

# Effects of Interaction in Online Language Classroom: A Case Study in Najran University

Taj Mohammad<sup>1</sup>, Jalal Ahmed<sup>2</sup>, & Soada Idris<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor (English) at Najran University, Saudi Arabia

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer (English) at Najran University, Saudi Arabia

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor (English) at Najran University, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Taj Mohammad, Associate Professor (English) at Najran University, Saudi Arabia.

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## Abstract

This research investigated the effects of interaction in online language classroom. A mixed method research design using questionnaire and interview was employed to elicit quantitative data from teachers (N=30) and students (N=55). In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted with faculty members (N=10) to collect the qualitative responses on the effects of interaction in online language classroom. The data was analyzed using SPSS software (23.0). The results of the questionnaire revealed that students' interaction in online language classroom had positive effects on learning. However, the qualitative data contradicted the questionnaire results. Based on the contrary findings, the researchers offered the possible reasons for the difference of opinions. Solutions, based on the participants' qualitative responses, are offered to address the interactions' issues as highlighted by the respondents during the semi-structured interview. As e-learning platforms are being used worldwide in academia, this study will have universal implications.

**Keywords:** e-learning, interaction, online language classroom, effects

## 1. Introduction

There is no doubt that interaction is a key component in any teaching and learning situation. No learning can happen without proper interaction between teacher and student. However, in an EFL language classroom, it is more significant as a foreign language cannot be learnt without effective interaction and communication.

According to a report by Skolinspektionen (2011), the most effective lessons were those that used English in a meaningful way. The teachers interacted with the students and gave directions in the target language throughout these lessons. The interaction which takes place in any teaching and learning situation is pedagogic interaction. Brown (2001) viewed it "as heart of communication" (p. 165). Skolinspektionen (2011) mentioned as teacher uses target language to talk and discuss the contents, these classes are more effective.

The business of interaction is more challenging in EFL situations like as in Saudi Arabia as most of the non-Arab teachers do not know Arabic and the students do not know English well. As teachers are not well versed in the mother tongue of students, they can use only target language as a means to transmit the contents to the students. Moreover, teachers who know the target language of students are immensely discouraged to use L1 in the classroom. As a result, many students do not understand what teacher teaches, at least, in the beginning of the semester. However, with the passage of time, they begin to understand the L2 and respond to the teachers that effects learning in online classroom.

Nonverbal behavior and paralinguistic traits, such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone, and voice pitch, play a significant role to make learning effective in a physical classroom. Nevertheless, teachers cannot rely on them in an online language classroom as video call is not encouraged in online classroom due to cultural issues especially in Najran region of Saudi Arabia. Students only listen to audio and there is no face to face communication. It cannot assimilate the facial expressions and body language in online communication, which may limit the scope of the interaction (Curtis & Lawson, 2001). There is nominal student to student or teacher to student interaction. Therefore, the online classroom lacks engaged learning, or instruction that is assisted by the instructor. Teachers are not well trained in using technology, particularly learning management system (LMS) to speed up the process of knowledge production. There is no denying that a number of learning theorists have promoted engaged learning for many years. They have emphasized that students learn most successfully while working collaboratively and having discussions with other students (Bornstein & Bruner, 1989; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1981). Positive relationships between learner engagement and desired learning outcomes, including improved grades and critical thinking, have been established (Carini, et al. 2006). Encouragement of contact in the classroom is essential to ensure that students actively construct their own knowledge and succeed since student engagement is built on interaction (Anderson, 2003). Interaction must be effective and motivate students to communicate with each other positively. So, classroom discourse plays a substantial role in a teaching and learning situation. In order to motivate students to interact with each other and with teachers, teachers must focus more on

the activities which encourage interaction. For example, instead of asking simple yes/no question, teacher must focus more on WH (information) questions which provide learners enough scope to state their personal opinion on a particular subject. This viewpoint emphasizes that pedagogical objectives and the language employed to attain them are intricately linked and continually modified (Walsh, 2006; Seedhouse, 2004). In an EFL situation like Najran University, students generally do not come from a strong academic background and English proficiency draws no exception. Nevertheless, there have been little efforts to find out the effects of interaction in online language classroom. The present research found out there were positive effects of interaction in online language classroom. However, the interview results contradicted the questionnaire findings. The researchers assumed that the possible reasons of contradiction might be attributed to the nature of the research instrument that restricts participants expressing their opinion. The study offered solutions, based on the participants' qualitative responses, to address the interactions' implicit issues as discovered during the semi-structured interview. This research is important as it investigates the effects of interaction in online language classroom to achieve the study's objectives.

