



Lack of Social Interaction in Online Classes During COVID-19

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Abstract

Online learning has been popular with students elsewhere on Earth due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to helping to maintain the continuity of education worldwide, it also imposes a lot of challenges for students. Among them, social interaction issues have been mentioned as one of the barriers preventing learners from being successful online learners. Social interaction refers to the interaction between students and teachers. The study aimed to investigate the effects of lack of social interaction in online classes. The study is helpful for instructors, educational institutes, educationists, and policymakers to standardize strategies to enhance social interaction in online learning and analyze their pedagogy to improve effectiveness. The mixed-methods study attracted the participation of 1456 students for quantitative data and 70 teachers' for qualitative data from the Government universities of Punjab. The questionnaires were distributed through social media apps by using snow ball sampling technique. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data, while frequency and percentage were used to analyze quantitative data. The findings of the study revealed that a lack of social interaction affected students' satisfaction level, and cause psychological issues such as health, depression, fear of loneliness, and boredom. The results suggest that lack of social interaction is a global challenge to the effectiveness of online learning. It is recommended that counselling sessions might be conducted for students to reduce their stress levels, which have increased during the pandemic, in online classes, and to take measures to increase their social interaction.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 epidemic had an impact on every area of people's lives around the world. It had a massive impact that had never been seen before [1]. It brought everything to a halt, limited people's movement, and created a great deal of uncertainty [2]. People found themselves rapidly approaching a new reality that necessitated new behaviors Governments and education ministries around the world were forced to collaborate closely with universities to deal with the confinement and subsequent closure of educational institutions [3]. As a result of Coronavirus 2019, Pakistan was one of the first countries in the world to implement widespread school closures (COVID-19) (Figure 1). Although school closures have been beneficial in aiding social distancing measures, they may have major ramifications for education and learning [4]. The graph [5] shows the total number of COVID cases recorded in Pakistan (Figure 2).

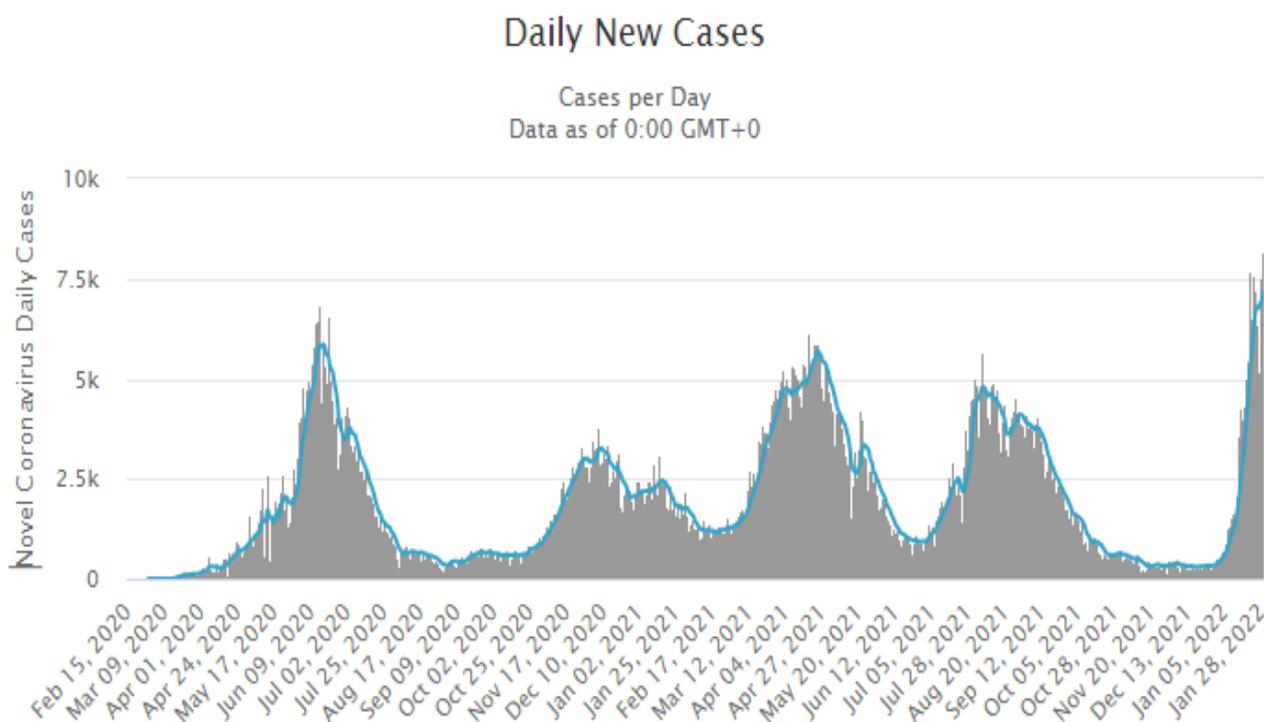


Figure 1: *Source: World o meter’s COVID-19 data.

