Language Learners' Disengagement in e-Learning during COVID-19: Secondary Teachers' Views

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Abstract

The study looked at language teachers' views of their students' disengagement in e-learning during COVID-19. It described their efforts on how to engage the learners beyond the screen, where teachers have no control, and how to overcome the issues disturbing students' engagement, motivation, and achievement. The study looked at learning engagement as an important requirement in e-learning, which is influenced by social factors including teachers' communication with students, students' interaction among themselves, and their collaboration in learning activities. This study used interviews, reports, and notes of 15 teachers to collect data from 15 language teachers in some Saudi secondary schools during the academic year 2020–2021. That year was completely delivered in e-learning platforms. The findings show that teachers ran into several difficulties to engage their learners in online sessions during that year; students lacked some ethics and requirements for e-learning; and technical issues disabled both teachers and learners from remaining in the learning engagement. These three main results propose a framework for educators, students, parents, and policymakers to deal with the obstacles and threats of learning engagement in online lessons. The study ends with suggestions for future studies.

Keywords: language learning, learning engagement, online learning, Saudi secondary school, teachers' observations

1. Introduction

Learning occurs when only students are willingly engaged in the learning process and are passionate about exploiting classroom learning opportunities (Egbert, 2020). Learning relies on engaging students in learning activities and encouraging them to take part in learning situations (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Learning engagement is a significant concept to develop education, support helpful feelings, and guide to accomplishment. Students' engagement is a central challenge in all educational institutions. Shernoff (2013) states that engagement highly depends on context, and is influenced by several factors such as schools, families, cultures, classrooms, and learning activities.

Fredricks et al. (2004) define learning engagement as a multi-layered model of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions of engagement for describing students' thoughts, actions, and feelings. To them, behavioral engagement focuses on how students behave to complete classroom activities; emotional engagement contains internal and external signs of students' satisfaction with the classroom without having a negative effect; and cognitive engagement shows students' thinking to connect ideas, solve problems, and answer questions.

There is a fourth dimension in Philp and Duchesne's (2016) multidimensional construct of engagement, which is social engagement. Therefore, the social dimension plays a dominant part in language acquisition. Svalberg (2009) considers social interaction as the main dimension of "engagement with language" (EWL) theory, which integrates all dimensions. EWL "is a cognitive, and/or affective and/or social state and process in which the learner is the agent and language is object, and may be vehicle (means of communication)" (p. 247).

Svalberg (2009) believes that EWL is seen when students use the language, learn it, and act with it. For instance, language students' desire to involve in learning opportunities supports them to acquire it. Moreover, such an engagement can empower their attention to learning, employ power to accomplish their goals, progress in obtaining the language, and create their autonomous learning. Their active participation in learning tasks leads to high motivation, deep interest, positive feelings, and strong self-efficacy (Egbert, 2020).

In language learning, the role of context is stressed as an important indicator of engagement (Svalberg, 2009). It is demanding to keep learners engaged in learning activities in the face-to-face (F2F) context, (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). In this context, language teachers can deal with these challenges in classroom settings by having the authority to manage their students, observe their learning development, and expose them to engaging activities. On the other hand, in e-learning contexts, language teachers encounter more trouble engaging their students. E-learning settings have numerous distractions to terminate the teachers' efforts in encouraging students' engagement. Furthermore, teachers' authority is inadequate due to the nature of distance teaching (Al Shlowiy, 2021; Luburić et al., 2021).

E-learning issues are considered mutual disadvantages of e-learning contexts (Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Henry, 2019; Ragan & Schroeder,

2014). This is the case if e-learning is purposely chosen as an entire learning situation or as a part of blended learning, which was the status of e-learning before COVID-19. However, shifting education into complete e-learning during COVID-19 was different for two reasons (Al Shlowiy, 2021). First, it was not a choice, but a compulsory shift to this setting. Second, it continued for some teaching weeks with neither preparation nor a plan. In this unprepared crisis, students face many interruptions that might weaken their engagement even if they are highly motivated (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

E-learning is not commonly practiced in Saudi public schools. Due to COVID-19, the emergency shift to e-learning was a new experience for most teachers and students in secondary school. Moreover, most studies focus on undergraduate students at the college level. Therefore, this study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by gaining in-depth information about teachers' perspectives, ideas, and views to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers engage their students in e-learning during COVID-19?
2. What are their observations about students' engagement in online classes?