### *1.1 Objectives of the Study*

1. To assess the extent interaction plays a crucial role in teaching/learning situation
2. To analyze the level of improvement interaction effect teaching/learning situations
3. To identify the remedies of the problems of interaction and their possible solutions

## **2. Literature Review**

Interaction plays a key role in any teaching and learning situation. However, during the pandemic, it is noticed that teacher to student and student to student interaction have greatly suffered. There have been several issues in online classroom that affected the interaction to a great extent. While interaction used to be overlooked in pursuit of information in online courses (Nipper, 1989), interaction is now acknowledged as being essential to promoting learning (Bernard et al. 2009; Lou, Bernard, & Abrami, 2006; Norris, Mason, & Lefrere, 2003).

Many teachers who deliver instruction in person are not interested in doing so online (Fein & Logan, 2003; Osika, Johnson, & Buteau, 2009). The fact that these instructors have been imparting knowledge face-to-face for years and are hesitant to switch to the online format is one of the main problems. This unease is caused by a fear of the unknown or it could be due to a difficulty interacting with pupils in an online setting. Many teachers were scared that they will be replaced by computers as a result of their fear of the unknown (Berge & Collins, 1996; Osika et al., 2009). Some teachers don't yet make the connection between the subject matter and the most effective way to teach their classes online because they perceive the online environment as cold and distant for students.

Even though teachers may feel at ease incorporating technology to improve their classrooms, they might not think that online courses are as valuable as traditional ones (Osika et al., 2009). Seven principles for efficient online education were developed by researchers in 2001 and were adapted from well-established concepts for face-to-face instruction. The guiding theme of the seven principles is the expectation of contact between faculty and students as well as between students and their peers. These principles also include good faculty-student interaction and setting expectations for interaction (Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, & Craner, 2001). Another aspect of such relationship is effective communication, along with prompt feedback to students. Online teachers need to have excellent listening and communication skills, as well as put in the time and extra efforts to build a sense of community among their students and engage them with challenging questions that will help conversations progress. (Santiago, Lipschuetz, & Kebritchi 2017)

A deterioration in the quality of the response could be a result of the high levels of interaction caused by an over-reliance on the instructors. Because many online students are millennials (Howe & Strauss 2000 & 2003), the generational divide between our students and staff can worsen this (Drange, 2014). The seeming lack of interest on the part of students in discovering their own solutions frequently irritates teachers. As staff strives to limit their responses to information sources in order to encourage student initiative in searching for information, this might create a barrier for both asking and responding inquiries.

Instead of using technology, the internet, or other resources that are available to them, students rely on their relationships with specific staff members for information and solutions. Peer interaction can be an important aspect of the online learning experience. Forums, instant messengers, blogs, and wikis are typical features in online courses, and they have been found to improve learning (Laurillard 1993, Moore 1993, and Ramsden 1992). The following research questions guided the current study.

### *2.1 Research Questions*

1. To what extent interaction plays a crucial role in teaching/learning situation?
2. How can improvement in interaction effect teaching/learning situations?
3. What are the problems students face in an online language classroom and their possible solutions?

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Research Design*

In the current study, a mixed method research design was employed to elicit quantitative data from teachers and students in addition to conducting a semi-structured interview with the faculty members to collect the qualitative responses on the effects of interaction in online language classroom.

3.2 The Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 55 students studying English Skills at level 1 and level 2 in Preparatory Year College of Najran University. 30 teachers, belonging to different nationalities also participated in research.

3.3 Instruments

Two questionnaires (teacher and student) were designed by keeping the research objectives in mind. A semi structured interview was conducted for teachers. The items for the questionnaires and the semi structured interview have been selected due to its suitability to the research questions. An expert panel of researchers, lecturers and professors checked the face validity of the contents of the instruments.

