

## Students' Participation in Online Discussion of ESP Course through Team Based Project

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze students' participation in online discussion forum of ESP course with Team Based Project. The materials and process of this model have been designed in the LMS for students. There were 98 participants from 5 classes of ESP course taken as the sample of this research. Various difficulties faced by students in developing communication in writing become more complicated when learning is done online. Team based project is applied because it demands the ability of the students themselves to solve problems (Student Center Learning) and in responding to the acquirement of Indonesian Qualification Framework (IQF) Curriculum that as a new Higher Education Key Performance Indicator (IKU) from the Ministry of Education. A survey with quantitative approach is conducted in this research. The results show that the respondents reacted to numerous responses into many aspects such as; 1) demographic information; 2) patterns of online participation 3) frequency of participation in online discussion forum; 4) percentage of read but no response posts; 5) percentage of response and response posts; 6) benefits of participation in online forum; 7) perceived impact of discussion forum on student learning and performance; and 8) problems of participation in online forum.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

Nobody can deny that active classroom engagement was critical to language learning success. According to Liu (2005), students who actively participate outperform students who do not participate in academics. Students' oral participation can help them bridge the gap between what they want to say and whether they can say it. Furthermore, "verbal contact provides language learners with the opportunity to follow up on new vocabulary and structures introduced during language sessions and practice them in context," according to popular belief (Liu, 2005). The advancement of science and technology is essential to education. The development of digitalization in human life has helped create closer connections and relationships. The internet allows people to connect with a wider range of people more easily than ever before. System changes require a quick response in order to keep up. Even though it is conducted at home, both lecturers and students must be prepared in order to get the most out of the class. Virtual meeting participants need to be prepared to manage their devices and internet data packages independently. These changes and developments happen as a whole, including the teaching and learning process that must be continued online. Lecturers and students need to be ready to use online learning systems in a way that adapts to the materials they are looking at, including finding and understanding information on the web. Many lecturers in ESP Course found that they have not used the Indonesian Qualification Framework Curriculum (IQF)- and new models of learning, such as Team Based Project and Case Method perfectly. Many factors contribute to this problem, both internal factors that the

lecturer is responsible for and external factors that are beyond his or her control. With a pandemic and online learning, assignments are a way for students to study independently from their homes.

The process by which students and instructors actively communicate with one another via text messages on the internet is known as online discussion (Ho, 2002). Effective participation occurs when online communication assists learners in developing a thorough understanding of the subject matter by exchanging perspectives and critically analyzing those of others. Understanding how students interact with the material is the first step in determining how to engage them in an online course. According to Zuckerman, Blau, and Monroy-Hernandez (2009), online engagement and content submission are the foundations of the Internet revolution and the primary online activity for younger generations.

In a similar vein, Blau, Mor, and Nuethal (2009) reported on the widespread use of online learning environments in higher education that are based on student-instructor and student-student interactions. Active online student engagement, according to Rovai and Barnum (2003), is a very considerable predictor of perceived learning, learning outcomes, and learning satisfaction (Brady, 2004). Interaction is defined as "a responsiveness-related process variable" (Rafaeli and Ariel, 2008:84). "We can generate active, engaged, collaborative, and inquiry-based learning possibilities with successful e-learning technology," according to research (Wishart and Guy, 2009:142).

A new Higher Education Key Performance Indicator (IKU) has been created in order to track predicted improvement. Eight Key Performance Indicators have been chosen as change indicators that will have the greatest influence on graduate quality, lecturer quality, and curriculum quality. The mental participation of students in the learning process through the opportunity to experience particular conditions or events as they occur in reality is one of the aspects that determine the success of learning (experimental learning). Students will find the learning process more fascinating and relevant as a result of their participation. The second scheme, according to the bill in IKU 7, is learning with the Team Based Project plan. The Team Based Project program is a cooperative and flexible learning paradigm for learner's skills to engage in free and creative thought processes. The participation of the learning team in grasping the facts of life from the concrete to the abstract is known as team-based project execution. This fact of life will serve as a source of inspiration and creativity when it comes to analyzing and constructing a life vision.

