Exploring the Factors Influencing Students Interaction During COVID 19 in the Faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the factors influencing interaction in the Faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University. The sample of this study was selective. It included all students who study translation in level two in the Faculty of Language Studies in the academic year 2021/2022. The researcher applied instruments which were focus group interviews via interviewing students and recording videos, individual interviews. In addition, the researcher measured all types of validity, descriptive, interpretative, theoretical and evaluation.

Furthermore, the reliability of the study was confirmed by repeating interviews several times and the reseracher used ATLAS to analyse collected data. The results revealed that there are different factors influencing interaction which are class size, teaching experiences, skills, methods and various psychological issues. Regarding the factors which are influencing students' interaction, the results support the presumed Constructivism Theory so, it recommends improving online teaching and providing students with all their needs as this will lead to better class interaction during Covid 19. The study recommends providing the lecturers with training; for example, providing the lecturers at Sohar University with adequate professional trainings and professional development sessions that consolidate and improve their online teaching skillsto expand their experiences during this crisis and for future sudden changes in learning. In addition, the study recommended to cover all students' needs by conducting intensive advising sessions that support the students' interaction, psychology and perspectives of realizing things that are surrounding them in the classrooms' atmosphere.

Key words: Interaction, Covid 19

Introduction

This study aims to investigate the use of learning-based theory and its related constructivism theory to ensure the better students' engagement and learning strategies during Covide 19 pandemic at Sohar University, Sultanate of Oman. This chapter will present the research problem, questions and conduct its significance and limitations.

Interaction between teachers and students and between students and teachers and between students and students has been identified as one of the most important challenges in the educational system. Relationships between teachers and students that are learner-centered assist to highlight the importance of students and learning processes for students' learning outcomes. Students' learning results are substantially influenced by their interaction with teachers and students themselves. on the other side, the primary component in motivating

students to learn is regular teacher-student interaction and vice versa. In general, the academic and social performance of students is favorably correlated with active teacher-student contact (Li & Yang, 2021).

Prior to the pandemic, the majority of educational courses were delivered in person, either in a standard or flipped style, and they heavily relied on interactions between students and teachers. Due to educational closures during the epidemic, several teachers were forced to quickly change their face-to-face lessons. Both teachers and students faced difficulties when they made the switch from face-to-face instruction to online learning. According to Libre, the absence of interactions, effective learning and motivation, were the biggest issue raised by students after transitioning to online settings. These results are consistent with other researches that have been published on how the current pandemic has affected students' educational experiences (Libre, 2021).

Research Background

In this modern era, COVID 19 is widespread around the world especially in the education organizations in which it has become as a huge pandemic that affects the education process. Most of the tutors and lecturers have used different platforms as educational ways to deliver their speech during their lecturers. These platforms are considered as online waythat can support the lecturersto deliver their speech smoothly in order to protect the students from COVID 19. Corona 19 pandemic it is an infection of SARS Cov-2 virus (International Health Organization, 2019).

This pandemic began in China, Wuhan in 2019 and spread to reach all the countries in the world. Wigan city was closed on 23 of January to reduce the spread of infection but, many cases were discovered after that in many Chinese cities and this became as threat to the whole world (Pradeep, 2019). According to UNESCO the crisis affected more than 363 million students in the world including 8.57 university students and this forced many institutions to use online e-learning (UNESCO, 2020).

Covid 19 is widespread all over the world and it has affected the education in some cities as they have never tried to use online learning and aren't able to use the platforms properly. At the beginning of this pandemic, the learning was stopped and all the students stayed home. In Oman, at Sohar University students and lecturers suffered from this pandemic. Both students and lecturers felt bored and not enthusiastic. Then, Sohar University created Microsoft Teams as a temporary solution to ensure that the students can be engaged in the learning process.