The aim of this study is to describe EFL teachers' perceptions of students' engagement in e-learning contexts through the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. In e-learning, teachers can observe the actions, attention, and participation of students. Also, teachers can witness different factors that influence students' perceptions, facilitate their engagement, and develop their learning outcomes (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Moreover, this study attempts to investigate EFL teachers' interactions with their students in e-learning contexts as well as students' engagement with authentic social learning activities (Henry, 2019).

2. Literature Review

Engaging students in language learning sessions encounters many difficulties (Al Shlowiy et al., 2021; Egbert, 2020; Luburić et al., 2021; Shernoff, 2013; Skinner et al., 2009). The issues are more duplicated and complicated in e-learning settings. It is one of the main challenges of the 21st century to engage students in e-learning (Al Shlowiy, 2021; Kebritchi et al., 2017). For example, during COVID-19, teachers and students dealt with numerous technical problems, such as Internet interruptions, irregular audio, confusing instructions, and frozen screens (Al Shlowiy et al., 2021). These problems interrupted the quality of e-learning sessions, continuous interaction, and facial expressions. Likewise, students' engagement is always connected to their motivation, which is influenced by various distractions and temptations around them (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

Skinner et al. (2009) believe that students' engagement can demonstrate the value of their connection to the endeavor of education and their involvement with people, activities, goals, and places that compose education. Literature shows that several reasons might impact students' engagement including teachers, learning setting, motivation, course content, entertainment, and interest (Al Shlowiy et al., 2021; Luburić et al., 2021; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Shernoff, 2013; Skinner et al., 2009). These causes enable students to overcome many difficulties in their learning journey. Therefore, Svalberg (2009) calls the positive factors "drivers" and the negative factors "spanners."

High-tech tools and the virtual space are other challenges in e-learning contexts that are faced by students. Teachers are encouraged to monitor their students in overcoming the challenges of isolation, lack of social communication with peers and access to F2F classroom, shortage of support, troubles with self-discipline, absence of real-time feedback, frustration due to internet disconnection, and the need for time management (White, 2003). Kebritchi et al. (2017) categorize e-learning issues into three groups: student issues, teacher issues, and content issues. They consider engagement and participation, a sense of belonging to a learning community, and isolation and disconnection to be among the first group of student issues.

To maintain students' engagement in e-learning teaching, teachers have to make more efforts for supporting their students' self-motivation and self-direction that assist in building their knowledge compared to F2F (Kebritchi et al., 2017; Ragan & Schroeder, 2014). It is more challenging to virtually teach because students must be involved in many communicative events, cooperative exercises, and authentic usages of English.

Because of the rapid change to e-learning in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, students and teachers meet many difficulties. A lot of researchers and policymakers examine the issues of this phenomenon and its benefits and drawbacks to e-learning teaching. To succeed in virtual teaching courses, Hampel and Stickler (2005) believe that teachers should acquire essential skills. Teachers should have seven skills: (a) basic ICT competence, (b) specific technical competence for the software, (c) dealing with restrictions and options of the medium, (d) virtual socialization, (e) simplifying communicative proficiency, (f) creativity and choice, and (g) own style (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). Such skills can support teachers to encounter many e-learning challenges.

Students need these skills in e-learning, too. This need was noticeable when moving into online education during the pandemic. Students were short of such skills. Al Shlowiy et al. (2021) examined the issues and concerns that could arise during the COVID-19 period. The study focused on the experience of 674 students and the perceptions of 61 teachers in Saudi Arabia. The students rated their concerns about the emergency shift into e-learning while the teachers reflected on students' concerns. It was found that some concerns might reduce teachers' enthusiasm and students' seriousness in e-learning. Also, teachers were not completely aware of the causes of disengaging students in e-learning.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Students' engagement in language learning is influenced by several dimensions, as discussed above. Among these dimensions,

sociocultural perceptions are employed in describing the EFL students' disengagement in e-learning. There are several social elements including participation, interaction, and collaboration that influence the learning environment. Svalberg (2009) states that such elements support language learning. In addition, Vygotsky (1978) believes that language learning requires social context, student interaction, and teacher scaffolding.

According to sociocultural theory (SCT), this study deals with e-learning sessions as social situations in which students participate in meaningful interactive tasks with each other. These activities help to create meaningful language learning and expose learners to high input of English. Using English to take part in these activities and interact with each other engages them in an authentic context, which develops their language and improves their cognitive and higher mental functions (Mitchell & Miles, 2004).