Project Based Learning (PjBL) is a learning model with an instructional approach that constructs learning activities by presenting real-world problems to be solved in groups. This model creates a new environment for learners to not only understand knowledge content, but also to apply it directly in solving problems together. PjBL can support learners in reconstructing information from lecturers and in completing assignments from lecturers in order to give students autonomy. The scale and complexity of most problems encountered in the learning process today extend not only beyond the physical and cognitive ranges, but also beyond the capacity of expertise of a single professional. As a result, Team Based Project is viable options for resolving existing cases (Denton, 1997). Traditionally, research problems have been solved by focusing on the cognitive processes of individual problem solving (Seidel & Godfrey, 2005). There are 7 stages found in Team based project, 1) Introduction to a concept, 2) Group formation, 3) Project Assignment, 4) Project Implementation, 5) Work Formulation, 6) Product Presentation, and 7) Evaluation and Feedback.

The problems that teams handle and solve are typically complex and unstructured in nature (Gerring, 2007). According to Jonassen and Hung (2008), the problem space of an unstructured problem is inherently complex and multidimensional, including the breadth of the knowledge domain, the level of knowledge attainment, and the complexity of the variables involved. Because of the high degree of non-transparency, heterogeneity of interpretation, interdisciplinary, and dynamic (for the nature and detail of these dimensions the problem's complexity and structure). In order to achieve the ultimate goal, the problem-solving team must be cognitively adaptive and collectively overcome unforeseen obstacles or changes. As a consequence, in order for a group to work effectively to solve complex and unstructured problems, team members must be able to collectively and systemically reason together as a cognitive system through the problem space and find the most feasible solution as a solution to the problem.

As a result of the above, English Education Study Program of Universitas Negeri Medan takes the issue of students' participation in online discussion forums very seriously and is now working to impose it. As part of these efforts, starting with the 2021/2022 academic year, every student is required to have a laptop, particularly at this Industrial Revolution 4.0 era, and participation in forums counts for 5% of the exam's overall score. This Study Program desires to determine if this endeavor is improving learning, deepening students' comprehension of their courses, and fostering information literacy skills among lecturers. The study's findings are expected to prove a framework of Team Based Project for enhancing the department's information model and approach,

and, in particular, the students' involvement in the discussion forum as a means of enhancing their information study about ESP course.

### *1.2 Research Objective*

The objective of this research is to analyze students' participation in online discussion forum of ESP course with Team Based Project

### *1.3 Research Question*

Based on the problem, then research question raises is how is the students' participation in online discussion forum for ESP course at Universitas Negeri Medan's English Education Study Program through a team-based project?

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Learner Participation in Online Discussion*

Preparation, contribution to discussion, group skills, communication skills, and attendance are the five components of participation (Dancer & Kamvounias in Rocca, 2010:187). Participation can take many different forms, including student questions and comments (Fassinger in Rocca, 2010: 187).

In general, students communicate in the classroom using two methods: verbal and nonverbal (Lee, 2005). Verbal or oral engagement refers to the actions of speaking or providing opinions in the classroom, responding to and asking questions or comments, and participating in classroom discussions. Students who do not take the initiative to participate actively are considered passive. Nonverbal involvement, on the other hand, is associated with behavioral responses such as nodding their heads, raising their hands, body motions, and eye contact during the class. Ho (2002) defines taking part in online conversations as active engagement in online text-based communication between students and teachers. Effective participation occurs when connections are made between different parts of the learning material or with information obtained from other sources, and when online communication assists students in developing a deep understanding of the subject matter by exchanging and critically evaluating their own and others' ideas (justified through research and analysis). For the purposes of this article, online involvement will be examined only in the context of online conversations taking place in online learning environments.

As an important component of online learning, learner engagement has received a lot of attention. It has been conceived in various ways in various studies. Hrastinski (2008), for example, listed six possible conceptualization methods: writing, reading, writing and reading, actual and perceived writing, conversation participation, and access to e-learning settings. After reviewing a number of related studies, Hrastinski (2008:1761) proposed the following definition of online learner participation: "Online learner participation is a process of learning through participation and maintaining relationships with others." It is a multifaceted process that involves acting, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging both online and offline.