Corona pandemic has forced all the students to stay at their homes and receive education via online in order to perverse their safety and nearly 1.8 million students were forced to receive learning from home (Affouneh and Salha, 2020). The governments resorted to learning distance without the need to attend the lectures face to face. This was considered as one of the most available means that meets the needs of the students and allowed the communication and maintained the continuity of the educational process despite the difficulties facing educational process through learning distance (Gurhan& Serkan, 2020).

Oman is one of the most Gulf countries which face this pandemic by following some rules and regulations that enhance the individuals to be safe from this enemy and one of the factor that is influenced by this pandemic is Omani educational organizations. One of the most educational organizations thatdeals with COVID 19 is universities all over the world. In Oman, Sohar University is one of these universities that follow the first experience of dealing with online learning. The Ministry of Higher Education in Oman has set some rules and regulations to ensure the high level of learning and students'interaction. One of these rules is learning online distance " remote learning "(Ministry of Higher Education Oman, 2020).

Sohar University is the first private university in Sultanate of Oman that was established in 2001 and its name was Sohar Applied College and later it is changed to Sohar University .It obtains official approval from the Ministry of Higher Education with the provided programs and faculties. Sohar University continued the educational process by activating the role of e-learning with its various applications by creating electronic educational platforms and television channels of SULMS to complete the curricula at all stages of education (Sohar University, 2020).

This study will investigate the students' engagement and learning strategies during Covide 19 pandemic at Sohar University, Oman and will focus on the challenges and problems that were faced by students and solutions which were followed to make the best effort to ensure the high level of engagement and learning strategies during Covid 19.

Problem Statement

In the beginning of 2020, all countries around the world suffered from the sudden change of learning. It became online after everyone used to have regular classes in the most of countries. At Sohar University during Corona period, some related problems are caused and they affected the student'sinteraction as teaching online is included as the first-time experience instead of regular lectures. This pandemic causes low level of students' engagement and learning strategies during lectures due to the lack of real attendance and participation. Sohar University Has started to activate different facilities to make the best effort to continue the education online via online. It has provided **SULMS,MicrosoftTeams** and trained the lecturers to deliver the lectures in all the faculties but still the students' performance is really weak and frustrating. This became as a problem because the majority of students don't have enough experience to deal with these technical programs and the lecturers too. In addition, it is not an easy transform to deal and adopt on online learning at Sohar University (AL-Fazari, 2022).

On the other hand, from the researcher experience, the lack of effective monitoring and pay attention during online lectures leads to time consuming and confusion. It is because of the internet low connection in Oman. It is considered as a negative impact that takes place in terms of effectiveness of interaction.

The studies of Marques, Rui & Reis (2020) showed that another problem is cheating which was noticed widely among low achievers. This is another issue that changed the level of students grades and interaction. These sorts of students improved their grades but still their real performances and interactionwasn't changed. They cheated and this is why they got the highest grades. However, their level in the regular and face to face lectures was not improved as they couldn't cheatin the assessments and real examinations during face to face learning.

Another issue is the stress that affected the high achievers. In fact, the high achievers lost their confidence and activity because they did not have the real lectures as they used to have before the pandemic. As a result, their participation and morale were reduced towards learning (Kayalar, 2020).

From another side, the lack of electronic devices led to frustration and low motivation of some students from poor families who don't have enough money to support these students, as well as inability to pay the costs of internet (Yulia, 2020).

This study focuses on investigating the students'interaction during COVID-19pandemic at Sohar University in all its faculties and sheds light on the challenges and difficulties that hinder and affect the educational process.

Study Significance

The study has an effective significance including the theoretical and practical aspects.

Theoretical Aspect

This study is a completion of some studies which were done in the topics of students' engagement and learning strategies during COVID- 19. In addition, it focuses on investigating the students'interaction at Sohar University during the pandemic. Moreover, it benefits the educational universities with some ideas that support the best ways of students'interaction and learning strategies during any sudden crisis and supply them with effective ways of dealing with these sudden circumstances.

