their education and be more engaged with the topic in all engagement dimensions by using different technological tools, applications, and engagement strategies.

Many academics agree that student engagement is a multi-dimensional concept with three significant dimensions of engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). Kahu (2013) offered a more comprehensive conceptual framework that considers various factors such as effect, cognition, and behaviour and includes multiple facets such as psychosocial and structural influences and proximal and distal consequences. Fredricks et al. (2004) claimed that student engagement is challenging to measure because of the overlap between the engagement dimensions and other constructs, such as student attitudes and interests.

The cognitive engagement was clear in the feedback-giving and --receiving processes as well as in the learners' attention and sense of relevance aroused by particular tasks. Emotional involvement was sparked by the design of the activities and the ongoing development of a learning community where students felt at ease contributing. Examples of behavioural engagement include students' attendance, participation in class, and meeting teacher and academic expectations.

A student's interest in their learning, such as their comprehension of challenging concepts, is reflected in cognitive engagement, which is characterized by intense, strategic thinking. (Fredricks et al., 2004; Harris, 2008). According to Meyer and Turner (2006), the learning environment significantly impacts emotional engagement. Louwrens and Hartnett (2015) investigated students' perceptions of engagement strategies and techniques in online classes by examining these critical dimensions. They interviewed the participants and found that students tended to engage behaviourally with all required activities. The current study explores the level of engagement in light of these critical dimensions. This investigation will fill a gap in the literature since few studies have investigated EFL students' engagement in Saudi Arabia.

According to Anderson (2013), interaction is crucial in student engagement and should be cultivated in the online learning environment. Moore (1993) addressed the interrelationship between three variables: student, teacher, and content, as well as how their interactions determine the intensity and quality of transactional distance. Student-student, student-teacher, and student–content interactions are claimed to be interaction techniques that increase student engagement (Moore,1993).

Students can learn from one another by exchanging resources, conversation, and sharing experiences and ideas in student-student interaction strategies (Beck, 2010). Strong peer connections in online courses, according to Jung et al. (2002), predict student satisfaction. Ryle and Cumming (2007) recommended that welcome greetings and announcements be posted to set the course expectations and post discussions in advance to generate interest and provide essential material. In addition, Park (2015) emphasized implementing online reflective practice to promote student involvement and deeper learning. Ko and Rossen (2010) provided numerous techniques for enlivening online courses, such as activities that prompt students to share aspects of their immediate surroundings with classmates to expand the boundaries of a course.

The student-teacher relationship is a significant determinant of student happiness and achievement (Andersen, Lampley, & Good, 2013; Kang & Im, 2013; Walker, 2016). The teacher can enhance student participation and improve students' sense of community by defining course expectations, providing variable contact channels, encouragement, and timely feedback (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012). In an online class, Bolliger and Martin (2018) examined student perception of different engagement strategies used in eight universities across the United States. The study used the Online Engagement Strategies Questionnaire (OESQ), which consists of three factors based on Moore's (1993) interaction theory. The finding revealed that students prefer student–teacher strategies.

Student performance is also linked to student–content interaction. Quality standards and minimizing barriers to learners' persistence are emphasized by Stavredes and Herder in 2014, ensuring that online courses suit the needs of students. Zimmerman (2012) claimed that student–content interaction is a predictor of success in online learning environments and the relationship between course materials and students' grades. **Furthermore,** Colley et al. (2012) **discovered that student-content strategies such as reflections were used to further engage students in the course's material.** Students who spend more time on course materials are more likely to achieve the goals of the course.

All the mentioned articles in the literature review were conducted merely on engagement dimensions or interaction strategies. In Saudi Arabia, there are limited studies on the differences in engagement between male and female EFL students. This study will be conducted on male and female EFL Saudi students to close this considerable gap in the literature review.

3. METHODOLOGY
3.1. The Context of the Study

This study focuses on the tertiary education system of Saudi Arabia because it has been the main focus of preparing students to achieve English language learning goals. The MoE uses a variety of online platforms, including "Madrasati" and "Blackboard," as well as social media platforms like "WhatsApp" and "Telegram," to disseminate English and other subjects to all upper and lower-grade students in the Coronavirus pandemic. As a line of MoE efforts to efficiently adopt a successful educational system and meet the educational goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2017). The present study investigates the impact of online classes on students' different engagement dimensions and explores the best strategy that enhances students' engagement.

3.2. Research Participants

A total of 197 Male and Female EFL students participated in this study. The participants were 87 male and 110 female students who took an online English class at Taif University. The participants' age was 19-26 years old (see Appendix A).