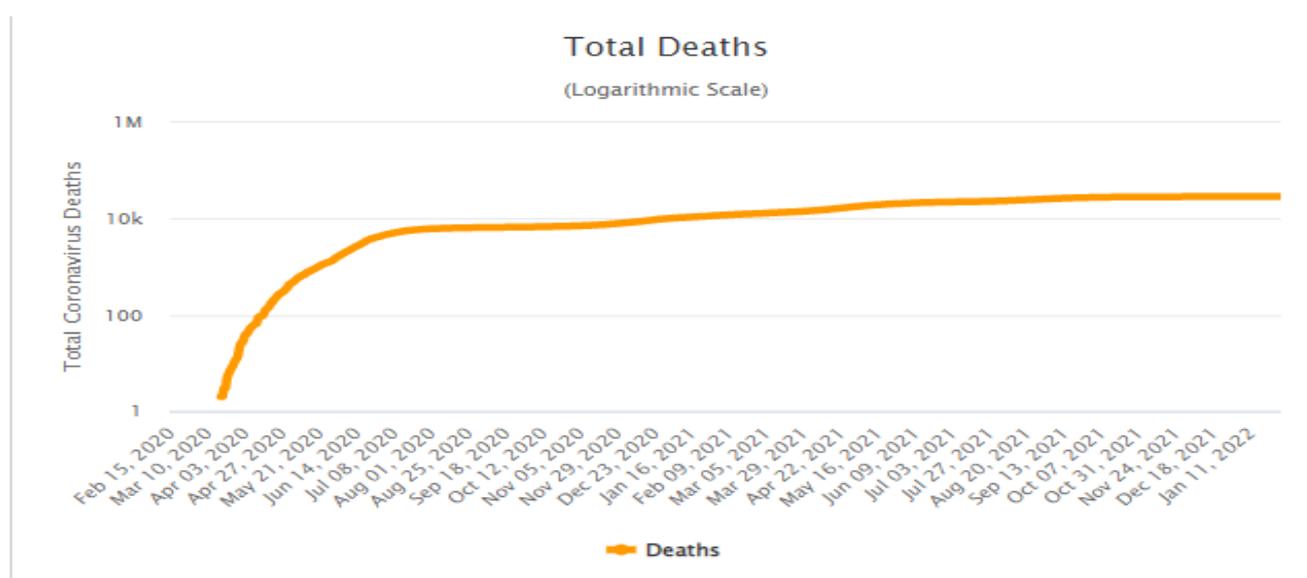


Figure 2: *Source: World o meter’s COVID-19 data.

Smoothed trend estimates of reporting daily COVID-19 deaths (blue) and total daily deaths due COVID (orange) (Figure 3) [6].

"Socialization" is a wide concept that can signify different things to different people [7]. On one or more levels, socialization refers to people's ability to mingle and form connections [8]. They communicate with one another, sharing ideas and information, and confirming connections through a mutually agreed-upon method [9]. Understandably, socialization research attempts to break down this complex process in a similar way, by discussing the components that make up the entirety of socializing [10]. Many are concerned with student interaction, while others are concerned with community development, but none appear to have a common meaning [11].