### *2.2 Group Discussion*

Teaching through discussion can be an efficient method for assisting students apply abstract concepts and think critically about what they are learning. It is critical to understand the goals of the conversation and how it fits into the entire course. If feasible, change the seating so that pupils can face one another rather than the teacher. Edger and Stanley emphasized the need of providing students with suitable materials and thought questions to assist their preparation (1958).

### *2.3 Importance of Participation and Interaction in Online Learning*

There is a wealth of research on the value of involvement and engagement in online learning, and this cannot be overstated. According to Caspi et al. (2006), computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies like synchronous or asynchronous tools have given students new options to engage in online courses, yet participation in the web-based learning environment is often lower than it is in face-to-face classes. In online contexts, a number of elements that impact learner involvement were noted. As a result of ongoing differences in CMC applications, study methodologies, instructions, and the roles of professors and students, there are still insufficient data to definitively address general issues concerning these elements, particularly the influence of student characteristics in online conversation (Prinsen, Volman and Terwel, 2007). As a result, there is a need for more research on the complicated link that exists between involvement, interaction, and learning outcomes (Picciano, 2002). This study is a reaction to other studies that Prinsen et al. (2007) pushed for, but it focused on the pattern of involvement and its positive effects on participants rather than trying to uncover a link between interaction and learning results.

Yukselturk (2010) conducted research on the two primary goals that influence student participation in discussion forums. The initial goal was to investigate the relationship between individual student demographics and the categories of students' engagement level (inactive, moderate, and active) in an online course discussion forum. The second goal was to investigate the students' perspectives on the reasons for the low level of discussion forum activity. The study included 196 students who took a course on computer systems and structures as part of an online certificate program. Semi-structured interviews and an online survey were used to collect data at the beginning and end of the course.

#### *2.4 Online Discussion Forum*

Harris and Sandor provided a structure for the online discussion forum as a peer-evaluation environment centered on students (2008). The findings of this study are specifically related to student perceptions of engagement and interaction in online discussion forums. Data was gathered through semi-structured student interviews. The findings support the framework described because it gives students more control over their education and makes studying more enjoyable. Finally, the framework provides an effective method for incorporating peer learning in an online learning environment.

Peachly, Jone, and Jones (2006) conducted empirical research on programs that encouraged students to enroll in online entrepreneurship courses offered by the University of Glamorgan. The goal was to look into topics of interest to online students in order to increase forum participation and, potentially, engagement with the course module. The findings suggest that incorporating online tests and activities relevant to the material being taught may increase student engagement and possibly even improve the learning process. The study's findings may influence the design, development, and delivery of online learning programs. The findings also provide guidance for best practices in online moderation and may help to reduce high withdrawal rates in the e-learning industry.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Design and Method*

This study applied a survey design approach and a strictly quantitative methodology. With this methodology, the researcher may use a sizable sample that is typical of the entire population (Babbie, 2004). This is done in order to be able to include a representative sample of the ESP Course Students at the 6<sup>th</sup> semester. Additionally, the survey methodology was used since it is the method that has been utilized the most frequently in similar research in the past (e.g., Virk, 2004; Yang et al., 2007).

#### *3.2 Population and Sample*

There are five (5) classes of ESP Course in the English Education Study Program taken as the sample of this research. The distribution of students by Class is shown in (table 1). According to the respondents' demographic data, 55 (57%) were male and 43 (43%) were female.

#### *3.3 Instrument*

For the purpose of gathering information for the study, a self-made questionnaire was employed. The quantitative methodology utilized in this study is consistent with the use of questionnaires for data gathering. The goal of the study and the primary research questions guided the questionnaire's design. Some of the questionnaire's questions were created by the researcher, while others were modified versions of previously conducted studies (such as Virk, 2004, Yang et al. 2007, etc.) that were relevant. Two sections made up the questionnaire. Demographic data about the respondents, such as gender and classes are required in Section A. The goods were located in Section B. According to the goals and research questions, this is separated into several sections. The subdivision is described as follows:

Part 1: Participation Pattern - For the respondents, four notable posting patterns that were informed by the literature were discovered and described. They were instructed to answer by selecting the one that best summarized their typical forum posting.