3.3. Research Method

The data was gathered using an online questionnaire instrument. The study focused entirely on evaluating engagement among Male and Female EFL students in Online English classes. Several ethical concerns were addressed, such as emphasizing that all data will not be released except for the objectives of this study and will be kept private (see Appendix B). The consent statement and the questionnaire were translated into Arabic to be more understandable for the participants to give accurate data (see Appendix C).

3.4. Research Instrument

The study used a quantitative research approach to provide a larger view of the sample's perception. The questionnaire was generated electronically using Google Forms. It includes three parts (see Appendix D). The first part consists of the information of participants, including the year of university, age, and gender. The second part consists of 23 statements and implements a reliable measure based on the SCEQ to measure students' engagement with an online English language course and answer the first two research questions (Handelsman et al., 2005). The third part consists of 10 Likert-type items and implements the OESQ to indicate which strategies students perceive to be important in enhancing their engagement (Bolliger & Martin, 2018).

3.4.1. The Validity of the Data

The questionnaire, including its three parts, was sent to expert EFL teachers who work at the English Language Department at Taif University. According to experts' comments, changes were made to ensure that the questionnaire answers the research questions and achieves the research's objectives.

3.4.2. The Reliability of the Data

A pilot analysis of 50 respondents' replies to the tool was conducted with the survey sample. The features of respondents were identical to those of the study sample, but they were excluded from the actual sample. The study looked at the reliability data and discovered that Cronbach's alpha was 0.967, as shown in Table 1, which is a very high value. Moreover, fundamental analysis was performed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25, to investigate the data's distribution and normality. Normality (i.e., the assumption that variables are normally distributed) can be measured using graphical or statistical approaches. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), kurtosis and Skewness were employed to assess the data normality in the current study. Most of the items had Skewness and Kurtosis values above the -2.58 and +2.58 thresholds, demonstrating that the data was not normally distributed as required by Hair et al. (2014). The kurtosis and Skewness coefficients of the data are -0.197 and -0.113, respectively, indicating that the data met the cut-off value of multivariate normalcy distribution.

Table 1 :*Cronbach`s alpha*

Factors	Cronbach`s alpha
Skill engagement	0.915
Emotional engagement	0.866
Participation	0.885
Performance Engagement	0.886
Part 3 (Strategies)	0.927

3.5. Data Collection Procedures

A random sample was used to collect the data. The EFL students from Taif University were requested to participate in the study between March and May 2022. All participants were given an electronic questionnaire by email to complete the form, and participants were required to sign a consent form (Appendix B).

3.6. Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data from the questionnaire was statistically analyzed using the SPSS, version 25. The study variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale on the questionnaire. The statistical analysis measured the differences between Saudi EFL male and female university students' engagement. In addition, it was determined the level of engagement regarding the four critical engagement dimensions (Handelsman et al., 2005). the effective engagement strategy based on students' perceptions was explored using descriptive statistics (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). The descriptive statistics were based on the constructs of measurement of central tendency (Mean), measurement of dispersion (standard deviation), and percentage to investigate the data characteristics of the variables. In addition, independent T-tests were used to represent the variations between the mean of the study sample's responses. The means of these scores that fell between 1-2.33 indicated a negative attitude (low), the means that fell between 2.34-3.67 indicated no opinion (moderate), and the means that fell between 3.68-5 indicated a positive attitude (high). All descriptive analyses of the questionnaire data were conducted using these interpretations.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The essential objective of this project questionnaire's analysis is to gather the respondents' general opinions, perceptions, preferences, and beliefs regarding the engagement of Male and Female EFL students in Online classes. The SPSS, version 25, was utilized to analyze the data. In addition, independent T-tests were used to represent the variations of the participants' responses. The significance was set at 0.05. As a result, any p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

According to Frequency and Percentage of Gender in Table 2 below, 87 male students and 110 female students participated.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Gender (N=197)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	87	44.2%
Female	110	55.8%
Total	197	100%

4.1.The Level of Student Engagement

The mean score and standard deviation of the participants were used to gauge how engaged male and female EFL students were in their English online classes. According to Table 3 below, which shows the mean and standard deviation for each engagement factor, Taif University's male EFL students generally showed high levels of "Agree" involvement in their English online classes (Mean = 4.14, SD = 0.728). Furthermore, it was discovered that female EFL students' engagement was also at a high level of "Strongly Agree" (Mean = 4.29, SD = 0.553). The outcomes demonstrated a high degree of engagement among EFL students in online courses. Performance involvement came in first place with a score of "Strongly Agree" (Mean = 4.42, SD = 0.654). (Mean = 4.26, SD = 0.664), "Skills engagement" came in second, indicated as "Strongly Agree;" "Emotional engagement" was ranked third (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.724), indicated as "Agree," and "Participation/interaction engagement" was ranked fourth (Mean = 4.10, SD = 0.753), indicated as "Agree."