The SCT inspired this study to explore EFL students' engagement in virtual learning settings through their teachers' eyes, their virtual immersion in a real-life social environment for acquiring the language, and their collaboration to work on activities. Social interaction and collaboration are central principles of language learning (Egbert, 2020). The study also considered how EFL teachers enhance their engagement, provide them with authentic language input, simplify their participation in English activities, and maintain their communication with individuals and groups.

Teachers should recognize their role in e-learning by keeping their technological skills updated. As social interaction and collaboration in e-learning classrooms can occur with a computer, they need to meet the skills of the 21st century by changing how they teach, achieve goals, create knowledge, find resources, create learning environments, evaluate improvement, and support students to improve their learning. E-learning requires them to meet new educational, social, and organizational responsibilities (Al Shlowiy et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

This study used the descriptive design to deeply understand the research problem and its characteristics in real-life circumstances (Patton, 2002). The study questions led the researcher to employ language teachers' perspectives of their classes and students as a group under investigation. This study attempts to comprehensively explain teachers' experience, reflection, and observation of students' engagement in e-learning settings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.1 Context and Participants

The study targeted teachers of English in Saudi secondary schools. I approached 21 male teachers in seven schools in the eastern region of the country. Fifteen teachers agreed to contribute to the study and signed the consent form. Four teachers were not active in the second semester. They were Saudis, aged between 28 and 54, and had experience teaching English for 3 to 20 years. They were teaching the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades of the secondary school through the Madrasti Platform, which is an official online platform for the Saudi Ministry of Education. During that year, education was completely conducted online on that platform for the first time in Saudi public education.

3.2 Data Collection

Two instruments were utilized to collect data: semi-structured interviews and teachers' reports and notes. Collecting data lasted 30 teaching weeks across the academic year of 2020-2021. These instruments facilitated understanding the participants' experiences, perceptions, and views about the research questions. I used them to perform the triangulation strategy that led me to a reliable understanding of the studied phenomenon and confirmation of the findings (Patton, 2002).

3.2.1 Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews as my first method to collect data. I met with every teacher several times. The meetings were online via Zoom platforms and face-to-face in their schools. Some meetings were short and did not pass 10 minutes, while some meetings took about 35 minutes. The total number of interviews was 38. All meetings were recorded with many notes about how they asked questions, responded to questions, decided on solutions, and discussed their concerns. The teachers had the choice to use Arabic or English in the meetings, or even both languages sometimes. I was able to ask different questions and provide teachers with the comfort to express their views.

I used the same questions with all the teachers and repeated the questions on different occasions. The interview questions are available in the Appendix. Such a repetition helped me acquire comprehensive answers, meaningful data, and thorough explanations of the participants' performances, experiences, and perceptions. I used these meetings to obtain insights into students' engagement in online settings by asking teachers about their perceptions and opinions. Their interactions and responses clarified their beliefs about how to engage their learners in language lessons, how to construct their teaching, and what sense they attributed to their experiences (Patton, 2002).

3.2.2 Teachers' Reports and Notes

I also collected other data by sending questions to teachers by email and WhatsApp. My aim was to provide teachers with more opportunities to reflect on the meetings. I sent follow-up questions after interviews and meetings to the participants. Moreover, I attempted to check every meeting to generate some prompts for each participant. One of the prompts was to reflect on the students' engagement in their last taught classes. I informed them to respond by either writing the answers in an email or sending voice messages on WhatsApp. They had an option for responding in Arabic or English. I collected 13 written emails, 21 written WhatsApp messages, and 14 voiced responses. In these written reports and notes, teachers provided valuable details in responding to the prompts.

3.3 Data Analysis

I followed the thematic coding strategy (Patton, 2002) to code data as I was collecting them. I started the analysis soon after the first interview. I analyzed every interview, written response, and voice note after collecting it. According to qualitative researchers, data collection and data analysis can be conducted at the same time because they are not isolated steps. They are interconnected. I followed a consistent strategy to deal with all interviews and teachers' reports. I listened to the recordings, wrote the transcripts, read the notes, prepared them for the coding process, and compared and contrasted the results of the coding. Therefore, my analysis was inductive and deductive, which establishes themes across the study period. This helped me to obtain rich details to answer research questions. To validate the analysis process, I consulted two investigators who performed the analysis individually before discussing the results and obtaining a final agreement (Patton, 2002).

4. Results

This study examines the perceptions, experiences, and reflections of EFL teachers about students' engagement in language lessons during COVID-19. This section displays the results of the thematic analysis, which produced three main themes (Table 1). The first theme includes teaching challenges in e-learning contexts. The second theme shows the requirements and ethics of these contexts. The third theme focuses on the technical issues facing both teachers and students in these contexts.