The theory of learners-based approach is applied for this research as it supports the the study to find out the accurate results. It is based on constructivist theories of education. The theory was discovered by Jean Piaget during the observation of learners'interaction and the ways they are engaged in the learning process. Furthermore, Jean Piaget observed how the learners bring their previous knowledge and experiences, ideasto

their learning and how this affect their engagement and learning strategies and take on board their new information. This theory is different from traditional students centred approach which depends on the instructor without students'interaction during learning in the classrooms and it is considered as the most updated one in the educational field (Michell,2016). The theory has become to that the core of learning is the students themselves and it is the most focus element in this theory itself.

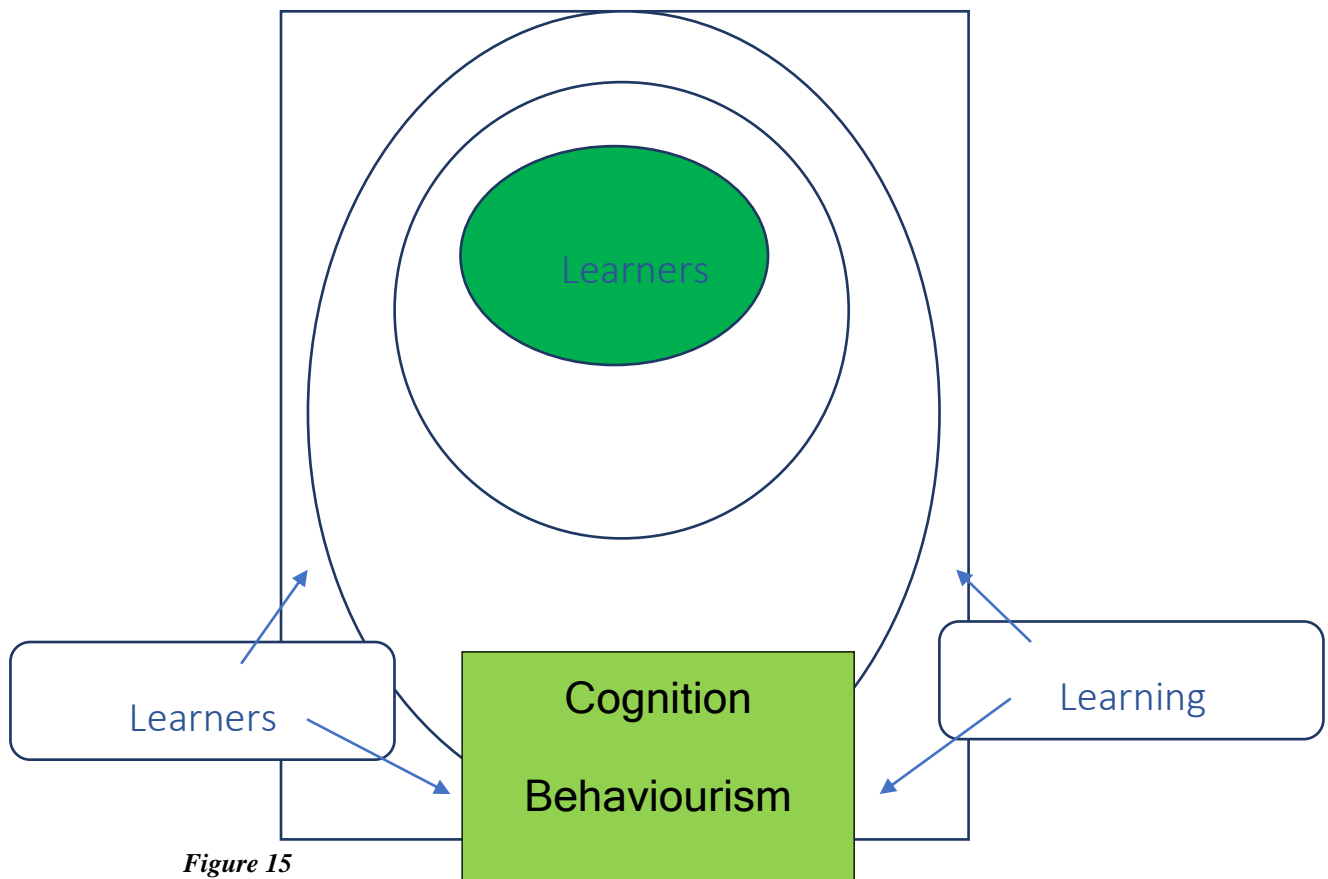**The figure 1 illustrates the theory of learners-based approach.**

