EFL Students' Perspectives on Activities Designed for Asynchronous Discussion Forums: Transformative Practices

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Article Info	Abstract
	The current study aimed to examine the perspectives of EFL students regarding the types of pedagogical activities they found engaging while using asynchronous discussion forums (ADF), as well as the practices of educators in encouraging the participation of their students. An interview with ten university students who were enrolled in an English language methodology course was used to construct data. The results of the study revealed that university students preferred open-ended activities to knowledge-based tasks such as quizzes or direct tasks. They found open-ended activities to be more challenging and engaging. The results also unveiled that the participants of the study expressed appreciation for tutors who provided clear instructions for tasks uploaded on the online discussion forum. They also valued the tutors who motivated them and offered constructive feedback. These factors were crucial in enhancing students' engagement and participation in ADF. Based on these results, the study recommends empowering tutors with the skills and knowledge necessary to design engaging assignments that align with students' expectations and provide them with direct and constructive feedback that would enhance ensuing research.

Introduction

Decades ago, universities sought to integrate education with technology to enhance the quality of graduates' learning experience, promote learning autonomy, and foster high-level thinking (Al-husban, 2020; Al-husban and Tawalbeh, 2023). As a result, terms such as online learning, blended learning, and open learning became integral parts of universities' strategic plans to incorporate technology into the learning process. Additionally, open learning and blended learning have served as solutions for vulnerable groups, such as refugees, in their pursuit of higher education, as they can study at any time and from any location using a learning management system (LMS) (Al-husban and Shorman, 2020).

Al-Hamed (2022) emphasized that universities should prioritize leveraging technology to create interactive learning environments and enhance the teaching –learning process by infusing technology with learning thereby creating an interactive learning environment. Consequently, blended or online learning, based on interactivity, could be a solution to address the issue of limited resources. Moreover, this pattern of learning transcends geographical, cultural, and temporal barriers between learners and tutors. Thus, open learning, or blended learning

can be considered viable approaches to education, especially in pandemic circumstances.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions have been compelled to respond effectively to the challenges it poses. In tandem with the rapid spread of the virus, numerous countries have promptly implemented measures to mitigate its impact on the education sector. A notable response has been the adoption of online home schooling, where interactive applications, platforms, televisions, and YouTube have played a pivotal role (Bundock et al., 2023; Husban & Yusef, 2022; Tümen Akyıldız, 2020). UNESCO (2020) has made substantial efforts to encourage affected nations to prioritize the alleviation of the pandemic's effects on education and uphold the right to education during this critical period. This call by UNESCO aligns with the objectives of the fourth sustainable development goal, which emphasize on the quality of education and ensuring inclusivity. Consequently, UNESCO has approached member states, urging them to fortify their educational systems by expanding distance learning and blended learning to foster resilience, accessibility, and innovation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought several prevailing learning patterns to the forefront, significantly accelerating their widespread adoption at an unprecedented pace. This global crisis expedited progress that would have otherwise taken decades, achieving in less than two years what might have been accomplished over a much longer timeframe. Concurrently, the pandemic compelled educators to reassess instructional approaches to optimize teaching outcomes, leading less technologically inclined universities to embrace online or hybrid education. The global community is striving to transition to a post-COVID-19 era and extract valuable lessons learned during this unprecedented pandemic, particularly in the realm of education. According to the United Nations (2020), the crisis has sparked innovation within the education sector, compelling stakeholders to ensure the continuity of education through the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in various contexts. This guidance has presented higher education institutions, such as universities, with an opportunity to adopt flexible learning modalities. While some universities had already incorporated online learning into their educational policies, such as the Arab Open University, others had yet to fully explore its potential.