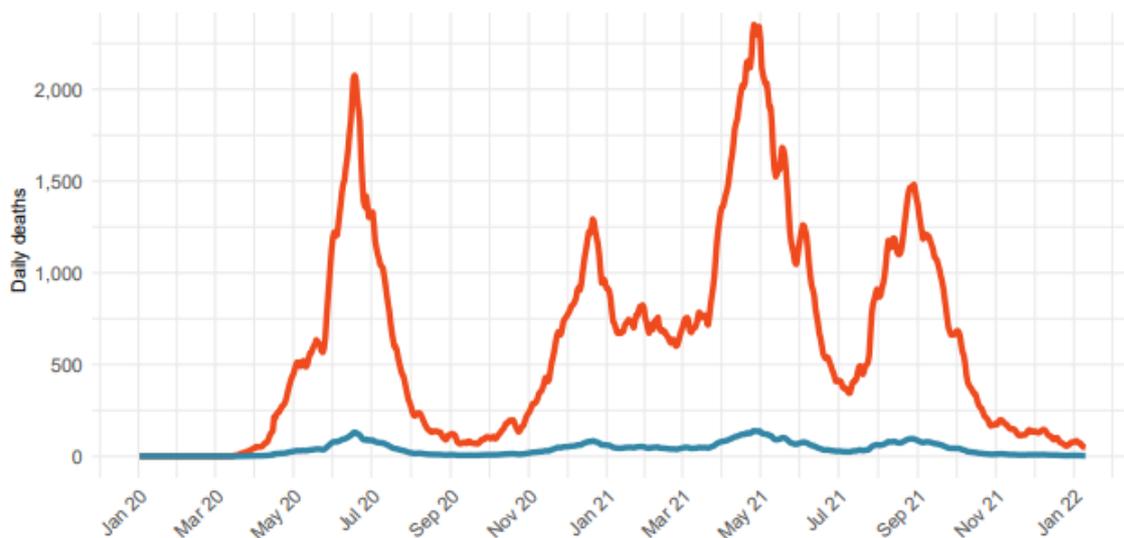


Figure 3: *Source: COVID-19. health data.org

Learning effectiveness is a critical topic for online learning. Online learning has grown in popularity as a result of the Internet, and many academics, academicians, and educators, particularly in higher education, are interested in increasing and expanding student learning outcomes [12]. When the majority of educational establishments around the world go to online learning, this efficiency becomes even more important [13]. Online learning has been around for a long time and has been the subject of many studies. Concerns about the quality of learning, efficacy, learning outcomes, and student happiness have arisen as a result of the abrupt move toward online education in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic [14]. Instructors have enough time to prepare lectures with online learning; yet, there is a lack of immediate connection between an instructor and a learner [15]. The definition of interaction in online learning has been proposed by a number of studies. The most frequent description of contact in online learning is that it can take three forms: instructor–learner, learner–learner, and content–learner. As a result, interaction is defined as the process of creating a meaningful flow of information and ideas between more than two people [16]. Interaction refers to a psychosomatic impression of the total process of developing a pedagogically meaningful exchange of constant contact between more than two people in online learning [17]. Many research has been conducted to improve instructor-student interaction in various learning situations. While interaction is important in collaborative learning, being a silent student can also be beneficial to online learners. Inclusion and equal opportunity in interactions and conversations have long been important parts of higher education learning [18]. In an online learning community, social contact is one of the most important aspects. Interaction is at the heart of the learning process and a critical aspect in achieving a favorable student learning outcome. Interaction aids in the development of knowledge and the empowerment of learners, as well as providing a forum for people of a society to express their views and interests with one another [19].

Barriers can be defined as roadblocks that prevent students from achieving their own learning objectives. A variety of studies have been conducted to explore the barriers to online learning, based on geographical factors, types of learners, local educational policy, or technological progress in a specific region [20]. Learners' difficulties in reading, writing, typing skills, technical problems with computers, feeling of isolation, family issues, interaction, lack of time, insufficient academic

background, workplace issues and lack of support from family and friends or the workplace, insufficient technology background, computer and/or Internet issues, and lack of instructor presence were synthesized as online learning barriers. Furthermore, the findings of Henderikx et al. (2019)'s empirical investigation revealed issues with students' own responsibility for learning, a lack of time, poor course material, a lack of enthusiasm, poor instructional quality, and/or family challenges [21]. (Moustakas, 1994) observed eight barriers, the most significant of which is social interaction [22]. Social interaction issues have been mentioned as one of the barriers preventing learners from being successful online learners [23]. Social interaction refers to the interaction between students and teachers. In online learning, this type of interaction was missing, as students could not talk to each other in front of the other students [24]. The study is aimed to find out the effects of lack of social interaction in online classes during COVID-19.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

