

Chapter 6

Student Engagement in the Post–Pandemic Virtual Classroom

Zahra Pourabedin

Shepherd University, USA

Vahid Biglari

Shepherd University, USA

ABSTRACT

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions worldwide experienced unprecedented challenges, leading to a paradigm shift in the education system. To deal with the need for more flexible learning, educational research and development aimed at providing a richer, more engaging remote learning experience by the creation of virtual classrooms. Within this digital learning environment, the challenge is to create an engaging learning environment to ensure optimal learning outcomes. This chapter addresses the imperative need to foster greater student engagement in virtual classrooms to maximize learning effectiveness. Drawing on established literature which underscores the link between student engagement and positive learning outcomes, the chapter emphasizes the pivotal role of engagement in enhancing student satisfaction and retention in online teaching contexts. By increasing the level of student engagement, instructors can increase the students' satisfaction level and retention, improving the efficiency of online teaching. Moreover, the chapter delves into the evolution of virtual classrooms and elucidates innovative strategies and practical techniques designed to augment student engagement. By synthesizing empirical evidence and best practices, the chapter offers insights into effective pedagogical approaches that educators can employ to create vibrant and interactive virtual learning environments. Through a rigorous examination of

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research findings and experiential knowledge, this chapter contributes to advancing our understanding of how to optimize student engagement in virtual classrooms, thereby enriching the landscape of online education.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with exploring the evolution, application, and implications of virtual classrooms, particularly examining their pre-pandemic utilization, responses during the COVID-19 outbreak, and sustained post-pandemic integration. The chapter adopts a multidimensional theoretical framework. This framework draws upon Thornburg et al. (2021) which explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student readiness and engagement in virtual classrooms.

The literature review critically examines the pre-pandemic landscape of virtual education, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in online teaching methodologies. While acknowledging the historical utilization of virtual classrooms for distance education and professional development purposes, the review highlights the shortcomings of early approaches characterized by simplistic lecture-based formats. Through an analysis of seminal works by Dykman & Davis (2008), Gaytan & McEwen (2007), and Palmer & Holt (2008), among others, the review underscores the imperative for active student engagement and pedagogical innovation in virtual learning environments.

The study addresses a significant gap in existing literature by offering a comprehensive exploration of virtual classrooms' evolution, challenges, and potentials across pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic contexts. By synthesizing historical insights with contemporary empirical findings, the research contributes to a nuanced understanding of virtual education's role in facilitating educational continuity, fostering student engagement, and promoting pedagogical innovation amidst unprecedented disruptions. Moreover, by delineating practical recommendations for educators based on insights gleaned from Dias et al. (2020), Redinger et al. (2020), and Akhtar et al. (2020), the study offers actionable strategies to enhance the efficacy and inclusivity of virtual teaching practices.

The research illuminates the dynamic evolution of virtual classrooms and underscores their enduring relevance in shaping the future of education. By elucidating the historical antecedents, contemporary challenges, and emerging trends in virtual education, the study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers navigating the complexities of online teaching and learning. Moreover, by highlighting the need for ongoing professional development initiatives and pedagogical innovation in virtual education, the research underscores the importance

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