Online learning necessitates the use of (LMS), which facilitates communication between instructors and students while delivering instructional content in either synchronous or asynchronous modes. It can be asserted that online learning extends beyond a mere augmentation of PowerPoint presentations with audio. Instead, it demands comprehensive training, content adaptation to the chosen platform, ensuring accessibility and equity, and, above all, enhancing student engagement and communication. As stated by Araka et al. (2021), the use of LMS should focus on making students active participants and able to produce knowledge. This requires tutors who not only deliver learning resources to learners but also design an interactive learning environment.

The latter aspect proves particularly challenging, as instructors are not solely tasked with conducting online tutorials but are also responsible for actively involving students and encouraging their participation in assigned tasks. As a result, numerous universities have prioritized a shift toward high-quality online learning and the associated activities. This necessitates the identification of effective practices and strategies to meet the demands of the new educational landscape and provide adequate support to students (Khan, 2021).

Undoubtedly, there is a pressing need to continue the development of online learning as a mode of educational delivery, and higher education institutions should actively promote and support innovative approaches in this realm. This perspective is supported by scholars who argue that the pandemic has merely amplified the necessity for robust online learning initiatives, which align with the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution (Ashour et al., 2021). In light of these considerations, it is imperative for the transition towards online learning to become strategic and systematic in order to effectively address emergencies. This entails a focus on actively engaging students in the online learning process. Furthermore, conducting critical analyses of case studies that examine student engagement in online learning becomes essential (Ashour et al., 2021; Al-husban, 2020). This viewpoint is reinforced by Comer and Lenaghan (2013), who argue that asynchronous discussion forums in online learning platforms play a pivotal role in facilitating student learning and the development of their skills and abilities.

Asynchronous discussion forums have emerged as a prominent instructional tool in higher education, particularly among universities that have embraced online learning as a mode of instruction (Al-husban, 2020). Empirical research supports the efficacy of online learning in engaging students in remote knowledge construction. Loncar (2014), drawing upon the principles of social constructivism theory, posits that this pedagogical approach is in line with the demands imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated the widespread adoption of online delivery methods in higher education.

The primary purpose of asynchronous discussion forums is to cultivate connectivity among students and facilitate meaningful interaction with their instructors. By fostering collaborative and cooperative learning experiences, these forums aim to stimulate active knowledge construction. However, one of the significant pedagogical challenges that educators faced during the past two years of the pandemic was the limited extent of student engagement observed in online instructional practices. In some instances, instructors appeared to solely disseminate course materials, placing emphasis on completing assignments and examinations without fostering substantial pedagogical engagement.

Samawi and Al-kreimeen (2022) underscored the inherent concerns surrounding online learning, particularly in the post-pandemic landscape. A focal point of their analysis is the pressing issue of student active engagement. The authors proffered strategic measures aimed at fostering meaningful engagement amidst asynchronous distance learning. These measures encompassed the assignment of online projects to students, the provision of timely feedback by tutors, and the positing of intellectually stimulating queries designed to sustain students' cognitive involvement with the course material. Correspondingly, Gantner and Kimbrel (2022) acknowledged the formidable challenge confronting university tutors in terms of engendering student engagement within asynchronous instruction.

The authors identify the predicament of tutors who find themselves disheartened by students' tendency to evince scant attention towards the content or activities disseminated via (LMS). Termed the behavior of ruthlessly efficient online learners, this phenomenon denotes students who minimally engage with the vital course content despite acknowledging its significance. These perspectives collectively substantiate the notion that activities facilitated through the LMS, including asynchronous discussion forums (ADF), ought to constitute an

indispensable facet of the pedagogical process. Nonetheless, the successful integration of online synchronous and asynchronous learning necessitates the incorporation of certain practices and strategies aimed at ensuring students' active participation and sustained engagement.

Hasani et al. (2021) similarly underscored the immense potential inherent in asynchronous discussion forums as an invaluable instrument for students to deliberate, introspect, and interact with their peers. Realizing this potential hinges upon the cultivation of active participation, as well as the fostering of a climate wherein students are encouraged to challenge prevailing ideas. Effectively harnessing these strategies is indispensable for attaining the desired educational outcomes associated with deploying this particular mode of instruction.

