

# **Successful Online Teaching Techniques Exploited during Covid-19 as Perceived by Saudi EFL University Teachers**

إعداد

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### Abstract

The study in hand is a mixed methods investigation that attempted to identify effective online teaching techniques exploited during COVID-19 at Saudi universities in promoting learners' engagement in classroom proceedings, mutual interaction, rapport between EFL learners and faculty members, EFL learners' comprehension of target content and motivation. A self-developed Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to generate quantitative data and in-depth qualitative data was gathered through a semi-structured interview protocol. Standard procedures were followed to determine content validity. The instrument was pilot tested and Cronbach-alpha was run to determine its reliability index. Inter-item consistency reliability of the final instrument was reported as .984 which is high reliability to generate reliable data. One hundred four (n=104) participants have responded to the questionnaire and ten (n=10) faculty members were interviewed. Descriptive analyses were used to present the results of quantitative data whereas deep insights were presented through the qualitative data. The results revealed that those teaching techniques which actively involved EFL learners during online pedagogy and generated mutual interaction were found extremely effective in enhancing target pedagogical objectives set for this investigation. 'Lectures, E-portfolio and written feedback' were perceived as the least effective online teaching techniques. It is highly recommended that university faculty members should practice those teaching techniques during their online teaching sessions which generate active participation and mutual interaction to achieve the desired results.

### Keywords

online teaching techniques, COVID-19 crisis, EFL learners, effective teaching

## Introduction

The world has experienced unprecedented lockdowns and restrictions including closure of educational institutions as it has been declared a worldwide health emergency by World Health Organization in January 2020 and then decided to declare it a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2020. This pandemic has caused the biggest educational disruption and has affected nearly 1.6 billion students globally including 99 percent students from low and lower-middle income countries. It has been estimated that “some 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic’s economic impact alone” (United Nations, August, 2020, p. 2). Strict imposition of ‘social distancing’ made it impossible to continue face-to-face teaching and educational institutions had to adopt online teaching to replace the traditional one “and to fulfil in part the gap between the commitment to the precautionary measures to combat the emerging COVID-19 and the proper continuation of the learning and teaching process” (Khafaga, 2021, p. 1161). This extraordinary situation initiated innovations as well and educational institutions started using various options to continue teaching such as radio, television and take-home instructional packages. Governments and international educational agencies, such as UNESCO Global Education Coalition, supported educational institutions to support and materialize this mode of teaching (United Nations, August, 2020). Digital pedagogical platform of Blackboard has been adopted to switch to online pedagogy for regular programs during COVID-19 crisis which Saudi universities have been using for selective programs for more than a decade (Hussain, 2016; Al-Zahrani & Al-Jraiwi, 2017). Toquero (2020) has stated that the current situation is extraordinary and doesn’t resemble with normal switching to online learning as both the students and teachers were not prepared to this mode of learning because planned online teaching needs amendments and modifications in curriculum, teaching methods and classroom strategies to suit this kind of pedagogy. Present COVID-19 crisis is “a quintessential adaptive and transformative challenge, one for which there is no preconfigured playbook that can guide appropriate responses” (Reimers et al., 2020, p. 2).

## Statement of the Problem

Educational institutions in Saudi Arabia started online teaching since beginning of March, 2020 as a precaution to avoid negative impact of COVID-19 (Middle East News, March 9, 2020) and they needed to resort to same mode of teaching even till the end of 2021. This shift from conventional mode of education to virtual learning was linked to certain challenges which needed planning and preparation. Furthermore, faculty members as well as students had to adjust to various online teaching techniques to compensate for the absence of face-to-face teaching on campus along with availability of technical resources (Crawford et al., 2020). This forced shift rather added to the existing “stress and workloads experienced by university faculty and staff who were already struggling to balance teaching, research and service obligations, not to mention the work-life balance” (Rapanta et al., 2020, p. 2). Another factor which added to this stress was the feeling that virtual learning was only temporary and they would switch to traditional mode soon. This rather hindered educational institutions and faculty members to undertake long term planning for virtual pedagogy. This investigation aimed to bridge the gap between on-sight and online pedagogy through identifying the effectiveness of various online teaching strategies exploited during COVID-19 crisis to generate indigenous data for future implications.