Table 1. Findings of thematic analysis

Theme	Title
First	teaching challenges
Second	requirements and ethics
Third	technical issues

The first theme is built on what teachers reported about the issues that faced during that academic year. It groups all concerns they observed during their online lessons and how they went through them. The second theme focuses on what teachers required from students in e-learning. Teachers thought about some requirements and ethics that they needed in their students due to their first use and experience of e-learning. The third theme goes to the technical issues that disturbed the learning process. Teachers believed that these issues were obstacles not only for themselves but also for many students who felt overwhelmed on several occasions.

5. Discussion

This study attempts to describe students' disengagement in e-learning EFL classes during COVID-19 relying on the observations of their teachers. It studies EFL teachers' perceptions in some secondary schools. The aim is to answer the two research questions by obtaining rich information about Saudi EFL students' engagement in e-learning. To answer the first question, teachers were not able to engage their students in their e-learning during that academic year. For the second question, they provided different observations about the challenges of students' engagement in e-learning. Relying on the thematic findings, below are more details for both questions.

5.1 Theme I: Teaching Challenges

The first theme shows that online teaching encounters several challenges and requires different teaching roles and approaches. Teaching in online contexts is different from teaching in traditional classrooms. In the rapid shift to online sessions during COVID-19, teachers run into various difficulties that disable them from creating an interactive e-learning environment. The study discovered that teachers had lost control over their classes, appropriate teaching approaches, administration collaboration, and parent involvement. Most of them reported this loss in the interviews. These difficulties play an important role in students' engagement in a negative way.

Teachers were not able to engage their students in online settings in a continuous way that enabled the learners to participate in language learning opportunities. One of the teachers stated that "many students did not participate, ask questions, or contribute to the discussions rather than show their attendance, which is compulsory." Most teachers agreed with this observation about attendance. This attendance shows that the students did not dedicate effort, attention, and persistence to using the language authentically and communicatively (Hiver, et al., 2020). They were not cognitively engaged but only met the attendance requirement without focusing on learning materials (Kebritchi et al., 2017).

This is also an indication of negative communication between teachers and their students in online settings. Students cannot develop their language without positive communication with teachers. Teachers' positive communication with learners leads to better students' educational accomplishments (Coman et al., 2020; Freihat, 2020), builds their self-motivation and self-direction to build their learning (Kebritchi et al., 2017), and regulates their behavior toward learning goals (Hiver et al., 2020).

Losing positive communication in e-learning displays that students lack social interaction, which is a requirement for language learning (Mitchell & Miles, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). This loss of positive communication might be the cause of disabling students' participation in learning activities, as discussed above. Moreover, such a loss might result in students' lack of focus and attention in e-learning, according to what the teachers observed in this study.

On the other hand, if students are not exposed to positive communication and social interaction, learning does not occur. According to the SCT, learning contexts should be interactive, engaging, and communicative (Mitchell & Miles, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978) to provide learners with meaningful social interaction to develop their language.

Most teachers reflected on the new teaching approaches that they went through during this hard time. In the beginning, they discovered

the unsuitability of the teaching methods of traditional F2F classrooms for e-learning and virtual communication. They felt uncomfortable teaching their lessons through the screen and interacting with their students distantly. They were isolated without creating social relationships or speaking communities with each other. Such situations are found by Kebritchi et al. (2017), who believe that most teachers neither enjoy online teaching nor connect the learning contents and objectives with the real delivery of lessons.

Consequently, teachers had to develop their teaching approaches and adapt their communicative strategies. In WhatsApp discussions, they believed that they needed to meet the requirements to teach in online settings, such as the skills mentioned in Hampel and Stickler's (2005) study. They spent much effort motivating students and engaging them in e-learning. Before delivering the online lessons, preparing lessons and designing appropriate activities takes a significant amount of time. They used different technical tools, online resources, communicative platforms, and social media to communicate with their students. This leads to positive learning engagement that enables students to succeed in their learning, similar to the findings of Coman et al. (2020), Freihat (2020), and Kebritchi et al. (2017).

Due to several issues related to students, as found in Kebritchi et al. (2017), teachers cannot engage them. Teachers also struggle to manage their online classes and avoid distractions. They find that F2F classes are manageable because the student's needs are understood and most issues are under control. In online classes, they have no power to control the learners, motivate them, improve their self-discipline, and diminish their frustration due to technical issues and Internet disconnections (White, 2003).