Table 3 :Descriptive data for the student engagement factors

Factors	Mean	SD
Skill engagement	4.26	0.664
Emotional engagement	4.19	0.724
Participation	4.10	0.753
Performance Engagement	4.42	0.654
Part 3 (Strategies)	4.18	0.690

Skills Engagement. The findings observed that skills engagement in English classes among Male and Female EFL students was generally at the "Strongly Agree" level, as shown in Table 4. This demonstrated that the students were very engaged and involved in the EFL courses they received online (Mean = 4.26, SD = 0.664). "Exerting effort" was indicated as "Strongly Agree" and ranked first (Mean = 4.36, SD = 0.767); "Completing all of the assignments" was likewise indicated as "Strongly Agree" and ranked second (Mean = 4.33, SD = 0.844). In contrast, "Reviewing lesson materials between classes to ensure understanding." was ranked the least (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.970), indicated as "Agree."

Table 4 :Descriptive data for the students' skills engagement

N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Strongly Agree + Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree + Disagree
					Total %		
1	Ensuring that you regularly study	197	4.23	0.787	83.25	14.21	2.54
2	Exerting effort	197	4.36	0.767	88.32	8.63	3.05
3	Completing all of the assignments	197	4.33	0.844	86.29	9.14	4.57
4	Following the readings	197	4.21	0.841	80.21	16.24	3.55
5	Reviewing lesson materials between classes to ensure understanding.	197	4.12	0.970	78.17	14.21	7.61
6	Having organization	197	4.26	0.832	82.23	14.22	3.55
7	Keeping accurate notes in class	197	4.26	0.936	81.22	12.69	6.09
8	Paying attention in class	197	4.28	0.856	83.25	12.69	4.06
9	Attending class regularly	197	4.28	0.880	83.76	11.68	4.57

Note. 1.00- 2.33: Low; 2.34-3.67: Moderate; 3.68-5.00: High. (Low = below average, moderate = average, high = above average)

Emotional Engagement. Table 5 revealed that the students were emotionally involved in their online classes, as seen by their positive responses to these statements on the scale. The highest degree of involvement was "Really desiring to understand the material" (Mean = 4.40, SD = 0.753), with a level of engagement of "Strongly Agree" "Finding ways to make the course information relevant to my life" was ranked second (Mean = 4.23, SD = 0.847), with a "Strongly Agree" level of engagement.

Table 5 : *Descriptive data for the students' emotional engagement*

N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Strongly Agree + Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree + Disagree
					Total %		
10	Making an effort to apply the subject to my life	197	4.23	0.847	82.23	13.20	4.57
11	Using what I learned in class in real life	197	4.16	0.943	79.19	14.72	6.09
12	Trying to come up with ways to make the course interesting to me	197	4.23	0.873	83.25	10.66	6.09
13	Reflecting on the course in between class sessions	197	3.95	1.046	73.10	14.21	12.69
14	Genuinely wanting to learn the information	197	4.40	0.753	85.79	13.20	1.02

Note. 1.00- 2.33: Low; 2.34-3.67: Moderate; 3.68-5.00: High. (Low = below average, moderate = average, high = above average)

Participation/Interaction Engagement. As stated in Table 6, the overall degree of participation/interaction engagement in English classes was "Agree" (Mean = 4.10, SD = 0.753). The following elements elicited responses from the students: "Assisting other pupils"

came first (Mean = 4.31, SD = 0.770), with a "Strongly Agree" level of participation. "Enjoying in class" came in second (Mean = 4.16, SD = 0.892), with a "Agree" level of involvement, and "Participating actively in small group discussions" came in third (Mean = 4.14, SD = 0.942), with a "Agree" level of engagement.