## Literature review

Twenty first century brought a major change in human life including education due to the impact of digitalization in communication enabling people to indulge in various activities in a virtual world (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). COVI-19 crisis accelerated this phenomenon and educational institutions had to switch to online teaching which was defined as “a form of learning process that takes place over internet or electronic technologies to access educational curriculum outside a traditional face to face classroom environment” (Gogoi & Bora, 2021, p.4235). Singh & Thurman (2019) identified it as “learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access” (p. 292). This mode of education allows the students as well as faculty members to interact from their homes. It has also been revealed that online teaching is done in real-time and students can directly communicate with the instructor as well as to other students (Reimers et al., 2020).

Though online learning provides a range of benefits, outbreak of covid-19 has rather pushed educational institutions to switch to this model and the world has witnessed an explosion of e-collaborations and online learning (Favale et al., 2020). It emerged as an opportunity for educational institutions to exploit this mode of learning as in normal situation, “the people have always been complacent and never tried some new modes of learning. This crisis will be a new phase for online learning and will allow people to look at the fruitful side of e-learning technologies” (Dhawan, 2020, p. 15). Research has reported that online learning bears several advantages including “accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning” (Dhawan, 2020, p. 6). Furthermore, it has been suggested that online teaching “can make the teaching–learning process more student-centered, more innovative, and even more flexible” (Dhawan, 2020, p. 7). Basilaia et al. (2020) have mentioned that online teaching facilitates us in keeping classrooms flexible by allowing students and faculty members interact actively, engaging large number of students through video conferencing, enabling students watch recorded lectures on teaching platforms, providing instant oral and written feedback to students and connecting through multiple devices including smart phones.

Abrupt disruption of face-to-face teaching and switching to online mode without proper planning and preparation has created several problems. Wu (2020) has revealed that this crisis tested the ability and agility of educational institutions as many of them only shifted teaching content on digital world instead of initiating proper online teaching. Uninterrupted internet connectivity, unavailability of latest technology and resources in educational organizations and lack of device accessibility by the students and faculty members were also reported (Zhong, 2020). Much research has indicated that lack of active interaction between students and faculty members during online pedagogy hindered proper understanding and comprehension of target content (see for examples Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020; Khafaga, 2021; Oraif & Elyas, 2021). Furthermore, delayed response time was another major issue which hindered comprehension when feedback was shared through email and online platforms (Zhong, 2020). Britt (2006) has informed that online teaching lacks in real-time communication and sharing of ideas between teachers and students. Adnan & Anwar (2020) have revealed that face-to-face socialization is missing in online teaching which create comprehension issues especially among ‘tactile’ learners. Dhawan (2020) has stated that

sometimes it becomes difficult to keep students motivated and interested during online teaching as it provides students with ample time and flexibility and weaker students get rather lazy. He has further narrated that effective mutual interaction also lacks in online teaching. Song et al. (2004) have suggested that comprehension of target content is compromised unless students practice what they are taught and it becomes rather challenging during online teaching.

Several studies have been conducted worldwide to identify best possible teaching techniques to compensate for the weaknesses associated with online teaching. UNESCO IESALC (2020) has suggested that “online courses should be made dynamic, interesting, and interactive” (p. 9). It is further suggested that students should be given time limits to complete various tasks to keep them alert and attentive. The teachers should pay close attention, especially to the less motivated ones, to help them adapt to virtual mode of teaching. It has been further revealed that success lies in engaging students in active mutual interaction with the teacher and with other students during online teaching sessions. Alternative channels such as texts, emails, messaging apps should also be exploited. It is recommended that online courses should be designed in a manner to keep them interactive, learner-centered, creative, engaging and relevant (Partlow & Gibbs, 2003). Keeton (2004) has advocated to encourage student feedback and comprehension questions to maximize understanding of target content.

