ONLINE PLATFORMS AND TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION: COMPARING ENGAGEMENT LEVELS IN ONLINE AND OFFLINE LANGUAGE CLASSES

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: This article examines the dynamics of teacher-student interaction in online versus offline language education, particularly in light of the recent shift toward digital platforms spurred by the global pandemic. It explores how online environments impact engagement levels, comparing the immediacy and spontaneity of interactions in traditional classrooms with the structured communication necessitated by online platforms. The analysis highlights key factors influencing engagement, including the frequency and quality of interaction, student motivation, and the advantages of flexibility and accessibility offered by online learning. Findings suggest that while offline classrooms promote rich, immediate interactions, online platforms can enhance engagement through personalized learning opportunities and diverse resources. The study underscores the need for further research to optimize these technologies in fostering meaningful teacher-student interactions in both settings.

INTRODUCTION

The shift towards digital education, accelerated by the global pandemic, has led to a fundamental change in how educators interact with students. In the realm of language education, the use of online platforms has become particularly prominent, as they facilitate interaction, deliver instructional content, and allow for a variety of assessment tools. However, the dynamics of teacher-student interaction in online environments differ significantly from traditional, offline classrooms. This article explores the influence of online platforms on teacher-student interaction, with a particular focus on comparing engagement levels between virtual and traditional language teaching methods.

Teacher-Student Interaction in Offline Language Classes

In offline or face-to-face language classes, teacher-student interaction typically follows well-established norms and expectations. These interactions are often direct, spontaneous, and rich in non-verbal communication cues such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). In language classes, the immediacy of feedback—both verbal and non-verbal—is crucial for effective learning. Teachers can instantly gauge students' comprehension and provide clarification, while students can seek real-time support, enabling a dynamic and interactive learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, face-to-face interactions allow for collaborative activities like role-playing, group discussions, and language games, which foster social learning and linguistic competence (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). The classroom setting also facilitates peer-to-peer interaction, where students can engage in authentic communicative exchanges that mimic real-world language use. However, these interactions are often limited by classroom size, time constraints, and the teacher's ability to attend to each student individually.

Teacher-Student Interaction in Online Language Classes

In contrast, online platforms, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom, offer a different dynamic in terms of teacher-student interaction. While they allow for flexibility in terms of time and location, the nature of interaction is often mediated by technology, which can affect engagement. According to Garrison (2011), online learning environments necessitate more structured and intentional forms of interaction, as spontaneous communication is often more challenging. Teachers must carefully plan lessons to ensure that interaction remains a key component of the online learning experience.

Online platforms enable synchronous and asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication, through video conferencing tools like Zoom, attempts to replicate the immediacy of face-to-face interaction, albeit with some limitations. Issues such as poor internet connectivity, delayed responses, and lack of non-verbal cues can hinder the flow of communication (Murphy et al., 2011). Asynchronous communication, on the other hand, allows students to interact with teachers and peers at their own pace through discussion boards, emails, and recorded lectures (Hrastinski, 2008). While this mode provides greater flexibility, it may also reduce the immediacy of teacher feedback, potentially affecting student motivation and engagement. Despite these challenges, online platforms offer unique features that can enhance teacher-student interaction. For example, the use of digital tools such as chat functions, breakout rooms, and polls can foster engagement in ways that are not always feasible in offline classrooms. Furthermore, the ability to record sessions allows students to revisit lessons and engage with the material at their own pace, which can deepen their understanding (Means et al., 2013).

Comparing Engagement Levels: Online vs. Offline Language Classes

When comparing engagement levels between online and offline language classes, several factors come into play, including student motivation, communication frequency, and the quality of interaction.

1. Frequency and Quality of Interaction

In traditional language classrooms, teacher-student interactions are often more frequent and spontaneous due to the immediacy of the physical setting (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers can address student concerns in real time, adjusting their teaching strategies based on immediate feedback from learners. In online settings, however, the frequency of interaction may decrease, particularly in asynchronous modes, where students may not feel as compelled to engage regularly with their instructors (Hrastinski, 2008). Nonetheless, synchronous tools like Zoom can facilitate frequent interaction, provided that technological issues do not interfere with communication. The quality of interaction also differs between the two modes. In offline classes, non-verbal communication plays a

significant role in enhancing the quality of interaction. In contrast, online platforms often lack these cues, leading to potential misunderstandings or reduced engagement (Murphy et al., 2011). However, online tools such as discussion boards may enable more thoughtful and reflective responses, as students have more time to process information before contributing to discussions (Hrastinski, 2008).

2. Student Motivation and Engagement

Student motivation is another key factor influencing engagement in both online and offline settings. Research suggests that students in traditional classrooms tend to be more motivated due to the physical presence of their peers and teachers, which fosters a sense of accountability (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). The social aspect of learning in offline environments contributes to increased engagement, particularly in language learning, where communication is a central component of the curriculum. In contrast, online platforms may pose challenges in maintaining student motivation, particularly in asynchronous settings where students may feel isolated or disconnected from the learning community (Garrison, 2011). However, well-designed online courses that incorporate interactive elements, such as quizzes, forums, and multimedia content, can enhance engagement by providing varied learning experiences (Means et al., 2013). Furthermore, online platforms offer opportunities for personalized learning, where students can engage with materials at their own pace and receive tailored feedback from instructors, potentially increasing motivation (Hrastinski, 2008).

3. Flexibility and Accessibility

One of the primary advantages of online platforms is the flexibility they offer in terms of access to learning materials and communication with instructors. In traditional classrooms, teacher-student interaction is confined to the scheduled class time, whereas online platforms allow for continuous engagement outside of regular hours (Garrison, 2011). This flexibility can lead to higher levels of student engagement, as learners have more opportunities to interact with their teachers and peers. Additionally, online platforms provide access to a wide range of resources that can support language learning, such as videos, articles, and language practice tools. This wealth of resources, combined with the ability to revisit recorded lessons, enables students to engage more deeply with the content (Means et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while teacher-student interaction in traditional offline language classes tends to be more immediate and spontaneous, online platforms offer unique opportunities for structured, flexible, and personalized engagement. The dynamics of interaction differ between the two modes, with online platforms requiring more intentionality in communication but providing valuable tools that enhance engagement. As the use of online platforms in language education continues to evolve, further research is needed to explore how these technologies can be optimized to foster meaningful teacher-student interaction in both online and offline settings.

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