Table 6 :*Descriptive data for the students' participation/interaction engagement*

N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Strongly Agree + Agree	Total % Neutral	Strongly Disagree + Disagree
15	Raising up my hand in class	197	4.13	0.886	78.17	16.75	5.08
16	Asking questions when I do not understand the teacher	197	3.95	1.061	68.53	21.83	9.64
17	Enjoying in class	197	4.16	0.892	79.70	16.24	4.06
18	Actively taking part in conversations in small groups	197	4.14	0.942	78.68	13.71	7.61
19	Consulting the instructor to study homework, tests, or to ask questions	197	3.92	1.083	71.07	16.75	12.18
20	Assisting other pupils	197	4.31	0.770	86.29	11.17	2.54

Note. 1.00- 2.33: Low; 2.34-3.67: Moderate; 3.68-5.00: High. (Low = below average, moderate = average, high = above average)

Performance Engagement. In Table 7, it can be observed that male and female EFL students' performance participation in English classes was generally "Strongly Agree" (Mean = 4.42, SD = 0.654). The students agreed on the following points the most: "Achieving a high grade" was ranked first (Mean = 4.45, SD = 0.658), with a level of engagement indicated as "Strongly Agree, " "Believing in my ability to learn and do well in class" was ranked second (Mean = 4.41, SD = 0.713), with a level of engagement indicated as "Strongly Agree" and "Doing well on tests" was ranked third (Mean = 4.39, SD = 0. 0.798), with a level of engagement indicated as "Strongly Agree".

Table 7 :*Descriptive data for the students' performance engagement*

N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Strongly Agree + Agree	Total % Neutral	Strongly Disagree + Disagree
21	Achieving a high grade	197	4.45	0.658	90.86	9.14	0.00
22	Achieving success in tests	197	4.39	0.798	86.29	10.66	3.05
23	Believing in my ability to learn and do well in class	197	4.41	0.713	88.83	10.15	1.02

Note. 1.00- 2.33: Low; 2.34-3.67: Moderate; 3.68-5.00: High. (Low = below average, moderate = average, high = above average)

The Differences among Male and Female Regarding Engagement Dimensions. The study conducted data analysis using an independent t-test to determine the differences between males' and females' engagement in English online classes. The results are shown in Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11.

Table 8:*Two independent t-tests for Skills engagement*

	Part	Mean	SD	T value	Sig.
Gender	male	4.16	0.734	1.794	0.074
	female	4.33	0.595		

Table 9 :*Two independent t-tests for Emotional engagement*

	Part	Mean	SD	T value	Sig.
Gender	male	4.12	0.772	1.204	0.230
	female	4.25	0.683		

Table 10:*Two independent t-tests for Participation*

	Part	Mean	SD	T value	Sig.
Gender	male	4.07	0.812	0.584	0.560
	female	4.13	0.706		

As shown above, in Tables 8,9,10, there is no significant difference between Male and Female students in Skill Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Participation\Interaction Engagement. However, in Performance Engagement, there is a significant difference between male students (Mean= 4.23, SD=0.740) and female students (Mean=4.56, SD= 0.538) as shown in Table 11 below. Female students showed a higher performance engagement than male students. Overall, Male and Female EFL students at Taif University have a high level of engagement because the Mean is higher than 4: Skill Engagement for Male, (Mean= 4.16, SD=0.734), Skill Engagement for Female, (Mean= 4.33, SD=0.595), Emotional Engagement for Male, (Mean= 4.12, SD=0.772), Emotional Engagement for Female, Mean= 4.25, SD=0.683).

Table 11:*Two independent t-tests for Performance Engagement*

	Part	Mean	SD	T value	Sig.
Gender	male	4.23	0.740	3.587	0.000
	female	4.56	0.538		

4.2.EFL Students Feeling toward Their Engagement

The participants were subjected to a descriptive percentage analysis to assess "How EFL students feel about their participation in Online English classes." The majority of students (89.3%) were "satisfied" with their English class experience, while only a few (10.7%) were "not satisfied" (Table 12). Most students expressed confidence about their online learning

experience, showing their interest in the subject. These data were then subjected to more analysis.

Table 12 :_Descriptive data for students' feelings about their online learning experience._

Variables	Categories	N	%
How do you feel about attending English language classes through the online environment?	Satisfied	176	89.3 %
	Not Satisfied	21	10.7 %

The Relationship between Students' Engagement and Their Feelings. The independent t-test in table 13 below showed that the means differed since the p-value=0.00 was less than the significance level. According to the respondents' descriptive data, 84.8 % of students used the Blackboard enrichments and connections. By putting the course information into practice and accessing the enrichments independently, the students grew more self-sufficient, especially in an online context. According to Handelsman et al. (2005), the replies to this questionnaire demonstrate the various levels of students' engagement in a class setting. These statistics showed that the students actively participated in their online English sessions. Because of their involvement, they assessed their experience as pleasant. In addition, the findings revealed that the questionnaire has positively correlated with the question about students' feelings, **"How do you feel about attending English language classes through the online environment?"** since the p-value is less than the level of significance (see Table 14).