Saudi universities have adopted e-learning platform of Blackboard Collaborate much before the advent of COVID-19 crisis and “the use of Learning Management Systems (LMSs) in Saudi universities has brought about significant changes in the academic environment” (Hussain, 2016, p. 81). This factor has helped Saudi universities to successfully switch to online teaching without any delay and as Elsayy & Ahmed (2019) have stated that this e-learning platform “allows students quick access to content, discussions, tests, tasks, announcements, virtual classes, e-mail and assessments, tools for student assessment” (p. 51). Much research has reported that this platform has facilitated large number of students to actively engage in learning process without attending on-campus teaching before COVID-19 crisis (see for example Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014; Al-Asmari & Rabb, 2014; Al-Zahrani & Al-Jraiwi, 2017; Ghamdi & Afshi, 2017). Blackboard Collaborate is a unique digital tool of online learning which facilitates EFL learners and faculty members to effectively communicate during online teaching sessions and ensure proper execution of

necessary teaching processes including presenting course content and facilitating assignments through continuous mutual communication (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014). It has been further revealed that this pedagogical platform is rich in multiple teaching and learning options, which facilitate EFL learners and faculty members to engage individually and in groups to carry out various tasks during online sessions. Mohsen & Shafeeq (2014) conducted their study at Najran university to identify effectiveness of Blackboard Collaborate and reported positive results. That mode of teaching benefited both EFL learners and faculty members to establish enhanced rapport and positive academic bonding, which resulted in effective English language teaching at various academic levels. Alzahour (2013) conducted a study at King Khalid university to identify the role of Blackboard Collaborate in teaching reading skills and vocabulary learning and results showed significant gains. The findings of the study also revealed that platform Blackboard Collaborate was extremely instrumental for effective teaching especially at university level as it provided a range of options to EFL learners and faculty members. The study of Kashghari & Asseel (2014) investigated EFL learners at King Abdulaziz university and reported that platform of Blackboard contributed significantly in improving listening skills of the participants. The study of Almaqtri (2014) investigated gender-based differences and the results revealed that female participants of the study perceived learning through Blackboard Collaborate more effective as compared to their male counterparts.

## Research Methodology

### Study Design

This triangulation design mixed methods study utilized both quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative paradigm was used to elicit data from large number of participants to record a broader view of the participants' perceived preferences related to the effectiveness of various online teaching techniques practiced during COVID-19 crisis in various Saudi universities. The quantitative data were collected through convenience sampling. A self-developed questionnaire was shared with faculty members of various universities to enter their responses on Google Forms. The qualitative paradigm was included to incorporate in-depth investigation to generate rich data. Wengraf (2001) has reported that semi-structured interviews enable participants to communicate more freely and deeply with the researchers to generate rich data. Purposive sampling was used for

qualitative data collection and selected faculty members were interviewed thorough a semi structured interview protocol (Appendix # 1). These sessions were recorded and were later encoded to document responses of the participants.

### Research Objectives

This investigation aimed to identify the following research objectives:

1. To determine the success of online teaching techniques in promoting EFL learners' engagement in classroom proceedings
2. To identify the success of online teaching techniques in promoting mutual interaction
3. To ascertain the success of online teaching techniques in promoting rapport between EFL learners and faculty members
4. To measure the success of online teaching techniques in promoting EFL learners' comprehension of target teaching content
5. To identify the success of online teaching techniques in promoting EFL learners' motivation level

### Research Questions

This study aimed to investigate these research questions:

1. What online teaching techniques have been found successful in promoting EFL learners' engagement in classroom proceedings?
2. What online teaching techniques have remained successful in enhancing mutual interaction?
3. What online teaching techniques have been reported successful in enhancing rapport between EFL learners and faculty members?
4. What online teaching techniques have been found successful in promoting comprehension of target content among EFL learners?
5. What online teaching techniques have been found successful in enhancing EFL learners' motivation?

### Instrumentation

The researchers went through the latest studies in the field of online teaching and e-learning to develop instrumentation for this study. The first instrument was a self-developed questionnaire meant to elicit the perceptions of the faculty members related to the effectiveness of various online teaching techniques exploited during COVID-19 crisis in enhancing students' understanding of the target content, active involvement in learning process, motivation and mutual interaction. A semi structured interview protocol was also developed to generated rich data related to effective online teaching techniques. The interview protocol had five open-ended questions related to the effectiveness of online teaching techniques in enhancing Saudi EFL learners' mutual interaction, motivation, engagement in classroom proceedings, comprehension of target content among EFL learners and