Figure 15

Practical Aspect

   The studyprovides new suitable solutions to ensure the best level of student interaction and increase the universities libraries researches qualitative studies in the area of investigating the students'interaction during educational crisis.

Research Purpose

 The study aims to investigate the student interaction in the faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University in the academic year 2022 to 2023. The research objective is to explore the factors influencing students' interaction that students encountered during COVID- 19 pandemic and the solutions to overcome them in the future in case of any sudden crisis that ban the learning process.

Research Questions

The research discusses two main themes as follows:

- Students'interaction isthat considered as the level of attention, cooperationcuriosity, interest, optimism and passion that the students show during learning process.

The research contains two main questions as follows:

- What are the factors influencing students' interaction during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the difficulties faced by students in terms of students'interaction   during Covid- 19 at Sohar University?
- What are the solutions that are the best to avoid any sudden crisis in the future of education in Oman?

The sub questions in this research are as follows:

- How can students overcome any problem related to any factors that influence the interaction at Sohar University?
- How can students overcome the challenges related to students'interaction   during COVID-19 crisis at Sohar University?

Research Methodology

Data collection

This research presents a qualitative approach in which it explores the collected data to describe and analyze these data. The interviews and focused interviews are used to collect the research data for different students in faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University. The number is 80 students. These interviews are designed using forms of different questions that includes one main theme: students'interaction. The questions that are used: demographic questions, closed questions and open-ended questions. The questions are used to reveal the real factors that influence the students' interaction during Corona period's impact.

Study Limitations

The following limitations is conducted as follows:

- **Human limitation:** this study is conducted for the Faculty of Language Studies in level four at Sohar University, Sultanate of Oman
- **Location limitation:** this study is applied in the in the Faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University, Sultanate of Oman
- **Time limitation:** this study is applied for first academic year (2023-2024) at Sohar University, Oman.

The sample

The researcher selects a group of participants who are related to the research objectives and questions. The sampling is snowballing and purposive. These groups consist of 80 students from the faculty of Language Studies atSohar University and they use the platforms when they learn. This number is sufficient to research enough data that ensure the reality and investigation.

Data Analysis Process

This research implements the qualitative analysis. First, the research themes iscoding and identifying. Second, the data is organized in a thematic analysis. Third, the researcher designs a list of data answers. Fourth, the study data is analyzed by ATLAS Software to classify them into themes and coding is classifying into categories. Finally, the codes are summarized, abstracted and analyzed in discussion to reduce the narrative data and choose the selective and the most significant research details that are related to the issue of this study.

Conclusion

This study presented the study problem, its significance and limitations as well as it introduced the theory of learners-based approach and its use in this research. Moreover, it shed lights on the research methodology and data collection and how it is analyzed.

Literature Review

This literature review investigates the students'interaction during COVID 19 pandemic at Sohar University, Oman and will focus on the challenges and problems that were faced by students and solutions which were followed to make the best effort to preserve the best level of engagement and learning strategies during Covid 19.

Students Interaction

Student interaction, is "more than involvement or participation. It requires feelings and sense-making as well as activity". Student engagement can be measured in three aspects: behavioral, emotional and cognitive (Salas-Pilco, Yang&Zhang 2020).