Mokoena (2013) posits that asynchronous discussion forums hold promise in facilitating active student participation, particularly in the realm of higher-order critical thinking. Similarly, the integration of asynchronous discussion forums as a pedagogical tool in recent years has established its significance as an extension of a learning approach that fosters dialogue, reflection, knowledge construction, and self-assessment. However, despite the potential benefits, empirical investigations such as Husband (2020) and Mokoena (2013) have unearthed a dissonance between the expected and actual levels of student engagement in these forums. Conversely, Vijayavalsalan (2018) has identified the effective role played by asynchronous discussion forums in promoting the development of both social and linguistic knowledge, thereby enriching students' overall learning experience.

Asynchronous discussion forums can become powerful tools when students are encouraged to actively engage with their peers, and tutors possess an understanding of effective practices and activities that promote student engagement. Therefore, it is crucial to ascertain students' opinions on these discussion forums, as well as identify the types of activities that motivate them to participate actively in the tasks posted. Additionally, understanding the practices implemented by tutors that serve to motivate students and encourage their involvement in activities on the (LMS) is equally important. This study aims to explore students' perspectives on discussion forums, identify the activities that enhance their participation, and shed light on the practices employed by their tutors that foster engagement on the LMS.

The Arab Open University has been at the forefront of this trend since its early days of establishment, incorporating (LMS) that offers online learning services to its students. Among the features of this service is the discussion forum, which allows students to engage in discussions on various topics, pose questions, and explore the pedagogical implications of teaching cases, all in the English language. This forum provides a platform for educators and students to interact and contribute regardless of time, location, or geographical constraints. In order to ensure active engagement between educators and students within this pedagogical framework, certain types of tasks and procedures need to be implemented. Consequently, this study aims to address the following questions:

- What are the assignments or tasks that stimulate EFL students to engage in the asynchronous discussion forums from students' point of view?
- What are the tutors' practices that encourage students to engage in issues posted on the discussion forums from students' point of view?

Literatures Review

It can be said that the majority of higher educational institutions rely on (LMS) in order to manage and deliver instructions as well as assessing students' performance. Wenzel and Moreno, J. (2022) interpreted that LMS platforms grant tutors and learners an interactive technological environment to manage learning, upload content and learning resources, and report students' progress towards reaching to the course learning outcomes. However, having LMS does not guarantee that students learn and acquired the desired learning outcomes; that is, tutors should be aware of the tools of LMS, and how to design assignments that engage students to perform them actively and making learning personalized, relevant, and responsive to their needs and circumstances, particularly when utilizing the asynchronous discussion forums (ADF) because it is accessible to all students, and allow them to interact and participate in the tasks assigned by tutors asynchronously.

According to the authors (2020), the integration of asynchronous discussion forums (ADF) in higher education has undergone extensive development, primarily due to their efficacy as a platform for the exchange of experiences, ideas, and knowledge, accommodating the temporal constraints of students. Notably, the concept of ADF predates the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby emphasizing its pre-existing recognition and implementation. In line with this, Ma and Luo (2022) contend that while the pandemic has presented formidable challenges to the global educational landscape, it has also engendered unprecedented opportunities for the pervasive utilization of ADF across diverse academic disciplines, including the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

Loncar et al. (2014) argue that the use of asynchronous discussion forums (ADF) can be effectively grounded in the theory of social constructivism. This promising tool aims to foster cooperative and collaborative learning by facilitating connections between students and their instructors, while also extending classroom activities. In line with this, higher educational institutions have increasingly embraced blended learning models, combining traditional classrooms with ADF (Loncar et al., 2014), thereby becoming a key approach to the advancement of higher education (Hunter, 2018).