rapport between EFL learners and faculty members. The final versions of these instruments were then generalized to the participants of this survey to record their responses.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The researchers adopted standard procedures to determine the content validity and reliability of the instruments. The initial version of self-developed Likert-scale questionnaire and semi structured interview protocol were sent separately to three senior professors in the field to review. Study title, objectives of the study and research questions were also enclosed. The recommendations of the experts were incorporated in the final versions of the questionnaire and the interview protocol. After determining content validity of the instrument, the revised form of the questionnaire was pilot tested to determine its reliability. The instrument was sent to 20 faculty members in two Saudi universities to collect data for pilot testing. The internal consistency reliability of the instrument, as determined by Cronbach  $\alpha$ , remained .984 (Appendix # 2). The instrument achieved high alpha value to generate reliable data. George & Mallery (2003) have stated that reliability value of .7 or above is acceptable, .8 or above is good whereas .9 or above is excellent.

### **Data Collection**

The researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect data regarding the effectiveness of various teaching techniques related to the target aspects of online pedagogy. Considering the broader scope of this survey, it seemed appropriate to generate data through a large population of the participants who responded to the questionnaire. The data generated through the questionnaire were validated through semi-structured interviews. The final version of the questionnaire was uploaded on Google Forms to generate data from male and female faculty members teaching in various Saudi universities. The researchers used convenience sampling technique to reach maximum number of the participation to respond to the questionnaire. Purposive sampling method was adopted for the qualitative part of data collection. 'Information-rich' cases were selected on the basis of online teaching experience from three Saudi universities. Ten faculty members were selected and interviewed through a semi-structured interview protocol. Interview sessions were recorded as well. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and understand phenomenon related to the effectiveness of online teaching as emerged in interview sessions.

## Data Analysis

The descriptive analyses were run to generate mean, standard deviation (SD), range, minimum values and maximum values for the quantitative data. The mean values were considered as the main indicator of the perceived preferences of the target pedagogical techniques exploited by EFL faculty members from in various Saudi universities during COVID-19 crisis. Higher mean indicated higher perceived effectiveness of these teaching techniques whereas lower mean values denoted that the participants did not consider them effective in achieving various pedagogical goals set for this survey study. The qualitative data generated through semi-structured interviews as well as the published research related to the role of English language in tourism marketing was presented to validate the quantitative data generated through the questionnaire.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1: The online teaching techniques successful in promoting learners' engagement in classroom proceedings

S No	Teaching Strategies	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	Teacher-student communication	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.1250	.91043
2	EFL learners' mutual interaction	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.9712	.93950
3	EFL learners' oral presentations	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.8462	.97313
4	EFL learners' written assignments	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.6538	.95296
5	EFL learners' E-portfolios	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.5962	.96057
6	Lectures	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.3558	1.08760
7	EFL learners' comprehension questions	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0577	.90121
8	EFL learners' discussion forum	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.1346	.92493
9	Faculty members' oral feedback	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.9327	.93751
10	Faculty members' written feedback	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.6442	.85807
<i>Mention any other activity (not given above)</i>							

Descriptive analyses indicated that 'discussion forum' managed by EFL learners was identified as the most effective online teaching technique followed by the 'mutual interaction' of teachers and students. The results revealed that EFL learners' comprehension questions remained the 3<sup>rd</sup> most effective technique in this regard. All the other items of this category were assigned medium low mean values of less than 4. The least effective online teaching techniques in promoting EFL learners' engagement remained lectures, EFL learners' E-portfolios and faculty members' written feedback. The last questionnaire item of this category suggested that animated lectures and frequent role plays were instrumental in enhancing learners' engagement in classroom activities. Along with these techniques, short regular quizzes and telling jokes were also recommended to achieve this goal.