Table 13 :_Relationship between the students' engagement and their feelings about their experience of attending online English classes._

Variables		Mean	SD	T value	Sig.
Skill engagement	Satisfied	4.33	0.626	4.714	0.000**
	Not satisfied	3.65	0.664		
Emotional engagement	Satisfied	4.27	0.701	4.209	0.000**
	Not satisfied	3.59	0.637		
Participation	Satisfied	4.18	0.701	4.668	0.000**
	Not satisfied	3.41	0.841		
Performance engagement	Satisfied	4.48	0.621	3.928	0.000**
	Not satisfied	3.90	0.716		

Table 14 :_Correlation matrix between students' feelings and the questionnaire's parts_

	Part	Person correlation	Sig.
How do you feel about attending English language classes through an online environment?	Part 2 (feelings and behaviors)	0.334	0.000**
	Part 3 (strategies)	0.331	0.000**

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

4.3.Most Valuable Strategies in Enhancing Engagement

Descriptive statistics on different statements were conducted on the participants to determine the most valuable strategies for enhancing engagement from students' perceptions. Participants believed that strategies for engaging online students were essential since the mean and standard deviation of each strategy were higher than 4, as indicated in Table 15. Some engagement strategies were more effective to some students than others. Collaborative activities were scored as "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" by 89.34 % (Mean=4.34, SD=0.789). Over 80% of the students who took part in the study agreed or strongly agreed that moderating discussions was a great technique. Icebreakers, collaborative work, peer presentations, and peer review of assignments were all seen as beneficial. On the subscale, students introducing themselves through an icebreaker talk were deemed to be the least necessary (Mean=4.07, SD=0.901). The student-student subscale comprised three items with a mean score of 4.00 or higher (see Table 15). Three items of student-teacher had mean scores above 4.00 (Table 15). The item with the lowest mean score was "The teacher creates short videos to increase instructor presence in the course" (Mean=4.10, SD=0.926). Regular announcements or email reminders (81.73%) and "The teacher employs numerous elements in synchronous sessions to communicate with students" (80.20 %) were scored as "Agree" or "Strongly" Agree by the overwhelming majority. A large majority of participants (85.28 %) "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that relevant materials should be chosen and that students should be given the opportunity to reflect on important aspects of the course (84.26 %). Students should also work on realistic circumstances to apply what they have learned (80.71 %). The provision of self-tests for learners received the lowest rating (Mean=4.15, SD=0.946). The mean of four items on the students-content subscale was higher than 4.00. (Table 15).

Table 15;*Descriptive Statistics for Part 3 (The Engagement strategies)*

N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Strongly Agree + Agree	Total % Neutral	Strongly Disagree + Disagree
1	Students introducing themselves using an icebreaker discussion	197	4.07	0.901	77.66	17.26	5.08
2	Discussions are being moderated by students.	197	4.13	0.905	80.71	13.71	5.58
3	In synchronous sessions, the teacher engages with the class using a variety of features (such as polls, emoticons, a whiteboard, and text).	197	4.16	0.937	80.20	12.69	7.11
4	To be more visible in the class, the teacher makes brief movies.	197	4.10	0.926	75.63	18.27	6.10
5	Regular announcements or email reminders are sent out by the teacher.	197	4.23	0.835	81.73	15.23	3.05
6	Students do case studies, projects, and reports in groups while collaborating online with online communication tools.	197	4.34	0.789	89.34	7.61	3.05

7	Students do searches for and choose appropriate data (such as articles)	197	4.25	0.867	85.28	9.64	5.08
8	Giving students the chance to reflect on key course concepts (such as the use of communication technologies and their own learning).	197	4.22	0.850	84.26	10.66	5.08
9	Students are putting their knowledge to use through case studies, reports, research papers, and presentations, among other realistic circumstances.	197	4.13	0.920	80.71	12.18	7.11
10	Students use self-tests to evaluate their comprehension of the topic.	197	4.15	0.946	80.20	13.71	6.09

Note. 1.00- 2.33: Low; 2.34-3.67: Moderate; 3.68-5.00: High. (Low = below average, moderate = average, high = above average)

Moreover, as shown in Table 16, there is no significant difference in Male and Female EFL students' responses in rating the most valuable engagement strategy from their perceptions; Male (Mean=4.16, SD=0.731), and Female (Mean=4.19, SD=0.658).