According to Salas, Yang and Zhang the students' interaction is more than involvement or participation. It requires feelings and sense-making as well as activity". Student engagement can be measured in three aspects: behavioral, emotional and cognitive (Salas-Pilco & Yang, 2020) Sarıtepeci and Cakır, in their study concluded that in [a] blended learning approach, average development of student interaction showed a meaningful rise when compared to [a] face-to-face learning approach. Instructional design strongly influences student interaction in class. Taylor and Newton commented that the design of the curriculum needs to ensure that learning objective engage the students in the class. Academically purposeful activities positively influence students' interaction and contribute positively to their learning (Salas-Pilco, Yang&Zhang 2020).

Yorke and Thomas observed that a lack of student interaction in a class leads to academic underachievement. According to Delialioğlu the difference in active learning is due not to students' individual differences but rather to the learning environment provided.

According to Ali Lily et al. (2020), The research used a quantitative methodology and conduct survey to students as sample in their research. one of the responses to the coronavirus pandemic was limiting face-to-face learning as a major way of ensuring that the pandemic did not spread at a high rate. This meant that students had to learn from home and had to depend on online learning tools. However, it needs to be understood that the Arab culture is built on social closeness, which meant that the decision to learn from home during the pandemic was going against the cultural norms of this group. This leads to the question of whether students were significantly affected by the sudden change and this could significantly affect the way in which students were engaged in their studies prior to the pandemic. The results showed that the students affected negatively during the pandemic as they faced major challenges of boredom, health problems and stress. These challenges created some learning difficulties and led to low interaction. The study recommended to solve these problems by using effective platforms and provided advising sessions for each student especially those who panic.

According to Campos et al. (2021), most of the students who were subjected to the pandemic were likely to suffer from mood swings and depressive symptoms due to the changing learning methods. The changing of the university routines was likely to affect the mental health of students, which could have a significant effect on their involvement in studies due to new learning contexts. These findings were supported by Keyserlingk et al. (2021) who indicated that students were likely to suffer from stress due to being subjected to new learning techniques and environments. It is only students who had high levels of self-regulation that were likely to suffer lower stress levels after the introduction of online learning. Therefore, it is clear that the introduction of online learning was likely to influence the student interaction in their course work. At the same time the study of Lemay, Brazalias and Doleck (2021) explored that students can't work properly under stress and they feel stressed and anxious when they study online because of some challenges that they face from isolation and the huge effort that they have to pay in order to understand the huge lectures details. The studies recommended to support the students with high level of activities with very effective technical learning tools and monitor their level by face to face online regular meeting every week.

In a study conducted by Alpert et al. (2021), the researchers found out that medical students taking up radiology classes had to adopt remote clinical learning after the pandemic struck. The pandemic forced educational institutions teaching radiology to suspend in-person medical student learning including NYU

Grossman School of Medicine campus. The remote learning strategy was adopted as a way of ensuring that the learning objectives of the students were met. However, the main concern was whether the remote learning will be of educational relevance for technical courses such as radiology that required the learner to be in close contact with the instructor and the learning materials. When Alpert et al. (2021) sought to investigate this issue, they found out that the remote learning had a modestly higher academic relevance and interactive participation among radiology students compared to in-person learning among the same group. This means that the introduction of the new learning strategies during the pandemic did not have a significant effect on the student interaction. These findings were, however, disputed by another study on student's interaction capability among German students who enrolled for online learning during and after the pandemic.

According to Spitzer et al. (2021), students who enrolled for the online learning during the first pandemic-related educational centers closures disengaged from the new learning environment in quite a short time. This means that the pandemic affected the level to which the students were engage in online learning during the pandemic. The dropout rates among online learners increased significantly during the pandemic. This means that the students'interaction in their learning could have been affected by the introduction of new learning strategies during the pandemic. This led to the question of why students could have been engaged or disengaged in online learning during the pandemic.

A study by Quigley et al. (2022) noted that personality traits and stress determined the level of students'interaction during the coronavirus pandemic. According to Quigley et al. (2022), conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness and openness were significant in ensuring that students were more engaged in online learning during the pandemic. Stress was, however, negatively related with online learning during the pandemic. In this regard, it was important to study what needed to be done to ensure that the students were more engaged during the pandemic .This recommended to continue supporting the students to show better interaction during pandemic.