The qualitative data were generated through interviewing EFL faculty members through a semi-structured interview protocol. Responding to the

question related to successful teaching techniques in promoting EFL learners' engagement, P1 (participant one) suggested that *'visualization, cooperative learning, inquiry-based instruction, and technology involvement'* was important in this regard. P2 response was that *'lecturing and Teacher-student interaction using online platforms such Webex and Zoom'* were important in engaging learners. It was further stated that *'individual projects to be capable to measure the students' knowledge levels'* were also instrumental. P4 was of the opinion that learners' engagement in online teaching could be enhanced if *'the teacher provides learning opportunities with other mates by encouraging peer and group presentations and by asking students to use social platforms to collect information on a given topic'*. The response of P5 was that *'I find relevant clips about the subject which enable student's engagement more because they begin to relate and participate more. Taking advantage of the poll option, break-out rooms, assigning tasks to each room separately and checking up on them has been effective and yielded good results'*. P6 reported that to achieve this pedagogical goal, *'discussion forum, teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, oral presentations, discussion forum, and asking comprehension questions have been helpful'*. P8 reported that *'my students' engagement increases when I ask them frequent questions and ask them to summarize some content'*. It was also stated that *'I link my teaching content with formative and summative assessment'* (P9). P10 answered that *'positive reinforcement is magic trick for me in this regard'*.

Table 2: The online teaching techniques successful in promoting mutual interaction

S No	Teaching Strategies	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
11	Teacher-student communication	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.3269	.87514
12	EFL learners' mutual interaction	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.2596	.77579
13	EFL learners' oral presentations	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.9519	.90714
14	EFL learners' written assignments	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.6442	1.04201
15	EFL learners' E-portfolios	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.6538	.90058
16	Lectures	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.4712	1.01404
17	EFL learners' comprehension questions	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.0481	1.07378
18	EFL learners' discussion forum	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.1538	.80976
19	Faculty members' oral feedback	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0769	.85551
20	Faculty members' written feedback	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7308	.99738
<i>Mention any other activity (not given above)</i>							

Next 10 items of the questionnaire meant to elicit the participants' responses related to the effectiveness of online techniques in promoting mutual interaction and the results indicated that the most favored techniques were teacher-students communication and EFL learners' mutual interaction respectively followed by discussion forums. High mean values assigned to these items indicated their significant role in maximizing mutual interaction

during online pedagogy. Mutual interaction is a much sought-after goal of EFL pedagogy and it is learned that along with most preferred teaching strategies of teacher-student communication and students' mutual interaction, students' discussion forums also provided an effective platform to engage EFL learners in active communication. Lectures, EFL learners' written assignments and EFL learners' E-portfolios were allotted the least preferences indicating their limited role in that important pedagogical aspect of online teaching. Responding to the open-ended question, the participants also suggested that EFL learners should practice teaching techniques such as role plays, animated lectures and to activate learning triangle of students, parents and teachers. The active engagement of stake holders would promote mutual interaction and bear positive underpinnings to achieve academic excellence in online teaching during COVID-19 period.

Interview data suggested that teaching techniques such as *'cooperative learning, inquiry-based instruction and technology involvement'* were found effective to maximizing mutual interaction during online pedagogy (P1). Similarly, P2 recommended that the faculty members should exploit those classroom activities which involve frequent *'teacher-student interaction'*. P3 also reported that he always tried his level best to promote mutual interaction through creating positive and frank atmosphere in virtual lectures. It was recommended that *'additionally, diversifying course materials in a smart and interesting way is a technique I used to support interaction'*. Furthermore, it was proposed that considering the significant role of mutual interaction, *'the teacher may ask students to present material in pairs and she/he may foster a positive learning environment'* and should maximize mutual interaction *'by asking them to engage in correcting each other's work online'* (P4). P5 indicated that it was rather difficult to maintain mutual interaction *'since students can deviate from the lesson and not be present'*. Their active participation was ensured though *'calling students by their names and complimenting them for their participation'* which motivated them to engage in activities actively and productively. P6 advocated that providing the students with more opportunities to engage in *'oral presentations'* followed by *'teacher's oral feedback'* and students' comments and questions related to the topic presented was found effective in this regard. P7 informed that this much sought-after teaching goal could be through asking *'comprehension questions'*. *'Group and pair work is important to achieve this goal'* (P8). *'Creating a separate virtual class is also very beneficial since many students are used to texting instead of emailing'* was suggested by P9.