In the same context, Ergulec (2019) explored design and facilitation strategies employed by online instructors in a department of educational technology at a large university in the U.S. The researchers used interviews and document analysis to gain insights into these strategies. The findings of the study revealed some distinctions from existing literature regarding the strategies and activities that can be utilized in online asynchronous discussions. The study proposed several strategies that could enhance online discussions, including facilitating online collaborative teams, considering self-regulation strategies, designing a discussion rubric that evaluates cognitive, teaching, and social presence, ensuring an optimal level of instructor presence in the discussion forum, and setting specified time parameters. However, the researchers found that some of these suggestions were not fully implemented in some of the courses examined.

The Arab Open University has been at the top of this trend, implementing a Learning Management System (LMS) that provides online learning services to its students. One notable feature of this service is the inclusion of a

discussion forum, which serves as an extension of traditional learning. Richardson and Ice (2010) suggest that the discussion forum promotes dialogue, knowledge construction, and critical thinking during students' free time. This underscores the significance of ADF, as highlighted by Öztürk (2021), who emphasizes its flexibility in terms of time and space, making it a preferred choice for higher education institutions, especially during and after the pandemic. ADF offers students who face multiple commitments in their professional and personal lives the opportunity to pursue education at their own pace.

However, despite the strengths of ADF, certain limitations exist. These include issues such as a lack of motivation, limited interaction, and the challenge of effectively monitoring and engaging with posts from both instructors and students (Richardson & Ice, 2010). Likewise, Araka et al. (2021) presented the challenges that lessen students' interactivity on the LMS, such as, lack of individualized feedback on student work, lack of instructors' guidance, lack of interaction between students and instructors and peer interaction. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensure the optimal use of ADF in facilitating active participation and learning.

When conducting a comprehensive literature analysis, numerous studies have examined students' perceptions and instructors' practices regarding the implementation of asynchronous discussion forums (ADF). Öztürk (2021) investigated students' experiences with ADF and found that students perceived face-to-face interaction in traditional classes to be superior to interaction on ADF. They also expressed a lack of instant feedback from instructors and a dearth of group work activities to enhance engagement with the tasks. Conversely, Mairing et al. (2021) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of ADF in improving university students' mathematical skills and course outcomes. The findings indicated that ADF was successful in developing students' skills and enhancing their overall performance in the university course. Similarly, Shida et al. (2018) explored university students' perceptions of ADF usage within the (LMS). The results revealed that university students actively and enthusiastically participated in ADF discussions, demonstrating a high level of engagement with the topics being discussed.

Gasell et al. (2022) have elucidated that the efficacy of students' experience in utilizing (LMS), particularly in relation to (ADF) or discussion boards, is contingent upon the quality of online interaction among students and between students and their tutors. The researchers discovered that heightened interaction between students and their tutors, as well as their peers, engenders greater levels of student satisfaction and facilitates enhanced academic attainment. Drawing from these findings, Gasell and colleagues have recommended further investigation into the optimal practices for employing ADF, with a specific focus on the nature of online interaction that fosters student satisfaction, as well as the frequency at which such interactions should occur to yield desired outcomes.

It is evident from the studies that students' experiences and perceptions of ADF usage can vary depending on factors such as the nature of the course, the level of instructor engagement, and the design of the forum itself. These findings shed light on the need for instructors to consider student feedback and employ effective strategies to maximize student engagement and satisfaction when utilizing ADF in educational settings. Hebebci et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive analysis involving professors and students from 13 European countries to

examine the effectiveness of asynchronous online learning. The study revealed that students generally perceived asynchronous distance learning (ADF) to have a moderately positive impact on the learning process. The authors identified formative assessment limitations as a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of asynchronous online learning and its associated tools. Furthermore, the study highlighted the continued significance of asynchronous communication in online education, while emphasizing the growing importance of synchronous teaching methods, such as audio and video conferencing, during the pandemic.