The purpose of this research study was to find out the effects of lack of social interaction in online classes during COVID-19. The data was gathered from Punjab government universities that were working online during the lockdown. Snowball sampling was used to collect data from students and teachers who were learning online owing to the pandemic COVID-19, and they were urged to share it with their networks. The sample population consists primarily of 18–22-years old undergraduate students admitted to various areas of study. The majority of respondents had never been exposed to online learning; nevertheless, some students had sufficient expertise with it. The quantitative data collected through an online survey was examined and expressed in percentages based on the frequency of common student responses. The Likert scale was used to collect demographic data, which is reported as a percentage of students' responses. Thematic analysis was used to acquire qualitative data.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The independent variable, lack of social interaction in online classes, caused both physical and psychological issues in students. It includes stress, depression, feeling of loneliness, and health issues, etc. This conceptual framework supports the idea that lack of social interaction in online classes is one of the global educational challenges from the perspective of the COVID pandemic (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Conceptual Framework

2.3 Results

Result of Quantitative Study

Quantitative research examines the relationships between variables in order to test objective ideas. These variables can then be measured using instruments, resulting in numbered data that can be examined using statistical processes. Introduction, literature and theory, methodology, results, and comments are all included in the final written report [25]. The result of the quantitative data consisted of the responses of 1456 university students, as shown in Tables 1 to 14.

Table 01 There is a lack of interaction/communication among students in the online classroom.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	1125	256	75	1456
Percentage		77.26	17.58	5.15	100

Table 01 shows that 77.26% of respondents agreed that there is a lack of interaction among students in online classrooms. 5.15% of respondents disagreed, while 17.58% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 02 Online learning seems impersonal and isolated as compared to traditional classroom.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	1231	194	31	1456
Percentage		84.54	13.32	2.12	100

Table 02 shows that 84.54% of respondents agreed that online learning appears impersonal and isolated when compared to traditional classroom learning. Only 2.12% of respondents disagreed, while 13.32% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 03 I am afraid of feeling isolated in the online classroom.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	980	451	20	1456
Percentage		67.30	30.97	1.37	100

Table 03 shows that 67.30% of respondents agreed that they felt isolated in the online classroom. Only 1.37% of respondents disagreed, while 30.97% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents felt loneliness in an online classroom.

Table 04 shows that 70.12% of respondents agreed that there is a lack of social context cues in the online classroom. 10.23% of respondents disagreed, while 19.64% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 04 There is a lack of social context cues in the online classroom.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	1021	286	149	1456
Percentage		70.12	19.64	10.23	100

Table 05 There is a lack of student collaboration in the online classroom.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	1029	298	129	1456
Percentage		70.67	20.46	8.85	100

Table 05 shows that 70.67% of respondents agreed that there is a lack of student collaboration in the online classroom. Only 8.85% of respondents disagreed, while 20.46% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 06 I will prefer to learn in person than online classroom as there is no social interaction.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	989	460	07	1456
Percentage		67.92	31.59	0.48	100

Table 06 shows that 67.92% of respondents agreed that they would prefer to learn in person rather than in an online classroom, where there is no social interaction. Only 0.48% of respondents disagreed, while 31.59% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 07 If I were to engage in social distancing (e.g., not going to school), I would lessen my chance of developing the infection of COVID-19.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	764	453	239	1456
Percentage		52.47	31.11	16.41	100

Table 07 shows that 52.47% of respondents agreed that if they were to engage in social distancing, they would lessen their chance of developing the infection COVID-19. Only 16.41% of respondents disagreed, while 31.11% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 08 I am encouraged by engaging in social distancing during the pandemic of COVID-19 because I feel it is a necessity to do it.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	897	398	161	1456
Percentage		61.60	27.33	11.05	100

Table 08 shows that 61.60% of respondents agreed that they were encouraged to engage in social distancing during the pandemic of COVID-19 because they feel it is necessary to do it. Only 11.05% of respondents disagreed, while 27.33% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 09 I feel confident in my ability to engage in social distancing during the pandemic of COVID-19.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	902	437	117	1456
Percentage		61.95	30.01	8.03	100

Table 09 shows that 61.95% of respondents agreed that they felt confident in their ability to engage in social distancing during the pandemic of COVID-19. Only 8.03% of respondents disagreed, while 30.01% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 10 I cannot learn in the online classroom as compared to the traditional classroom.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	987	402	67	1456
Percentage		67.78	27.60	4.60	100

Table 10 shows that 67.78% of respondents agreed that they could not learn in an online classroom as opposed to a traditional classroom. Only 4.60% of respondents disagreed, while 27.60% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 11 Learning in an online classroom is not so effective as compared to the traditional classroom