3.3.1 Questionnaires

Students' questionnaire consisted of 6 statements to elicit the students' experience on the effectiveness of interaction in online language classroom. Teachers' questionnaire consisted of 10 statements to elicit their experience on the effectiveness of interaction in online language classroom.

3.3.2 Semi Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the teachers (N=10) who volunteered for the interview. The purpose of the interview was to have an in-depth understanding of the effects of interaction in an online language classroom and the issues they face. The faculty members offered solutions to the various issues (as discovered during the interview sessions).

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected using questionnaires and semi structured interview. SPSS (23.0) was used to analyze quantitative data. The interview contents were transcribed, and the transcripts were carefully examined by the researchers using content analysis classifying themes and replies into distinct groups. The major themes were then identified by highlighting the major topics. The analysis showed the challenges students encounter while learning a language online as well as potential solutions.

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Research Question 1: To What Extent Interaction Plays a Crucial Role in Teaching Learning Situation

The researcher extracted the arithmetic averages, standard deviations, and the rank of the interaction extent for student learning, and Table (1) shows that:

Table 1. Arithmetic averages, standard deviations, and rank of the interaction extent for students' learning

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
1	I use document camera to show my classwork to the teacher.	3.58	1.031	5	large
2	There is plenty of opportunity for socialization in online learning.	4.11	.916	2	large
3	I get enough opportunity to interact in groups with my classmates.	4.15	.891	1	large
4	I have one-on-one interaction with teachers.	4.09	.928	3	large
5	I possess required technological skills for online language classes.	4.04	.838	4	large
	Total	3.99	.885		large

Table (1) showed that item (3) ranked first with an arithmetic mean (4.15) and standard deviation (0.891) and with a significant degree, then item (2) ranked second with an arithmetic mean (4.11) and standard deviation (0.916) and with a significant degree, and in the third place item (4) with an arithmetic mean (4.09) and a standard deviation (0.928) and a significant degree, and in the fourth rank item (5) with an arithmetic mean (4.04) and a standard deviation (0.838) and a significant degree, and in the last rank item (1) with an arithmetic mean (3.58) and with a deviation standard (1.031), and the total mean was (3.99) with a standard deviation of (0.885), and to a large extent. The researcher also extracted the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of the extent of interaction of teachers in teaching, and Table (2) shows that:

Table 2. Arithmetic averages and standard deviations of the extent of teacher interaction in teaching:

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
1	Graphic Tablet / Pen Digitizer	3.50	1.196	7	Large
2	Technological Skills for Online Teaching	4.33	.606	1	Very large
3	Students Interaction in Group	3.52	1.075	6	Large
4	Students Teacher One-on-One Interaction	4.20	.484	2	Large
5	One-on-One interaction with Classmates	3.20	1.031	8	Moderate
6	Immediate Feedback to the Students	4.10	.885	3	Large
7	Opportunity to Socialize	3.53	1.137	5	Large
8	Access to Academic Advising Services	3.60	1.102	4	Large
	Total	3.75	.879		Large

Table (2) showed that the total degree of the teachers' interaction in teaching was with an arithmetic mean (3.75) and a standard deviation (0.879) with a significant degree, and the arithmetic averages on the items ranged between (3.20 - 4.33), and item (2) ranked first with an

average arithmetic (4.33) with a standard deviation (0.606) and a very large degree.

4.2 Results of the Research Question 2: How Can Improvement in Interaction Effect Teaching/ Learning Situations?

Arithmetic means, standard deviations, and rank were extracted for the interaction effectiveness among students and faculty members, and Table (3), (4) shows that:

4.2.1 First: the Faculty Members

Table 3. Arithmetic averages, standard deviations, and rank of the interaction effectiveness among faculty members:

Response	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Not at all effective	1	3.3	3.37	.928	Moderate
Slightly effective	3	10.0			
Moderately effective	13	43.3			
Very effective	10	33.3			
Extremely effective	3	10.0			
Total	30	100.0			

Table (3) showed that the effectiveness of the interaction among the faculty members obtained an arithmetic mean (3.37) and a standard deviation (0.928) with a medium degree.