5.2 Theme II: Requirements and Ethics

The second theme includes the requirements and cultural ethics of e-learning, particularly among students. Students in Saudi public schools experienced e-learning sessions for the first time without planning and preparing due to COVID-19 (Al Shlowiy, 2021). The study found several observations about their misbehavior in e-learning settings. Most teachers reported deficiencies in students' discipline, culture, seriousness, and awareness that led to high levels of disengagement. For example, many students ignored the teachers' instructions and kept texting each other, plagiarizing, and disturbing the lessons.

This study found that most secondary students need to be observed and disciplined by their parents at home when they study online, as the teachers discipline them in classrooms. According to the teachers, students were not fully aware of the e-learning system, practice, and culture. Learners were suddenly moved to this e-learning without guidance, which left them confused. Moreover, they could not maintain their attendance, achieve the learning objectives, pay attention to their duties, and organize their studies. They, as stated by Hiver et al. (2021), could not self-regulate their behavior toward learning goals. Some teachers thought that most students felt more nervous about using e-learning tools, including the camera and microphone.

These deficits are discussed in the literature relying on three types of engagement: affective, behavior, and cognitive (Svalberg, 2009). For affective engagement, losing focus shows those students might not enjoy the learning. They were not interested in participating in learning activities. This means that the e-learning activities were boring to them, and they usually discard these activities. Students differ in their learning styles, preferences, attitudes, and perceptions that influence their engagement. Luburić et al. (2021) state that students are not the same in valuing the recording lessons, participating in online classes, replaying the videos in their own time, enjoying the static learning elements, and joining virtual discussions.

Moving to behavior engagement, the study found that many students were inattentive based on the teachers' experience. During online classes, teachers often discovered that their students were using social media, having side conversations, or missing important parts or instructions of the lessons. Most of them were not involved in learning activities. This illustrates the negative behavioral engagement of students during that period. Other studies (Al Shlowiy et al., 2021; Coman et al., 2020; Fredricks et al., 2004; Freihat, 2020) find that such behavior does not support language learning and discourages learners from accomplishing the learning objectives. Successful e-learning demands students change their behavior toward positive engagement.

For cognitive engagement, many students did not meet the learning standards, as most teachers noted. For example, two teachers thought that their students failed to achieve the learning objectives, acquire the content, develop their language, and complete the assignments in e-learning. It is a typical result of inactive attendance in learning activities and not participating in them (Kebritchi et al., 2017). These practices harmed cognitive engagement because they attended the classes for the sake of attendance only without joining the learning community.

Students' cognitive engagement was not supported outside the classroom by reviewing the recording lessons or looking for additional learning sources. However, a few students reviewed the recorded lessons and searched for the right information behind the classroom, as stated by two teachers. It was not obvious to most teachers how some students understood the learning concepts in detail without being active in the learning sessions. This might be attributed to their previous knowledge and experience or their parents' support. Although some students might be autonomous learners, they are still required to manage their appearance and participation in online classes to have positive cognitive engagement.

5.3 Theme III: Technical Issues

The third theme focuses on the technical issues of moving to e-learning during COVID-19. These issues prevented both teachers and learners from having a stable learning environment during that period. Teachers observed several technical issues and distractions that prevented them from fully engaging their students, such as internet disconnection, device availability, and software suitability. Many teachers suffered that some students did not have personal computers or laptops to join the online classes at the right time. Other teachers

commented on how some students were not able to have a good connection to the internet. Teachers discussed several reasons that led to these issues, including providing services in the residential area, the economic status of the student's family, and the number of students in each home.

With these issues, teachers struggled to engage their learners and encourage their participation. One of the teachers showed that the internet disconnection restricted him from scaffolding his students and guiding them throughout his online classes. Another teacher reported that many learners were not able to continuously attend any single lesson. Because the learners lost the connections to online lessons, they lost the sense of belonging to those classes. Therefore, such loss plays an important role in how they behave in these online lessons (Coman et al., 2020; Freihat, 2020). As seen above, they did not enjoy their attendance at those lessons due to their negative affective engagement (Svalberg, 2009), and some students rejected the lessons as well as avoided participating in the learning activities due to a lack of community belonging (Kebritchi et al., 2017).

Teachers could not create supportive contextual and social situations in their e-learning classes. In such classes, students did not contribute to communicative practices (Mitchell & Miles, 2004). These technical issues were negative factors or "spanners" (Svalberg, 2009) to separate the learners from participating in social activities or joining a speaking community (Ellis, 2003). Issues of disconnection, choppy audio, ambiguous teaching, frozen screen, and regular interruption made it difficult to design social learning environments that encourage, participation, interaction, teacher support, and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978).