According to Sessions et al. (2022), it was important for educators to provide enhanced pedagogical support to learners to improve their interaction in the learning environment. This is because the support could improve the emotional wellbeing of the learners, which could have enhanced the student's interaction during the pandemic. The results showed that the students should be provided with emotional sessions to avoid low achievement which affects interaction negatively during pandemic.

Additionally, the study of Kayalar (2020), in Turkey aimed to appoint the challenging factors that faced by the students which are the difficulties of using technical tools and the adaptation on using digital learning,knowledge and skills and this even was related to teaching experience that affected the students understanding and interaction as most of the teachers tried this crisis for the first time. On the other side, this study mentioned that there were some financial problems that caused some learning obstacles during corona and these problems happened as some families are poor and lost their jobs and they couldn't provide these students the internet expenses. The study recommends the students to use the curriculums materials and study by using the easiest technical learning tools and at the same time it advised the teachers to decrease the number of students in each online classes in order to make them more effective and interacted during this pandemic.

The study conducted by Shawaqfeh (2020)in Riyadh, Suadi Arabia at the University of King Suad Bin Abdul Aziz aimed to clear the perspectives of pharmacy students and it clarify that 34% of students faced challenges which are related to online study due to lack of technical tools. However, 75% of students were ready to online classes and use platforms such as BACKBOARD and ZOOM since these students have already known how to use them in forums, courses and workshops. The study recommended to continue using various learning platforms that fit the students' learning interaction.

Moreover, the study of Marques, Rui & Resi (2020) in Portugal used a theoretical form and clarify the factors that faced Social isolated students during pandemic. This focused on students learning experience during COVID – 19 and its reality of students' isolation. The study discussed the technical demands of students that had relation with information and knowledge. It showed that students weren't the same in their abilities of internet

tools and technical facilities availability. Some students couldn't access online since they live in the remote areas where the internet connection is too low.This caused lack of training for students and led to an educational gap of misunderstanding the lessons and low interaction. The study recommended to provide the needs and easiest learning programs for isolated students and it advised even the teachers to present their lessons via attractive ways in which it leads the students for better motivation feeling and engagement by group working and using effective platforms of MsTeams, Google Classroom and ZOOM.

The study of Terenko and Ogienko(2020), in Rome included mix methods, this study aimed to appoint the technical curriculums and courses during pandemic and they applied online learning that caused to learning flexibility and provided learning support however there were some challenges that related to weak self-study skills and lack of training tools availability. The majority of students replayed positively during their period of quarantine. The study recommended to take care of those students who were under quarantine and supported them by giving them effective technical learning tools and monitored their level and as well as motivate them via recording the sessions and used videos to smooth their learning interaction.

Moreover, the study of Pinheiro &Italla(2020) conducted descriptive study in Brazil and aimed to describe the latest technical nursing online courses during pandemic and clarified that this disease forced to create new learning methods that protected its quality after the gap of new online learning took place in the education. This change ensured the continuous learning and its quality of learning interaction. At the same time, there were some difficulties which stopped face to face learning and shifted it to the digital learning. This resulted in reforming the updated learning materials and methods by various newest techniques in all the field of education.

However, the study conducted by Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) in Gorgia, aimed to experimental study that explore the success of online learning and the effects on students'interaction and learning. It showed a successful learning that support students to get more experience and new learning skills for even future crisis. The skills made the students more dependent and able to get more new skills and the study recommended to improve more effective online technical learning and integrate it with curriculums in all the basic learning subjects in order to improve the interaction.

Similarly, the study of Sumitra, P &Roshn, C (2021) in Indonesia, showed that the high technology of education that were applied, supported the students to perfume positively as they were encouraged by using different ways of various learning via technical platforms. This led to high level of motivation and low level of boredom and as a result high level of interaction.