Table 16:*Two independent t-tests for part 3 (Strategies).*

	Part	Mean	SD	T value	Sig.
Gender	male	4.16	0.731	0.242	0.809
	female	4.19	0.658		

In conclusion, the quantitative data revealed that university students' engagement of both genders, Saudi males and females, is approximately the same in all engagement dimensions except the performance engagement. Significantly, females' performance is more than males in online classes. Moreover, the result showed that both genders rated the student-student strategy as most effective interaction technique from their perspectives.

5. 4.5. DISCUSSION

There were no differences in answers between males and females regarding skill engagement, emotional engagement, and participation/interaction engagement; however, performance engagement differed between males and females. The findings revealed that the female students show more performance engagement than the male students. Oraif's and Elya's (2021) research has supported this finding because they found that female students have a high level of performance engagement than other engagement dimensions.

Studying online, as opposed to traditional instruction, can improve the dimensions of engagement examined in this study in various ways. Traditional methods frequently offer teachers much power over their students; as a result, students have been provided insufficient opportunities to develop and express themselves. Furthermore, most class resources appeared to be based on a teacher-delivery-teacher-centred strategy in which students were primarily spoon-fed knowledge (Lassoued et al., 2020). Traditional classroom designs lead to some of these problems.

Graham (2014) examined how students at a British university used social media to learn outside of the class. The survey results revealed that students were more engaged when using social media outside the class. In the same vein, in Rose et al. (2019) research, an organic

chemistry synthesis problem set was given to students. Potential solution methods and tactics were captured on video and emailed to them. Student performance improved significantly after introducing the synthesis videos, with an average increase of 13%. Similarly, in a study by Al-Bogami and Elyas (2020), iPad applications improved students' engagement in EFL classes compared to traditional teaching methods, leading to more active classroom learning.

Students' satisfaction and engagement were found to be positively correlated. A total of 89.3% of the students were satisfied with attending English language classes in the online environment, while the remaining 10.7% were not satisfied. EFL students at Taif University revealed that they were happy being taught in an online context. These findings go against Moawad's (2020) research found that the students were incredibly stressed and anxious with shifting to online education.

The present study's findings agree with those of Oraif and Elyas (2021), who explored students' feelings towards online classes regarding engagement dimensions. Oraif and Elyas (2021) focused on the engagement of female high school students in Jeddah who took online courses using the "Madrasati" platform. They found that the students were satisfied with receiving instructions online. Therefore, Almaghaslah and Alsayari (2020) found that 57.6% of academic members strongly agreed or agreed that giving sessions online was more convenience and flexible.

Students rated themselves as working collaboratively, utilizing online communication as the most crucial student-student engagement technique. Researchers discovered that some students rely more on their classmates and prefer to work collectively rather than ask their teachers questions (Beck, 2010). This finding contrasts with Martin and Bolliger's (2018) research which discovered that the students prefer the student-teacher strategies as the most effective interaction technique. However, regarding the present study's findings, the high rate of student-teacher interaction is for teachers to send emails or post updates or reminders regularly. Ko and Rossen (2010) found that sending email announcements using the learning management system was advantageous. These results align with Martin and Bolliger's (2018) finding that the most effective student-teacher engagement technique is "teachers send emails or post updates".

The essential student–content engagement technique, according to the participants, is students selecting appropriate materials. Researchers have emphasized the necessity of offering course materials that allow students to discover facts, practice, perfect their skills, and expand their knowledge (Stavredes & Herder, 2014). When students select materials that suit them, they become more involved. "Students having an opportunity to reflect on important elements" was rated the second highest as the most effective student content strategy. Colley et al. (2012) took a similarly positive outlook regarding the power of reflection. However, the findings show no differences between males and females rating the most valuable engagement strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study draws attention to the students' engagement in online classes and the most valuable strategies to enhance this engagement. According to this study's findings, students' satisfaction and engagement are critical for establishing their learning experiences. This result supports the view that students' feelings significantly affect their engagement.

For tertiary education, online or distance learning has become a need. It is believed that learning will change completely, becoming more dynamic, amusing, and engaging. Teachers and students must embrace these new shifts with open arms and minds.

6.1. Pedagogical Implications

In both traditional and online classes, teachers can utilize these data to select and combine different strategies to increase student engagement and learning. The research's conclusions can help instructional designers create and implement online courses and support their partnerships with online instructors who want to convert traditional classrooms into online learning environments.

6.2. Limitations

There are some methodological limitations in the present study:

1. The sample was exclusively Male and Female EFL students, including 197 cases.
2. All the data were self-reported.
3. All the participants are from Taif University due to the short time for data collection.