Table 3: The online teaching techniques successful in promoting teacher-learner rapport

S No	Teaching Strategies	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
21	Teacher-student communication	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.2115	1.04902
22	EFL learners' oral presentations	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.6731	1.01868
23	EFL learners' written assignments	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.5481	1.02284
24	EFL learners' E-portfolios	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.7596	.97039
25	Lectures	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.6538	1.04062
26	EFL learners' comprehension questions	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.9904	.90838
27	EFL learners' discussion forum	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0000	.88131
28	Faculty members' oral feedback	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.1635	.96653
29	Faculty members' written feedback	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.8942	.90219
<i>Mention any other activity (not given above)</i>							

Descriptive analyses pointed out that teacher-student communication, teachers' oral feedback and learners' discussion forums were considered the most effective respectively to promote teacher-learner rapport. An interesting finding is that the highest-ranking item of this category were assigned SD of 1.05 indicating wide inter-rater differences. The next most preferred items had less than 1 SD which showed that the participants saw eye to eye with each other. All the remaining teaching techniques were allotted medium low mean values of less than 4 indicating their limited role in developing rapport among teachers and EFL learners. The results reveal that learners' written assignments were considered the least effective in this regard. Traditional techniques of 'lecturing' was assigned second lowest mean followed by EFL learners' oral presentations. Results of open-ended question suggest that teaching techniques such as animated lectures, role modeling, role play, video feedback and teachers' preparedness also play significant role in promoting rapport between teachers and their students. The qualitative data related to effective teaching strategies in promoting teacher-learner rapport was generated through interviews and P1 suggested that '*cooperative learning, inquiry-based instruction and technology involvement*' were important in this regard. It was stated that '*teacher-student interaction and individual projects especially with teachers' oral feedback*' were also instrumental in achieving this pedagogical objective (P2). P3 proclaimed that he used an online survey in the beginning of the term in which the students were supposed to '*talk about themselves and tell me about their needs, learning problems, thoughts about online teaching/learning, interests, hobbies etc... I discussed most of their responses in the second week and promised to help with some issues. I found this method perfect for rapport building*'. The next response was that teachers should '*ask students to contact her/him whenever they have a question or difficulty understanding a point*' (P4). P5 and P8 proposed that

active participation of students in classroom proceedings facilitated in developing rapport with their teachers. The teachers should encourage them with positive feedback, praise and compliments. P6 recommended that teachers ‘*should ensure frequent interaction with the students and provide them with timely oral and written feedback, which will enhance mutual rapport*’. ‘*The teacher may tell students that they will address their questions or difficulties any time via e-mail*’ to develop rapport (p7). P9 revealed that ‘*encouraging participation is valuable and the student shouldn't fear participating. Replying to as many students as possible .....asking who are those who participated, and those who didn't and letting them know that their participation will be much appreciated*’. P10 also mentioned comprehension questions and positive feedback in this regard.

Table 4: The online teaching techniques successful in promoting/enhancing comprehension of target content to EFL learners:

S No	Teaching Strategies	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
30	Teacher-student communication	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.1731	1.08335
31	EFL learners' mutual interaction	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7404	1.19867
32	EFL learners' oral presentations	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0096	.92951
33	EFL learners' written assignments	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.8846	1.02690
34	EFL learners' E-portfolios	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.7692	.89476
35	Lectures	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7212	1.12739
36	EFL learners' comprehension questions	104	2.00	3.00	5.00	4.3077	.71158
37	EFL learners' discussion forum	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.1154	.80421
38	Faculty members' oral feedback	104	2.00	3.00	5.00	4.1635	.76464
39	Faculty members' written feedback	104	2.00	3.00	5.00	4.0577	.81045
<i>Mention any other activity (not given above)</i>							

The results revealed that those teaching techniques remained most effective in enhancing comprehension of target teaching content which involved active communication between the teachers and EFL learners. ‘Teacher-student communication’ received the highest mean with SD of 1.08 revealing differences in the perceptions of the participants towards this item. ‘Faculty members’ oral feedback’ and ‘EFL learners’ discussion forum’ were perceived the next most effective teaching strategies to enhance target content comprehension. The descriptive analyses indicate that ‘lectures’ and ‘EFL learners’ E-portfolios’ were considered the least effective in enhancing understanding of teaching content followed by ‘EFL learners’ mutual interaction’. It was also suggested that use of online applications, ESL interactive videos, role modeling and animated lectures enhance possibilities of better content comprehension. The participants also indicated that timely quizzes, structured lessons and focused use of social media also bore positive overbearing in EFL learners’ comprehension of the target content.