These findings align with the research conducted by Lowenthal et al. (2020), who similarly observed the effectiveness of synchronous discussions in the context of the pandemic. However, the authors also discovered that asynchronous discussions played a vital role in fostering connection and engagement during this period. Students expressed appreciation for the flexibility provided by asynchronous discussions, which allowed them to keep up with their studies, alleviate the pressure of participating in live sessions, and ask questions that could benefit the entire class when addressed by the professor. Moreover, asynchronous discussions proved particularly valuable for facilitating class interactions across different time zones or accommodating individuals with family or work commitments requiring time flexibility.

In an academic context, it is important to acknowledge the research conducted by Hebebci et al. (2020) and Lowenthal et al. (2020), which shed light on the perceptions and experiences of professors and students regarding asynchronous online learning. The findings underscore the moderate positive effect of ADF on the learning process, with formative assessment limitations being a critical determinant of its effectiveness. Moreover, while asynchronous communication remains significant, the pandemic has necessitated a greater reliance on synchronous teaching methods. Nevertheless, asynchronous discussions have proven essential in maintaining connection and engagement, enabling students to navigate various circumstances and time constraints. Overall, these studies contribute valuable insights to the field of online education and emphasize the multifaceted nature of effective instructional approaches during challenging times.

In a related study, Al-Nofaie (2020) conducted an investigation into the perspectives of EFL students regarding the use of synchronous and asynchronous learning environments. The findings revealed that students exhibited a preference for asynchronous tools over synchronous ones due to the inherent flexibility offered by the former. Subsequently, various studies have examined the practices employed by tutors during the implementation of remote learning amidst the pandemic. For instance, Johns and Mills (2021) reported that university tutors extensively utilized asynchronous discussion forums. However, there was a noticeable disparity compared to traditional teaching methods, as there appeared to be a reduced level of student interaction, with tutors assuming a more dominant role in the discourse. Consequently, an emphasis was placed on imparting knowledge rather than fostering active student participation. Consequently, it is imperative for tutors to receive adequate technical training and supervision in order to effectively initiate asynchronous sessions, design interactive tasks, assist students in completing assignments, and provide feedback. Similarly, the author et al. (2022) observed that students exhibited negative attitudes towards electronic feedback, primarily due to difficulties in locating it within the (LMS)

Based on the comprehensive review of the relevant literature, it can be deduced that there exists a diverse range of responses toward the use of Asynchronous Discussion Forums (ADF). Some studies have highlighted the value of employing ADF as an effective approach during times of crisis or when internet access is limited for vulnerable students. ADF has been found to offer a flexible learning technique that allows students to engage at their own pace and convenience, accommodating their individual circumstances.

Conversely, other studies have identified certain considerations that need to be addressed when implementing ADF. These include the limited availability of interactive tasks and activities within ADF platforms, as well as concerns regarding the provision of insufficient or dissatisfactory feedback to students. These discrepancies in views and practices emphasize the importance of conducting further in-depth investigations on this topic. Such research endeavors are essential for devising strategies that ensure the successful integration of ADF in future educational contexts, thereby maximizing the potential for achieving desired learning outcomes under both normal and crisis circumstances. In conclusion, the existing literature provides valuable insights into the advantages and challenges associated with the adoption of Asynchronous Discussion Forums. However, further scholarly exploration is warranted to develop comprehensive approaches that harness the full potential of ADF, enabling its effective implementation in diverse learning environments, and ensuring optimal learning outcomes for students in all educational settings

Method

Participants

The study consists of ten in-depth, semi- structured interviews with ten EFL students enrolled in the higher diploma of education at the Arab Open University- Jordan. This program is for in-service teachers, and the participants in this program are English as foreign language teachers at public and private schools in Jordan. Their age ranged from 28 to 45, and their experience is from five years to 15 years.