The study of Rokopenko&Berezhna(2020) in Ukraine cleared that the spread of COVID-19 led to transforming the way of learning interaction to better change and beneficial digital learning. Although the students faced challenges during quarantine, they could benefit from the remote learning because of the chance to provide self-learning and use technical learning tools with the support of training for students. At the end, this study recommended to train students and provide them with best health and psychologycare that will lead to better interaction.

The research study and its relation with these literatures (previous studies)

This study agrees with the previous studies in terms of the following: This study presented the previous studies and agreed with other studies in clarifying the research problem of COVID- 19 and cleared thegap , the challenges and the solutions related to this crisis as well as its influence on students interaction.

The sampling of the previous studies was different from others, but they shared the same issue of the factors that prevented the proper students'interaction during COVID -19 pandemic. The factors are different from one area to another although they are similar in some areas such as the factors of low internet connection, health, emotional and mental problemsand learning difficulties. It also shows the factors that influence the interaction which are technology, motivation,

This research is considered as the most significant study which has discussed the challenges that students faced during pandemic and it is giving some solutions to avoid any sudden educational crisis in the future of Sohar University, Oman.

Conclusion

Based on the research literatures, students'interaction isinfluencedbylearning atmosphere in which it is considered a mediator between teachers and students. In addition, it has been impacted by many other factors that affect students' level in terms of emotion and behaviors and cognition, communication, technology and teaching methods, motivation and culture. Last but not least, this educational crisis leads to positive and negative points in the education that the previous studies found out.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the challenges faced by students in the Faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights the need for institutions to provide adequate technological resources and support to enable effective online learning. The study also emphasizes the importance of adopting interactive and collaborative pedagogies to promote student interaction during online classes. Finally, the study highlights the importance of effective communication, motivation, and cultural sensitivity in promoting student interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings

The study found several factors influencing students' interaction during COVID-19 in the Faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University. These factors are discussed below.

- Technology: The use of technology was a significant factor influencing students' interaction during COVID-19. Students reported experiencing difficulties with accessing online classes due to poor internet connectivity and inadequate devices, which affected their ability to participate in online discussions and group work.

- Teaching methods:The use of effective teaching methods is considered as a real factor that impacts students' interaction during the pandemic.

- Communication: Effective communication was identified as a crucial factor in promoting student interaction during COVID-19. Students reported experiencing communication barriers, such as language differences and technical issues, which negatively impacted their interaction with classmates.

- Motivation: Student motivation was identified as a crucial factor influencing their interaction during COVID-19. Students who lacked motivation reported feeling isolated and disconnected from their classmates, leading to reduced interaction.

- Culture: Cultural differences were identified as a factor influencing student interaction during COVID-19. Students reported experiencing challenges with understanding cultural differences, which impacted their ability to interact effectively with classmates from different cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

This study provides insights into the factors influencing student interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Faculty of Language Studies at Sohar University. The findings highlight the need for institutions to provide adequate technological resources and support, adopt interactive and collaborative pedagogies, and promote effective communication, motivation, and cultural sensitivity to promote student interaction during online classes.

Ethical Consideration

In this study the ethical considerations will be taken to the researcher's consideration. The ethical considerations that are related to the study are as follows:

- The study data is sorted safely and confidentially so, no one can look at any different primary resources for this study.

- The researcher has to make sure that the study data will not harm any participant psychologically or physically.

- The researcher should maintain the anonymity for every participant and ensure that only the researcher can see the participants and know their contribution in the meetings.

- The participants have all the right to answer the question fully or shortly depending on their views and opinions and as well as they have the right to withdraw if they have any sudden issue however the researcher has to encourage them to participant without any harm or force.

- The participants have to get a clear picture and vision about the study topic and what are they supposed to answer for and fill in the consent letter before their participation.

- The researcher has to use very easy and clear language and translate or clear some parts of language to ensure that all participants can understand the questions clearly without obstacles.

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