Part 2: Extent - Here respondents were asked to specify percentages of postings and select from the options given, such as daily, every two days, weekly, and fortnightly. This section's content was modified from Virk (2004).

Part 3: Benefits - Here, respondents had the chance to identify the advantages of taking part in the online discussion forum.

Part 4: In this section, various items were created to collect information on how learning performance was thought to be impacted by participation in the online discussion forum. The responses were organized using a Likert scale with five points.

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

The instrument was created and then delivered to two experts in online conversation research. The experts' suggestions and observations aided in the instrument's item moderation and adjustment. In addition, the construct validity of the study's instrument was investigated. This conclusion was reached through the use of principal component analysis in conjunction with a factor analysis. The results matched those of each related construct of the original instruments where the items were changed, such as Virk (2004). The fact that all loads ranged from satisfactory to exceptional confirms the instrument's suitability for use in this investigation (Comrey, 1971).

The questionnaire was sent to 98 students from the ESP Class who ultimately declined to participate in the study in order to ensure its validity. The results of the replies were tested for reproducibility between tests at intervals of two weeks using Cronbach's alpha. Because it is the simpler approach the researcher may apply at the time of the study, test-retest is regarded as important. The overall dependability of the survey produced a  $r = 0.85$ , satisfying the recommended minimum of 0.80 for basic research (Wang and Tang, 2003).

### 3.5 Procedure of Administration

The questionnaire was delivered directly to the respondents by the researcher. Because the researchers are lecturers at the English Education Study Program where the study was conducted, administering the questionnaire is simple. Each class comprised one of the five batches used to administer the survey. It took three days to complete the workout. On 98 of the 100 copies of the questionnaires sent, a return rate of 98.5% was achieved. These were used to analyze the study's data.

## 4. Results

For the objective of ranking things in order of importance, descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency counts were combined with the Friedman Test. The following is a presentation of the results.

**Table 1. Demographic Information**

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	55	58
Female	43	42
Total	98	100
Class of ESP Subject		
Class A	25	25.6
Class B	25	25.6
Class C	25	25.6
Class D	18	17.9
Class E	5	5.1
Total	98	100.0

According to the demographic data in table 1, 55 (58%) of the participants in the study were male, while 43 (42%) were female. This indicates that men outnumbered women in the study. Furthermore, demographic data on respondents' departments revealed that 25 respondents, or 25.6% each, came from ESP Subject Classes A, B, and C, while 18 respondents, or 17.9%, came from Class D, and 5 respondents, or 5.1%, came from Class E.

**Table 2. Pattern of Online Participation**

S/N	Pattern of Online Discussion Forum participation	Frequency	Mean Rank
1	Conveying and defending own ideas	53	8.68
2	Elaborating questions, answers, and comments	35	8.02
3	Cooperating with others	7	7.50
4	Involving in discussion initiatively	3	6.38
<b>Total</b>		<b>98</b>	

(Chi. Square = 17.36, Df = 9; N = 195; Significant at .001).

In order to arrive at the results in table 2, respondents were asked to specify the pattern of their participation in the forum as described in the questionnaire. These include taking the initiative in a discussion, conveying and defending one's own ideas, elaborating on questions, answers, and comments, and cooperating with others. The Friedman Test and frequency count results clearly show that 53.8% of respondents engaged in conveying and

defending their own ideas, with a Mean Rank of 8.68. The next most common patterns were elaborating questions, answers, and comments (35.0%, with a Mean Rank of 8.02) and cooperating with others (7.7%, with a Mean Rank of 7.50), while engaging in discussion on one's own was the least common (2.6%, with a Mean Rank of 6.38). The findings also revealed a significant difference between the respondents' primary and least frequent online activity patterns (Chi. Square 17.36 at .001 level). Because access costs rise with time spent, they may be an impediment to responders taking part in discussion involvement sessions (Tella and Isah, 2010) While respondents' failure to cooperate with other students in the course may be due to hesitation, Conveying and defending own ideas aims to get them to respond to their own questions by forcing thought and eliciting responses from the other person. Reaction posting refers to responding to a member's elaborating questions, answers, and comments.