The authors of the study conducted ten interviews using the Microsoft Teams platform. Each interview had an average duration of approximately 25 minutes. Prior to the interviews, the participants were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives and were required to provide informed consent to participate. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, the participants were assured that their responses would be collected anonymously and treated with strict confidentiality. It is important to note that all interviews were conducted in the Arabic language. To facilitate analysis, the interviews were manually recorded and transcribed, allowing for the application of thematic coding techniques.

Research Procedures

The interview questions were developed based on an extensive literature review pertaining to the use and effectiveness of asynchronous discussion forums, particularly in the field of English language. The authors carefully formulated the questions to elicit interviewees' perspectives on the factors that would motivate their

active participation in ADF posts, as well as the activities that would enhance their engagement. The decision to focus on ADFs stemmed from the recognition that teaching English language solely through face-to-face or remote learning might not be sufficient. Educators have additional essential points to convey, and facilitating practice and encouraging students to generate ideas about a topic requires more time and flexibility. Thus, the study aimed to accommodate and encourage students to freely express themselves in an asynchronous learning environment.

All interviews were thoroughly reviewed, transcribed, and analyzed using open coding to identify emerging categories. The interpretation of the data was guided by relevant literature implications, as well as the perspectives of practitioners and researchers in the field. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, which primarily stem from its limited number of the participants of the study. However, the study does offer valuable insights and implications for higher education institutions, suggesting ways to strategize education in the future by leveraging the capabilities of learning management systems to provide students with enhanced opportunities for learning, engagement, and collaboration. Furthermore, this study establishes a framework for future research endeavors that explore the impact of employing asynchronous discussion forums as an online learning approach in the development of students' language and thinking skills.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interviewees' responses revealed two main themes. Firstly, the pedagogical activities that stimulated EFL students to engage in the asynchronous discussion forums. Secondly, practices employed by educators encouraged students to engage in issues posted on the discussion forums related to teaching the English language from students' point of view.

Activities that Stimulate EFL Students to engage in the Asynchronous Discussion Forums

The analysis of participants' responses revealed a prominent theme, namely, the activities that stimulated EFL students' engagement in asynchronous discussion forums. The majority of participants (six out of ten) expressed that open-ended activities, which provided them with an opportunity to express their opinions on teaching situations, were more engaging compared to knowledge-based activities. One interviewee shared their perspective, stating, "*I frequently check the discussion forum posts when the instructor presents a teaching situation in one of the English language skills. We analyze the situation to evaluate its effectiveness, and I feel that I learn more about pedagogy from both the instructors and my peers' ideas.*"

Some participants mentioned that they felt at ease and were inclined to participate when the activities in the discussion forum focused on information covered in the textbooks, such as teaching approaches for the English language. In relation to the stages of teaching English language skills, one interviewee remarked, "*I feel comfortable and eager to participate when the activity involves reviewing information discussed during lectures.*" Another interviewee expressed her appreciation for posts that asked about personal experiences in teaching the English language, stating, "*My tutor asked us in one of her post*s, '*How do you make your students aware of*

mnemonics while teaching vocabulary?' This post made me eagerly await my colleagues' answers to learn more about their personal experiences with their students".

The preferred type of activity among students appears to be influenced by the level of thinking skills they have acquired, as mentioned by Khalil et al. (2020). Asynchronous discussion forums offer the benefits of presenting diverse ideas related to course content, saving time, and fostering the development of writing skills. Additionally, the types of questions posed in the discussion forums play a role in motivating students, which aligns with the findings of Mokoena (2013) and Gantner and Kimbrel (2022). Notably, participants exhibited motivation to engage in discussions on asynchronous discussion forums when they were prompted to share their personal experiences on specific topics. From an educational standpoint, this fosters a sense of community in the online context, encouraging students to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas without concerns about the reactions of others.