4.2.2 Second: the Students

Table 4. Arithmetic averages, standard deviations, and rank of student interaction effectiveness

Response	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Not at all effective	2	3.6	3.44	1.244	Large
Slightly effective	12	21.8			
Moderately effective	18	32.7			
Very effective	6	10.9			
Extremely effective	17	30.9			
Total	55	100.0			

Table (4) showed that the effectiveness of the interaction among the students obtained an arithmetic mean (3.44) and a standard deviation (1.244), with a significant degree

4.3 Results of the Research Question 3: What Are the Problems Students Face in an Online Language Classroom and Their Possible Solutions?

This study's main goal was to directly interview teachers to gather information through semi-structured interview. The interview was taped, transcribed, and their substance was examined. According to Nartey (2013), content analysis is “a key methodological apparatus that enables researchers to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at a meaning, and it facilitates the understanding of the types, characteristics, and organizational aspects of documents as social products in their own right as well as what they claim” (p. 122). The transcripts were carefully examined by the researchers as they conducted a content analysis, classifying themes and replies into distinct groups.

The major themes were then identified by highlighting the major topics. The analysis's findings showed the challenges students encounter while learning a language online as well as potential solutions.

Table 5. contains the problems students face in an online language classroom and their possible solutions

	Problems	Solution
Interaction in Online classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low teacher-student interaction because of anxiety</li> <li>- Least opportunity of social interaction</li> <li>- Lack of basic knowledge of the target language</li> <li>- Frequent use of mother tongue</li> <li>-Lack of face to face interaction</li> <li>- Silence and boredom</li> <li>-Lack of focused attention</li> <li>-Isolated, lazy, inactive students</li> <li>-Lack of training to benefit from online learning</li> <li>-No immediate feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Audio visuals</li> <li>- Queries at the end of the class</li> <li>- Communication with parents</li> <li>- Training for teachers</li> <li>-Long lectures be divided into small ones followed by quizzes.</li> <li>-Use of white board, record function and the chat box</li> <li>- Digital competence for teachers</li> <li>- Switch to video while teaching</li> <li>-Immediate feedback to the students</li> </ul>

According to Table 5, the most important problems students faced in online classroom are: low teacher-student interaction, limited social interaction in online classes, lack of basic knowledge of the target language, frequent use of mother tongue, lack of face-to-face interaction, boredom in online classes, a dead silence in between, isolated, lazy, inactive students, lack of training to use virtual class platform, no immediate feedback to the students etc.

## 5. Discussion

The results show that there is enough and effective interaction in online language classroom. Interaction positively effects teaching and learning situations. The item (5) in table 1 got 'large' affirming that teachers at Najran University are well trained in using technology for online classes. However, teachers usually do not possess technological skills owing to their reluctance to give up traditional method of teaching and the lack of resources that directly affect interaction in online language classroom. In the same context, the present study contrasts with Le et al. (2022) on EFL teachers where the findings showed the lack of teacher training in using technology as one of the main causes of poor interaction in online classrooms.

The item (4) in table 2 got the second place with a significant degree. It affirms students' teacher one-on-one interaction takes place in class which ultimately effects teaching and learning situation in online classroom. In contrast, a study by Harsch, Müller-Karabil, and Buchminskaia (2021) looked into a variety of online interaction-related concerns and came to the conclusion that fostering learner-friendly interaction is a significant issue in online language classrooms. The study makes the case that teachers and students should collaborate to build the interactional environment. Nevertheless, the present study asserts that there are students teacher one-on-one interaction and students interaction in group that effect teaching and learning situations.

The item (5) in table 2 ranked low with a moderate degree. It shows that one-on-one interaction with classmates did not get high value and needs to be improved to make interaction more effective in online classroom. These findings align with a study conducted by Moorhouse, Li, and Walsh (2022), according to which class interaction turns out to be a very difficult task that calls for language teachers to improve their pedagogical competence. In a related study, Taghizadeh and Amirkhani (2022) focused on the utilization of collaborative assignments, learner-centered techniques, and the development of online learning communities as means of enhancing student engagement and making teaching more effective.