This could be done by responding to a question or commenting on something that someone else has posted. While participation in a discussion entails gathering ideas and suggestions from others on a specific issue in addition to one's own understanding of the issue in order to arrive at a fact or solution, cooperating with others entails informing the class or members about one's own experiences.

#### *Extent of Participation in the online Forum*

**Table 3. Frequency of Participation in Online Discussion Forum**

Frequency of Posting	Frequency	Percentage %
Daily	75	76.9
Every Two Days	15	15.4
Weekly	5	5.1
Fortnightly	2	2.1
Monthly	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 depicts the level of engagement of respondents' frequency in the online discussion forum. According to the results, 75 respondents, or 76.9%, consistently publish comments and contributions. Following this, 15 people (15.4%) stated that they post every two days. Furthermore, 5 respondents (5.1%) publish comments and contributions weekly, while only a few (2.1% and 0.5%) do so every two weeks and monthly, respectively. The fact that a greater number of respondents post to the forum every day and every other day indicates that the respondents are actively participating in the online forum. According to Virk, the percentage of postings that respondents view but do not comment on was posed as a question in order to better evaluate the respondents' engagement in the online forum (2004). The solution is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Percentage of Read but no Response Posts**

Read but no Response Posts in %	Frequency	Percentage %
20 %	80	82.05
40%	13	12.8
60%	2	2.1
80%	2	2.1
90%	1	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>

The respondents' percentage of posts that were viewed but not commented on is shown in Table 4. The findings show that 80 (82.05%) people read at least 20% of the post but were unable to comment. Additionally, the respondents were asked to identify the proportion of the questionnaires they read and responded to (Virk, 2004). Table 5 displays the outcome.

**Table 5. Percentage of Read and Response Posts N =195**

Read and Respond Posts in %	Frequency	Percentage %
80 %	79	81.0
60%	10	10.3
90%	8	7.7
40%	1	1.0
20%	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 shows the percentage of postings that were viewed and responded to by respondents. According to the findings, 79 students (81%) regularly read and respond to all forum postings. When combined with the 10.3% and 7.7% who imagine reading and posting contributing up to 60% and 90%, respectively, the statistics show that a sizable portion of the respondents are using the forum. When compared to table 5, this result shows that a significant portion of the study's respondents were fully and intensely engaged in their participation in the online form.

### Benefits of online Forum

**Table 6. Benefits of Participation in Online Forum N =195**

S/N	Benefits	Freq.	Mean Rank
1.	Encourages participants to collaborate intellectually (by sharing knowledge and ideas).	195	9.63
2.	Allows introverts to freely express themselves.	194	9.45
3.	Students participated more actively in teaching and learning than in a face-to-face instructional setting.	194	9.45
4.	Encourage social interaction among participants.	193	8.67
5.	Allow colleagues to freely ask questions about anything that is unclear.	192	8.43
7.	Encouragement to become more participate with the course material.	190	7.66

Based on the frequency count and Friedman Test results, there are seven major benefits to participating in online forums, which are listed in the order below. Promoting intellectual support through idea exchange (100%, Mean Rank of 9.63), allowing introverts to freely express their opinions (99.5%, Mean Rank of 9.45), having students participate more than in a face-to-face class (98.9%, Mean Rank of 8.67), encouraging social interaction (98.5%, Mean Rank of 8.43), and inspiring students to engage with course material (97.4%, Mean Rank of 7.66).