Tutors' Practices that Encourage Students to engage in Issues posted on the Discussion Forums from Students' Point of View

The rigorous analysis of the interviewees' responses yielded valuable insights into the practices that exerted a significant influence on the level of student engagement in asynchronous discussion forums. Remarkably, a substantial majority of eight out of ten participants underscored the paramount importance of instructors offering clear guidelines and comprehensive instructions. These guidelines encompassed multifaceted dimensions, such as word limits, activity requirements, time allocation, and the provision of flexibility to add or delete answers. By availing themselves of lucid instructions, students were empowered to redirect their cognitive efforts towards the actual task and the quality of their contributions. Consequently, this allowed them to transcend the potential impediments associated with interpreting instructions within the context of their forum responses, thus enhancing their overall engagement in the asynchronous discourse.

One of the interviewees aptly articulated their perspective, stating, "*When I have a clear understanding of the time frame, the clarity of the questions, the submission process, and the specific areas of focus, I am able to execute tasks with precision. For instance, when creating lesson plans for teaching English language skills or vocabulary, having these guidelines in place enables me to achieve excellence. Furthermore, I actively engage with the work of others, making comparisons between their ideas and my own, which greatly enriches my overall learning experience".*

Another pedagogical practice that effectively fosters student engagement entails the judicious curation of authentic and compelling topics that bear direct relevance to students' lived experiences. By deliberately selecting such topics, instructors can augment motivation levels and elicit active participation within the discussion forum domain. An interviewee articulated the significance of this practice, stating, "*It is imperative to assign pragmatic tasks that seamlessly intertwine with our day-to-day realities, thereby kindling a profound drive for active engagement. Moreover, it is of paramount importance to transparently communicate the comprehensive grading criteria and provide explicit guidelines delineating instructors' unwavering expectations pertaining to student*

accomplishments". Seven out of ten interviewees expressed a preference for clear instructions regarding the timing and specifications for posting comments on the discussion forum, as well as instructors' expectations. An interviewee stated, "*It is helpful to know how many comments I should make in a week. I often ask instructors for guidance on using content from textbooks or other resources*".

The significance of providing feedback, both feedforward and constructive, was highlighted by interviewees. They expressed the need for personal positive feedback that acknowledges their contributions and mentions their names in comments. All participants indicated that they submitted their contributions and patiently awaited instructors' feedback. One interviewee shared an experience where immediate feedback from the instructor encouraged her to participate regularly due to the motivating language used. This aligns with Mokoena's (2013) assertion that assignments alone are insufficient, and students require feedback to ensure thoroughness and clarity, as well as opportunities for clarification if needed. However, educators should exercise caution when providing areas for improvement to avoid negatively impacting students' engagement in the pedagogical activity.

The type of assignment was also deemed essential in determining the level of student engagement. Interviewees expressed a preference for challenging assignments that require extensive reading, research, and critical analysis, such as open-ended questions, evidence-based assignments, real-life tasks, and critical analysis of EFL teachers' lesson plans for English language skills. Mokoena (2013) and Biriyai and Thomas (2014) support this notion, suggesting that the use of open-ended and debatable questions stimulates student participation.

Furthermore, seven interviewees mentioned the benefits of instructors providing a grading rubric. They found rubrics to be valuable tools that outlined expected performance levels and guided them on how to achieve the highest marks. This practice aligns with Penny and Murphy's (2009) findings, suggesting that rubrics positively influence student participation and cognitive development in asynchronous online discussions by providing clarity on evaluation criteria.

In summary, the analysis highlighted various practices that significantly influenced students' engagement in asynchronous discussion forums. Clear guidelines, authentic topics, explicit instructions, constructive feedback, challenging assignments, and grading rubrics all played crucial roles in promoting active participation and enhancing the quality of student contributions. These findings align with previous research and underscore the importance of implementing effective pedagogical strategies in asynchronous online learning environments.