As the mean (in table 3) is not very high, it implies that interaction does not affect teaching/ learning situations. However, there cannot be any improvement in teaching and learning situations until there is an improvement in interaction. So, interaction is crucial to online learning to make it effective. The results of this analysis are in line with a study by Carter and Rukholm (2008), who hypothesized that, in comparison to traditional education, teacher-student interaction in online education is a key element determining students' learning effects.

Students think (as shown in table 4) that interaction positively effects teaching/learning situations. In a related study, Sun et al. (2022) looked at how teacher-student interaction in online learning can increase students' levels of engagement (or level of learning investment), which in turn helps to foster learning effects.

The problems in online classes (table 5) as cited by interviewees can be portrayed from the following excerpts. This is to note that the answers provided by the teachers are not polished in order to observe the validity of the responses, so they could have grammatical and usage errors.

*(T1) There is low teacher-student interaction in online classroom because of the anxiety of students.* It contradicts the findings of the questionnaire where teachers accepted that there is teacher-student interaction in the online classroom. Nevertheless, the word 'anxiety' was not mentioned in the questionnaire. The results of the qualitative analysis are inspired by the anxiety of learners in online classroom which do not positively effect teaching and learning in online classroom. These findings contradict to a study of 510 European language learners, which found that learners enjoyed learning languages more and were less anxious in online classes (Resnik & Dewaele, 2022).

*(T6) There is a dead silence in between the session when teacher suddenly starts asking, it often leads to boredom.* In the same context, a survey by Pawlak et al (2022) of Iranian university students and instructors, found online classes to be more boring than offline ones.

The possible solutions to improve the interaction in online classroom mode as cited by interviewees can be portrayed from the following excerpts. It is to note that answers provided by the teachers are not polished in order to observe the validity of the responses, so they could have grammatical and usage errors.

*(T4) Parents should be informed of their children's performance and progress.* This solution supports Sayer and Braun's (2020) study wherein language educators made a concerted effort to engage with families in order to optimize children' readiness for online learning, it is crucial to strengthen teacher-parent relationships in order to benefit language learners. In a related study, Tao & Xu (2022) looked into how parents may help teachers and students communicate more effectively, especially outside of the classroom, in order to resolve academic issues and increase learning motivation. In order to promote young learners' online L2 learning, the study suggests a tripartite model of parental support that involves communication between parents, young learners, and teachers.

*(T5) Teachers need some training skill specific to make online teaching more effective.* In a study with similar context, Cheung's (2022) case study of an ESL teacher in a secondary school in Hong Kong shows that pedagogical ideas as well as technological proficiency have a role in how effectively language teachers employ technology (i.e., form-focused and exam-oriented).

*(T7) Teachers also need to be more empowered with digital competence.* Wong and Moorhouse (2021) looked at how primary and secondary language instructors demonstrate digital competence through the use of digital resources, teaching and learning, evaluation, and learner empowerment in a study with a similar context. They refer to the European Framework for Educators' Digital Competence (DCE). The findings demonstrate that teachers effectively met the language and educational needs of students and developed digital relationships with them utilizing synchronous and asynchronous platforms.

(T9) Teachers should provide immediate feedback to the students on their class work. He and Loewen (2022) examined how goal-setting with feedback boosted language learners' interest and motivation in the context of app-based vocabulary self-study in a study with a similar focus.

The analysis of the current study shows that there is a large level of interaction in online classroom. Students get ample opportunities for socialization, for interaction in groups and interaction with teachers, one-on-one interaction. Students also possess enough technological skills to carry out online classes. It shows that interaction is quite effective in the classroom. However, there is still scope for further improvement in technological skills and use of technological devices like document camera to make interaction more effective as they are the tools to carry out effective teaching learning assignments in the online classroom. Similar to this, Alger and Eyckmans' (2022) study of L2 learners' interpersonal interactions and relationships concludes the idea of social presence (SP) with a qualitative interpersonal pragmatics approach that played an effective role in online interaction.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Within the premise of the study, the researchers conclude that there are positive effects of interaction in online language classroom as revealed in the findings of the study. However, a contradiction has been found in the data collected through the semi-structured interview (qualitative data) and questionnaire (quantitative data). The researchers assumed that the possible reasons of this contradiction might be attributed to the nature of the research instrument that restricts participants expressing their opinion. However, during the interview, teachers described the issues faced in the online classroom in details as mentioned in table 5. Another study is recommended to observe the actual practices of interaction between teacher and students in the online classroom. Implications are also suggested to implement the solutions as provided by the teachers during semi-structured interview to improve interaction in online language classroom ultimately effecting teaching and learning situations.