Other benefits mentioned by respondents when asked to name others in addition to the ones asked to name are: My interactions with other students in the online discussion forums challenge me to think critically about the discussion topics, motivate me to participate in the discussion forums in the future, and inspire me to be more active in the discussion forums by posting more frequently and/or for longer periods of time. The findings also demonstrate that each benefit mentioned by respondents is significant, with (Chi-Square 20.66, Df. 9 and at .001 level).

**Table 7. Perceived Impact of Discussion Forum on Student learning and Performance N =195**

S/N	Item	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Participating in the forum would benefit my learning.	105 (53.8)	70 (35.8)	5 (2.5)	9 (4.6)	6 (3.0)
2	Using a discussion forum has improved my academic achievement.	115 (58.9)	53 (27.1)	10 (5.0)	10 (5.0)	7 (3.5)
3.	Receiving and responding to other people's posts enhances my reasoning and information processing.	121 (62.1)	48 (24.6)	16 (8.2)	6 (3.0)	4 (2.1)
4.	Contributing to the forum's brainstorming and other activities is expanding my insight of the courses.	117 (60)	57 (29.2)	6 (3.0)	8 (4.2)	7 (3.5)
5.	The discussion forum has significantly improved my overall performance and score in all courses.	125 (64.1)	57 (29.2)	3 (1.5)	5 (2.5)	5 (2.5)

Table 7 displays the findings on the perceived influence of participating in the discussion forum on respondents' learning performance. According to the results, (89.6%) strongly and agree that participating in the forum will aid their learning, as evidenced by percentages and frequency counts. 7.6% disagreed and objected strongly, while 2.5% were indifferent. Furthermore, the findings revealed that (86%) strongly and agree that participating in the forum has improved my learning capacity. In contrast, (8.5%) strongly disagreed, (5%), and (5%) were neutral.

The findings also revealed that (86.7%) of respondents said that responding to other people's posts improved their capacity for thinking and memory, while (5.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Furthermore, (89.2%) said that taking part in the forum's brainstorming sessions and other activities helped them learn more about the courses; 7.7% disagreed and strongly disagreed, and 3.0% were neutral. Finally, 93.3% of respondents said that using the discussion forum improved their overall performance and score across all of their courses. These findings show that the majority of research participants believed that participating in online discussions had a significant impact on their ability to learn, which resulted in a higher score.

### Problems of Online Forum

**Table 8. Problems of Participation in Online Forum N =195**

S/N	Problems	Freq.	Mean Rank
1	Constant power outage	193	8.78
2	Time factor based on a constrained schedule	178	8.16
3	Computer and Internet access is restricted	170	7.90
4	The Cost of Access	167	7.67
5	Participants become "unruly" if anonymous (e.g. excessive joking)	154	6.62
6	Slow internet connectivity	150	6.38
7	Inadequate Internet knowledge and skills	143	5.02

Note – Respondents did not specify any other problems apart from the ones in the questionnaire.



The difficulties and barriers to respondents' involvement in the online forum are shown in Table 8. The findings indicated that the problem of ongoing power outages was the main concern. (98.9%, with a Mean Rank of 8.78) of the respondents stated as much. The respondents (85.6%, with a Mean Rank of 7.90), who reported restricted access to computers and the Internet on campus, said that time was an issue (91.3%, with a Mean Rank of 8.16), which led to many students patronizing cyber cafes. Furthermore, (79% with a Mean Rank of 7.67) highlighted the expense of access to computers and the Internet. Findings also showed that some respondents often post excessive jokes and flames (76.9% and with a Mean Rank of 6.38), while others (73.3% and with a Mean Rank of 5.02) have poor knowledge and abilities for using the Internet. In addition to the issues listed in the table, the respondents also mentioned the following issues: difficulties in boosting social contact due to the fact that the majority of individuals participate in discussion forums due to evaluation requirements.