6.3. Recommendations

Future research may concentrate on engagement tactics for online and mixed learning to identify distinctions between learning environments. Researchers may be better able to gauge the impact and acceptance of online education if they conduct more in-depth interviews with open-ended or semi-structured questions. The similar study should be carried out on young pupils attending international, private, or public schools in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it would be beneficial to conduct a statistical analysis of the connection between student engagement and academic results.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A: The Characteristics of the Participants

Table A: *Characteristics of the participants*

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
Under 20	71	36.04%	36.04%
20-24	66	33.50%	69.54%
24-26	45	22.84%	92.38%
Above 26	15	7.62%	100%
Total	197	100%	

Appendix B: The Consent Form

You are gladly invited to take part in a brief survey comprised of this online questionnaire.

It has around 33 elements and will take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire is developed to evaluate your attitude toward online learning as well as your engagement in online English courses. You have the choice to withdraw the survey at any time. The information you submit will be used solely for the purposes of this research and will have no impact on your grades. Every attempt will be taken to keep the information gathered private.

Your permission to participate in this survey would be much appreciated, and you will be making an important contribution to my study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

For further information, please contact the researcher at any time at: ma1ak7@outlook.sa.

Consent statement:

I hereby consent to participate in this survey.

(Agree - Do not agree)

Appendix C: The Arabic Consent Form and Questionnaire

نموذج الموافقة بالعربية:

مدعو للانضمام طوعية لدراسة بحثية.

هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى تقييم موقف الطلاب والطالبات تجاه التعلم عبر الإنترنت بما في ذلك من تفاعل ومشاركات تقتضيها العملية التعليمية. تحتوي الاستبانة على ٣٣ سؤالاً وتستغرق قرابة ١٥ دقيقة.

إن مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة طوعية ولك الحق التام في عدم قبول تعبئه الاستبانة أو الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء الأسباب. ستبقى استجابتك للاستبانة سرية ولن تستخدم إلا للأغراض التعليمية لهذا البحث.

ستكون موافقتك على المشاركة في هذا الاستطلاع موضع تقدير كبير، وستقدم مساهمة مهمة في دراستي. لمزيد من المعلومات يرجى التواصل مع الباحث في أي وقت على: ma1ak7@outlook.sa

كل ما يتوجب فعله لملء الاستبانة هو اختيار (موافق أو غير موافق). تكرماً ما أحيطك لتعبئة هذه الاستبانة يعتبر إقرار مك بالموافقة على المشاركة في هذا البحث

الاستبانة باللغة العربية:

				القسم الأول: البيانات الأساسية
د. الرابعة	ج. الثالثة	ب. الثانية	أ. الأولى	١. السنة الدراسية في الجامعة
د. أكبر من ٢٦	ج. ٢٤-٢٦	ب. ٢٠-٢٣	أ. أقل من ٢٠	٢. العمر
	ب. لا		أ. نعم	٣. هل تستخدم الإثراءات والروابط المتاحة لمواد اللغة الإنجليزية على منصة "Blackboard" (الاثراءات هي الوسائط والبرامج والمصادر المختلفة والجاذبة والتي تعمل على تحسين المستوى التعليمي وفهم للدروس)
	ب. لا		أ. نعم	٤. هل تعتمد فقط على هذه الإثراءات والروابط لتطوير مهاراتك في اللغة الإنجليزية

5. ما هو مدى رضاك حيال حضور دروس اللغة الإنجليزية\ة من خلال الإنترنت.	أ. راضٍ ب. غير راضٍ

القسم الثاني:

غير موافق بشدة	غير موافق	محايد	موافق	موافق بشدة	إلى أي مدى تصف العبارات التالية سلوكك ومشاعرك أثناء الدراسة لمادة اللغة الإنجليزية عبر الإنترنت:
					6. الحرص على الدراسة بشكل منتظم
					7. بذل الجهد
					8. القيام بجميع مشاكل الواجبات المنزلية
					9. مواكبة المقروء
					10. مراجعة ملاحظات الدرس بين الفصول الدراسية للتأكد من فهمي للمادة
					11. البقاء منظماً
					12. كتابة ملاحظات جيدة في الفصل الافتراضي
					13. الاستماع بعناية في الفصل الافتراضي
					14. الحضور للفصل الافتراضي يومياً
					15. إيجاد طرق لجعل مفاهيم المادة ذات صلة بحياتي
					16. تطبيق مفاهيم المادة على حياتي
					17. إيجاد طرق لجعل المادة ممتعة بالنسبة لي
					18. التفكير في المادة بين الفصول الدراسية
					19. أرغب حقًا في تعلم المادة
					20. ارفع يدي في الفصل الافتراضي
					21. اطرح الأسئلة عندما لا أفهم الأستاذ\ة
					22. الاستماع في الحصة الدراسية
					23. المشاركة بنشاط في المناقشات الصغيرة بين التلاميذ
					24. مراسلة الأستاذ\ة خلال ساعات فراغها لمراجعة الواجبات أو الاختبارات، أو لطرح الأسئلة
					25. مساعدة زملائك\ زميلاتك
					26. الحصول على درجة جيدة
					27. الأداء الممتاز في الاختبارات
					28. واثقًا من قدرتي على التعلم والقيام بعمل جيد في الفصل