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## Appendix 1

### Students' Questionnaire

1. I use *document camera* to show my classwork to the teacher.

بصرف النظر عن الأجهزة المذكورة أعلاه ، أستخدم كاميرا المستندات لعرض واجبات الصيفية على المعلم.

Agree  
Strongly agree  
neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

أوافق بشدة  
أوافق  
محايد  
لا أوافق  
لا أوافق بشدة

2. There is plenty of opportunity for Socialization in synchronous online learning.

هناك الكثير من الفرص للتشئة الاجتماعية في التعلم المتزامن عبر الإنترنت.

Agree  
Strongly agree  
neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

أوافق بشدة  
أوافق  
محايد  
لا أوافق  
لا أوافق بشدة

3. I get enough opportunity to interact in groups with my classmates.

لدي فرصة كافية للتفاعل مع زملائي في مجموعات.

Agree  
Strongly agree  
neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

أوافق بشدة  
أوافق  
محايد  
لا أوافق  
لا أوافق بشدة

4. I have one-on-one discussion/interaction with teachers.

لدي مناقشة / تفاعل فردي مع المعلمين.

Agree  
Strongly agree  
neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

أوافق بشدة  
أوافق  
محايد  
لا أوافق  
لا أوافق بشدة



5. I possess required technological skills for online language classes.

أمتلك المهارات التكنولوجية المطلوبة لدروس اللغة عبر الإنترنت.

- Agree
- Strongly agree
- neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

أوافق بشدة
أوافق
محايد
لا أوافق
لا أوافق بشدة

6. How effective is online learning to promote teacher-learner interaction in the class?

ما مدى فعالية التعلم عبر الإنترنت في تعزيز التفاعل بين المعلم والمتعلم في الفصل؟

- Not at all effective
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

غير فعال على الإطلاق
فعال بعض الشيء
معتدل الفعالية
مؤثر جدا
فعالة للغاية

**Appendix 2**

Teachers' Questionnaire

Participant's Name:

Qualification:

Experience: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Online Teaching Experience: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Teaching hours per week: \_\_\_\_\_

1. I use *graphics tablet/pen digitizer* for drawing on the virtual board.

Agree      Strongly agree      neutral      Disagree      Strongly disagree

2. I possess required technological skills for synchronous online teaching.

Agree      Strongly agree      neutral      Disagree      Strongly disagree

3. The students get enough opportunity to interact in groups with their classmates.

Agree      Strongly agree      neutral      Disagree      Strongly disagree

4. The students have one-on-one discussion/interaction with teachers.

Agree      Strongly agree      neutral      Disagree      Strongly disagree

5. The students have one-on-one discussion/interaction with their classmates.

Agree      Strongly agree      neutral      Disagree      Strongly disagree

6. Choose the ratio of teacher : students interaction in your class.

Teacher 100% : Student 0%    Teacher 80% : Student 20%

Teacher 60% : Student 40%    Teacher 50% : Student 50%

Teacher 40% : Student 60%

7. Synchronous online learning provide opportunity to give immediate feedback to the learners on their class work/quizzes.

Agree      Strongly agree      neutral      Disagree      Strongly disagree

8. There is plenty of opportunity for the students to socialize in synchronous online learning.

Agree      Strongly agree      neutral      Disagree      Strongly disagree

9. The students have enough access to academic advising and counselling services in synchronous online learning.
- Agree            Strongly agree            neutral            Disagree            Strongly disagree
10. How effective is online learning to promote teacher-learner interaction in the class?
- Not at all effective  
Slightly effective  
Moderately effective  
Very effective  
Extremely effective

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