These issues were obstacles to supporting the social engagement of students. Most teachers showed their concerns in WhatsApp, in English and Arabic, about these obstacles. Philp and Duchesne (2016) confirm the importance of social engagement in the learning process. Social engagement in e-learning is more important due to the nature of isolation and distance in this context. As students stayed at their homes away from their teachers and classmates, they were not socially and emotionally connected to the learning process (Svalberg, 2009; White, 2003).

As reported earlier (Al Shlowiy et al., 2021; Coman et al., 2020; Freihat, 2020; Hiver et al., 2020; Kebritchi et al., 2017), students could not understand the classes clearly, achieve the learning objectives, and make progress. Such a home environment was not supportive, and their parent did not contribute to facilitating the education process. Many students were confused between two different learning environments, which are e-learning at home and F2F at school. They complained about this issue that isolated them from learning contexts, restricted them to organize their learning, managed their time, and led them overwhelmed (Luburić et al., 2021).

6. Implications

Several implications are provided for language learning contexts, teachers, students, and policymakers. Supporting the findings, traditional F2F teaching is not the same as online teaching. Students should be connected in online contexts through continuous interactions with their teachers and among themselves because most students isolate themselves behind the screen. Individual differences require independent and motivated students to succeed in e-learning by contributing to learning activities, joining speaking opportunities, and creating social relationships with teachers and among themselves (Henry, 2019).

Obtaining continuous access to e-learning and maintaining regular classroom interactions with students are mandatory to simplify the learning process. Teachers should have the power and ability to manage e-learning settings and change their methods of teaching and communication. Both students and teachers need training and support to develop their technical skills and solutions for e-learning issues that will persist. Educational institutions should reform the teaching strategies to encounter the problems (Coman et al., 2020) by boosting students' communicative competence, supporting their critical thinking, designing engaging exercises and authentic materials (Hampel & Stickler, 2005), and inspiring their self-efficacy and persistence (Egbert, 2020) that lead to the lifelong learning process.

7. Limitations and Suggestions

Qualitative research does not exist without possible limitations in the methodology, researcher, setting, data collection, data analysis, questions, responses, or participants (Patton, 2002). In this study, for example, the sample size was not big enough to confirm that the findings were accurate. Fifteen teachers might be not enough to draw reliable pictures of students' engagement in online settings during COVID-19. Furthermore, they might not provide enough details to have comprehensive explanations for male and female EFL students at all educational levels. Therefore, the data collected may be insufficient and lead to distortion in the findings (Patton, 2002).

However, findings were primarily located in teachers' perceptions as a single perspective responding to open-ended questions. I recommend replicating the study with different participants in other locations. Moreover, it is proposed to employ quantitative designs or different types of analysis, such as exploratory and phenomenological standpoints. These types can provide statistical representations of the issues of EFL students' engagement. Then, we can compare different results about students' interactions with the learning environment, with each other, and with teachers, as well as their engagement and participation.

8. Conclusion

Describing secondary-school teachers' reflections on students' disengagement in e-learning during COVID-19 is the focus of this paper, which deals with engagement as a dynamic and multidimensional concept containing cognition, affect, behavior, and social interactions (Fredricks et al., 2004; Svalberg, 2009). Engagement plays a central role in the learning process, students' attention, and knowledge building. Language learners' engagement is influenced by many factors, including learning settings and teaching approaches for F2F or online lessons.

The emergency move to e-learning during COVID-19 increasingly made e-learning a compulsory option. In future educational plans, e-learning is not an option anymore. In e-learning settings, student engagement remains the main challenge for many teachers who need to improve their pedagogical skills to suit their roles in the 21st century and acquire the basic skills as suggested by Hampel and Stickler (2005). They should help their students to be independent, responsible, and social. Students are required to be active participants in learning activities and engage in learning communities around them.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

How do you describe your students' engagement?

How do you keep your students concentrated on the learning activity?

What do you feel if your students lose interest in your class?

What are the main issues of losing students' engagement in online teaching?

Do your students sleep in e-learning classes?

What are the reasons behind their disengagement?

How do you deal with disengaged students?

How do they participate in activities?

Do they like to participate in learning activities?

How to support students' engagement?

Which types of engaging activities do you use? And how these activities influence your students?

Do your students support each other in learning?

What did you find challenging when engaging your learners?

What do teachers need to help their students in e-learning?

How did students evaluate the online materials and the course as a whole?