## 5. Discussion

In terms of pattern, frequency, and degree of involvement, perceived influence on learning, and issues encountered during participation, this study has determined the undergraduates' engagement in the online discussion forum. The four research topics that were formulated have been addressed through data collecting and analysis. The conclusion that Conveying and defending own ideas; elaborating questions, answers, and comments; cooperating with others; initiatively involving in discussion are the major participation patterns demonstrated by the respondents in this study is consistent with earlier findings (e.g., Zuckerman, Blau, and Monroy-Hernandez, 2009), who investigated participation patterns, users' contributions, and gratification mechanisms and reported that: (1) Involvement patterns distinguish between "project creators" (participants who provide ideas for members to discuss) and "social participators," two different participation kinds (those who share their experience with others). Despite the fact that these two studies found quite different patterns. However, one thing that is important to note is that this study has verified that there are different sorts or patterns of involvement in online discussion forums.

The results, which show a high level of engagement in the online forum with the majority posting every day, are consistent with the Peachly et al. findings (2006). The online forum's total postings by participants in this study accounted for 54% of all posts. Yang et al. suggest that peer pressure and perceived contribution to respondents' learning are two factors that may have contributed to the high level of involvement observed in this study (2007). Similarly, other contributing factors may include the perceived value of learning, utilitarian outcome expectations, and participation intention. The main factors stated by (Lorraine, 2004), which can be summarized as "usually getting acclimated to something new, encouragement from teacher, and recognizing how important conversations were for learning," also support the current conclusion. According to Virk's 2004 research, the majority of students viewed between 70 and 80 percent of the postings. The percentage of posts read but not responded to was higher, ranging from 40% to 90%, which also supports or confirms the current conclusion. Lack of time was used as an excuse for not responding to the posts. This supports the study's recent findings on the number of posts that were read but not replied to. Maya and Zuhairi's (2009) findings that there was little student input to online lessons, on the other hand, contradict the current findings of this study. This variation could be attributed to the discussion forum platform. This study identified some of the advantages gained by participants in the forum as encouragement of intellectual support in terms of sharing of knowledge and ideas among participants, introvert free expression of opinion, students participating more than in a face-to-face class, promotion of social interaction, opportunity to clarify things with peers, and others as the most common advantages. The outcome is consistent with Peachy et al. (2006), who found that online discussions that are pertinent to the material being taught might boost student engagement and perhaps even improve the learning experience. Similar to Balaji (2010), Picciano (2002) found that students perceived greater quality and quantity of learning as a result of participating in the discussion forum, confirming the advantages of online discussion forums identified in this study. When used in conjunction with traditional classroom lectures, online discussion forums have a significant positive effect on students' participation and interaction, as well as their learning.

Similar to other relevant research, the current study also identified certain specific issues that forum participants faced. The participants becoming disorderly in terms of posting excessive joking and flaming, lack of knowledge and abilities to use the Internet, frequent power outages and time element based on tight timetable, restricted access to computers and the Internet, cost of access to computers and the Internet, and others. This finding is consistent with Maya and Zuhairi's (2009) assertion that access, prices, computer proficiency, and sluggish tutor-student feedback are the main constraints in online lessons. While Vrasidas and McIsaac (1999) examined the nature of interaction in an online course from both teacher and student perspectives; they came



to the conclusion that the structure of the course, class size, feedback, and prior knowledge of computer mediated communication all affected the interaction in the online course. In contrast, Vonderwell and Zachariah (2005) revealed technology and interface characteristics, content area experience, student roles and instructional tasks, and information overload. This demonstrates that there are issues with online discussion forums regardless of who, what, when, where, and how they are used.

## 6. Conclusion

The study has so far looked at the pattern, frequency, and level of engagement among undergraduates in an online discussion forum, as well as the reported effects of participation on learning and any difficulties they may have had while participating. The findings showed that the majority of respondents actively participate in the online forum and are devoted to it. The respondents cited four significant patterns of engagement. These include conveying and defending own ideas; elaborating questions, answers, and comments; cooperating with others; and initiating involvement in discussion. The results demonstrated that the majority of respondents were committed to and actively engage in the online forum. According to Bean and Peterson (1997), when students see that their participation is graded on a regular and consistent basis, they adjust their study habits. The respondents identified four important involvement patterns. These consist of conveying and defending own ideas; elaborating questions, answers, and comments; cooperating with others; and initiating involvement in discussion.

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