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	1067	298	91	1456
Percentage		73.28	20.46	6.25	100

Table 11 shows that 73.28% of respondents agreed that learning in an online classroom is not as effective as compared to a traditional classroom. Only 6.25% of respondents disagreed, while 20.46% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 12 The online learning approach cannot substitute the traditional classroom approach.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	1068	302	86	1456
Percentage		73.35	20.74	5.90	100

Table 12 shows that 73.35% of respondents agree that an online learning approach cannot replace the traditional classroom approach. Only 5.90% of respondents disagreed, while 20.74% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 13 I do not feel comfortable and confident in online learning as compared to the traditional classroom

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	886	327	243	1456
Percentage		60.85	22.45	16.68	100

Table 13 shows that 60.85% of respondents agreed that they do not feel comfortable and confident in online learning as compared to traditional classroom instruction. Only 16.68% of respondents disagreed, while 22.45% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents did not feel comfortable and confident in online learning.

Table 14 I learn better through traditional classroom compared to the online learning approach.

Level	N	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Total
Frequency	1456	1027	401	28	1456
Percentage		70.53	27.54	1.92	100

Table 14 shows that 70.53% of respondents agreed that they learn better through traditional classroom instruction than through the online learning approach. Only 1.92% of respondents disagreed, while 27.54% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the traditional classroom.

Result of Qualitative Study

Qualitative research is delving into and comprehending the significance that individuals or groups attach to a social or human issue. Emerging questions and processes are part of the research process, as are data acquired in the participant's environment, data analysis that builds inductively from specifics to broad themes, and the researcher's interpretations of the data. The structure of the final written report is customizable. Those who engage in this type of research promote an approach to research that values an inductive approach, an emphasis on individual meaning, and the necessity of rendering a situation's complexity [25]. The result of the qualitative data consisted of the responses of 70 university teachers:

1. Majority (70%) of the respondents said that there is lack of social interaction among students in online classes because direct monitoring and direct interaction was missing in online classes. Some 30% teachers said that there is no lack of communication and interaction among students because they made their online classes more interactive.
2. Majority of the respondents said that lack of interaction in online classes affect their students psychologically. There are some reasons
 - Teacher cannot see their facial expressions
 - Lack of motivation of students like physical lecture
 - Learning speed of students
 - Students were unable to interact and communicate each other
 - Stress due to learn from home
 - Use of technology for learning badly affect
3. The majority have the opinion that there are many consequences of lack of social interaction in online classes during Covid-19 as very few students took online classes regularly, they use cell phones other than study purposes, low appreciation from teachers, no attentiveness ,group studies are not possible, students become reluctant to share their ideas and perspectives with teachers and fellows, studies are boredom and cause of stress for them or they take online classes lightly because exams are also online and they can copy paste the material from web so they are not interested to take classes.
4. All the respondents agreed that social connection is a barrier in online classes due to which students cannot succeed. For example, lack of internet connection, misuse of mobile phones, online communication is not as much effective as physical means, no check and balance, poor time management, and inability to monitor students' activities are the barriers.
5. The majority of teachers agree that social interaction can be improved in a variety of ways, such as :
 - Keeping check how students are doing
 - Involving your students for better classroom interaction
 - Taking suggestions from students or try to know their needs
 - Counseling of students
 - Motivating your students to ask anything
 - Video meetings
 - Assigning group tasks to students
6. The majority of the teachers said that lack of social interaction has a great influence on students' satisfaction. This includes having no motive, not getting inspired by the work of others, having no

interest in class, and having no fear of exams. When they do not get the essence of a real classroom, they get unsatisfied. The physical presence of the teacher also has a great effect on students' satisfaction.

Conclusion

- There is a lack of social interaction during online classes. Students feel fear of loneliness and feel isolated in online classes. They are not comfortable with online classes.
- Lack of social interaction has a great influence on students' satisfaction. They feel that social connection is a barrier in online classes during COVID-19 and it has a great psychological effect on students as well as teachers like, fear of loneliness, misuse of mobile phones, and no fear of exams or being evaluated.
- Lack of social interaction has many consequences like they the study became boredom for them, students became habitual to not taking their classes and they misuse the technology, no attentiveness and cheating became more common. There are different ways to improve lack of social interaction like involving your students in classes, taking suggestions from your students like how to improve your interaction and by video meeting and assigning group tasks.

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