Conclusion

Asynchronous discussion forums have gained substantial recognition as an empowering pedagogical approach, both in pre-pandemic times and post the global crisis. Educators have adeptly harnessed the potential of these forums to administer activities that nurture critical thinking and propel the advancement of English language skills and pedagogy. Nevertheless, it is crucial for tutors in higher education institutions to grasp that technology alone cannot singularly accomplish desired outcomes. Rather, they must acquire and deploy effective pedagogical strategies that empower them to meticulously design and implement motivational activities. This can be achieved

through the strategic integration of elements such as open-ended questions, evidence-based assignments, and grading rubrics. Such an approach cultivates a dynamic and stimulating learning environment, conducive to facilitating robust student engagement and fostering profound educational growth.

Tutors play a pivotal role in promoting effective engagement within asynchronous discussion forums by honing their abilities to deliver clear instructions, offer constructive feedback, and tailor assignments to individual students. This personalized approach not only captivates students but also encourages them to delve into their peers' contributions and derive valuable insights from them. This reciprocal interaction holds paramount significance in propelling the realm of online learning. While asynchronous discussion forums can be employed across various disciplines, they hold particular value for learners of English as a second or foreign language. These forums furnish a pedagogical arena conducive to cooperative and collaborative language practice. By closely examining students' thoughts and capitalizing on the feedforward and feedback provided by instructors, students can make notable strides in fortifying their language skills within a flexible and nurturing online environment.

Throughout the research process, the authors have gained valuable insights regarding the efficacy of online learning as a pedagogical activity that fosters active and authentic student participation. In this context, active participation denotes students willingly and eagerly engaging in the learning process, driven by their intrinsic motivation to explore and deepen their educational experiences. Their participation is not driven merely by the desire to satisfy instructors; rather, it stems from a genuine curiosity and a desire to contribute meaningfully to the pedagogical encounters facilitated through online learning platforms.

Moreover, students' active participation is characterized by a sense of autonomy, as they feel empowered to freely express their thoughts and opinions on educational matters without hesitation or reservation. They are encouraged to exercise their agency and take ownership of their learning journey within the online learning environment. Furthermore, students engage in collaborative interactions with both their peers and educators, exemplifying a commitment to a democratic approach to online learning. They recognize and appreciate the value of diverse perspectives and actively seek opportunities to share and learn from one another. This collaborative engagement creates a rich and dynamic learning environment that nurtures mutual respect, encourages meaningful dialogue, and facilitates the exchange of knowledge and ideas. Overall, the research findings emphasize the transformative potential of online learning, where active and authentic student participation flourishes. It highlights the importance of fostering student autonomy, promoting collaborative interactions, and valuing diverse perspectives as key pillars for creating a vibrant and inclusive online learning community.

Recommendations

Future research endeavors should encompass larger and more diverse samples, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the myriad factors that influence student participation. Analyzing students' posts and observing their levels of engagement would contribute significantly to unraveling the intricate dynamics at play. Furthermore, it is imperative for higher education institutions to incorporate online asynchronous discussion forums into their course designs and assessments, particularly in the context of English language courses. By

doing so, institutions can effectively extend the boundaries of learning and language practice beyond the constraints of traditional lecture durations. Embracing these innovative pedagogical approaches holds immense potential for fostering enriched educational experiences and nurturing enhanced language proficiency among learners.

Moreover, it is vital for higher education institutions to prioritize the integration of online asynchronous discussion forums into their course designs and assessments, particularly in the context of language courses. By incorporating these forums, institutions can enhance student learning experiences and promote the development of language proficiency beyond the constraints of traditional lecture-based instruction. Such integration requires a strategic and deliberate approach, ensuring that these forums are seamlessly woven into the fabric of the curriculum and assessments, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive and holistic educational experience.

In conclusion, asynchronous discussion forums have emerged as an indispensable tool in higher education, offering a wealth of possibilities for empowering student engagement and promoting active learning. Further research, coupled with the deliberate incorporation of these forums into course designs and assessments, will undoubtedly contribute to the ongoing enhancement of online pedagogy, providing students with a more enriching and rewarding educational journey.

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