القسم الثالث

إلى أي مدى تحدد العبارات التالية أهم الاستراتيجيات في تعزيز مشاركتك؟

1. يقدم الطلاب أنفسهم باستخدام مناقشة كسر الجليد
2. الطلاب يديرون المناقشات
3. يستخدم **المعلم\ة** مميزات الفصول الافتراضية كاللوحة والرموز التعبيرية واستطلاع الرأي
4. ينشئ المعلم\ة مقاطع فيديو وصوتية لزيادة التفاعل
5. ينشر المعلم\ة إعلانات منتظمة عبر البريد الإلكتروني وBlackboard

6. الطلاب يتعاونون باستخدام أدوات الاتصال عبر الإنترنت لإكمال المشاريع والتقارير وما إلى ذلك.

7. بحث الطلاب عن المواد المناسبة ويختارونها (على سبيل المثال، المقالات، والكتب) على أساس اهتماماتهم.

8. للطلاب فرصة للتفكير في العناصر الهامة من المادة (على سبيل المثال، استخدام أدوات الاتصال وتعلمها)

9. الطلاب يعملون باستمرار على سيناريوهات واقعية لتطبيق المحتوى (مثل دراسات الحالة والتقارير والأوراق البحثية والعروض التقديمية.)

Appendix D: The English Questionnaire

Part 1

1. Year in University:	a) Year 1	b) Year 2	c) Year 3	d) Year 4
1. Age:	a) Less than 20 years	b) 20-23	c) 24-26	d) More than 26
2. Gender:	a) Male		b) Female	
3. 3. Do you utilize the links and enrichments offered for the English course on the "Blackboard" platform?	a) Yes		b) No	
4. 4. Do you simply rely on these links to improve your command of the English language?	a) Yes		b) No	
5. 5. How do you feel about taking English classes online?	a) Satisfied		b) Dissatisfied	

Part 2

How accurately characterize your actions and emotions when studying online for your English course? Please choose the option on the scale that most accurately reflects your feelings and actions:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Ensuring that you regularly study					
2. Exerting effort					
3. Completing all of the assignments					
4. Following the readings					
5. Reviewing lesson materials between classes to ensure understanding.					
6. Having organization					

7. Keeping accurate notes in class

8. Paying attention in class

9. Attending class regularly

10. Making an effort to apply the subject to my life

11. Using what I learned in class in real life

12. Trying to come up with ways to make the course interesting to me

13. Reflecting about the course in between class sessions

14. Genuinely wanting to learn the information

15. Raising up my hand in class

16. Asking questions when I don't understand the teacher

17. Enjoying in class

18. Actively taking part in conversations in small groups

19. Consulting the instructor to study homework, tests, or to ask questions

20. Assisting other pupils

21. Achieving a high grade

22. Achieving success in tests

23. Believing in my ability to learn and do well in class

Part 3:					
How well do the following statements describe the key strategies for boosting your engagement? Please choose the option on the scale that most accurately reflects your feelings and actions:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Students participating in an icebreaker conversation to introduce themselves.					
2. Discussions are being moderated by students.					
3. In synchronous sessions, the teacher engages with the class using a variety of features (such as polls, emoticons, a whiteboard, and text).					
4. To be more visible in the class, the teacher makes brief movies.					

5. Regular announcements or email reminders are sent out by the teacher.

6. Students do case studies, projects, and reports in groups while collaborating online with online communication tools.

7. Students searching for and select applicable materials (e.g., articles, and books) based on their interests.

8. Giving students the chance to reflect on key course concepts (such as the use of communication technologies and their own learning).

9. Students are putting their knowledge to use through case studies, reports, research papers, and presentations, among other realistic circumstances.