Open-ended question elicited interviewee responses related to effective teaching strategies which enhance target content comprehension and P1 proclaimed that ‘*visualization, inquiry-based instruction, and technology involvement*’ were found effective in this regard. Whereas, P2 disclosed that ‘*teacher-student interaction*’ was key to ensure better comprehension of the target content. P6 and P10 also propounded that teachers should try their level best to maintain mutual interaction during their online teaching sessions. P3 recommended that the faculty members should ensure maximum comprehension through ‘*diversifying course materials, maintaining discussion forum and oral presentation*’. This suggestion confirms that continuous mutual interaction facilitates in achieving enhanced comprehension of teaching content. P4 was of the opinion that this pedagogical objective was achieved through ‘*displaying the content/video/slide on the screen and by collecting information from different resources by teacher and students*’. The next participant reported that he was able to achieve enhanced comprehension by effectively using ‘*Microsoft word to elaborate teaching content more, taking advantage of the polling system and asking comprehension-related questions*’. P7 also supported the recommendations of other participants and stated that ‘*group and individual projects, teacher’s comprehension questions, supplementary videos and oral presentations*’ helped in maximizing learners’ comprehension of target content.

Table 5: The online teaching techniques successful in increasing learners’ motivation

S No	Teaching Strategies	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
40	Teacher-student communication	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.2404	.86457
41	EFL learners’ mutual interaction	104	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7981	1.15229
42	EFL learners’ oral presentations	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.9519	.94899
43	EFL learners’ written assignments	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.7115	.87770
44	EFL learners’ E-portfolios	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.7115	.88869
45	Lectures	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.6154	1.00781
46	EFL learners’ comprehension questions	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0577	.76103
47	EFL learners’ discussion forum	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0481	.80508
48	Faculty members’ oral feedback	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.1346	.82506
49	Faculty members’ written feedback	104	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0192	.80025
<i>Mention any other activity (not given above)</i>							

Table 5 presents data related to the role of teaching techniques in increasing EFL learners’ motivation and ‘teacher-student communication’ was allotted extremely high mean value of 4.24 indicating its crucial role in this regard. ‘Faculty members’ oral feedback’ was perceived the 2<sup>nd</sup> most effective followed by ‘EFL learners’ comprehension questions’. All these items were assigned low SD values revealing high inter-rater harmony towards their perceived role of techniques to enhance motivation among EFL learners.

Traditional lecturing, EFL learners E-portfolios and written assignments were perceived as the least effective teaching strategies to increase EFL learners' motivation. The participants also included scaffolding, role playing and animated lecturing as effective teaching strategies to increase EFL learners' motivation.

The qualitative data related to the effectiveness of online teaching strategies in enhancing learners' motivations reveal that effective use of '*visual aids, inquiry-based instruction, and technology incorporation*' are important (P1). P2 proposed to maintain '*teacher-student interaction*' along with providing frequent '*oral feedback*' to students to keep their motivation high. P 7 and P9 also seconded P2 in this regard. P3 reported that '*keeping students motivated is the most challenging thing I faced in online classes. .... I needed to reward them generously to keep them motivated. I also found that group projects can be used to help here*'. It was suggested that, to encourage students during online teaching, the teacher should '*provide positive feedback and engage some of them in the lecture by becoming moderators for the presentations/projects their friends present*' (P4). P5 reported that the faculty members should '*show appreciation for their students' participation, progress and grades they achieved*' to keep them motivated. The last participant has suggested that frequent use of '*discussion forums, oral presentations, mutual interactions, comprehension questions, and group projects*' contribute significantly in enhancing learners' motivation in EFL contexts. P8 informed that '*regular home assignments, parents' feedback and use of interactive videos were effective*' during online teaching. P10 expressed that '*timely' feedback played role in enhancing motivation among my students*'.

## Discussion

The results have suggested that those teaching techniques are instrumental in enhancing EFL learners' engagement which involve active interaction among the students as well as with their teachers. In this regard, '*teacher-student communication*' has been identified as the most effective teaching technique in promoting learning engagement in classroom proceedings, mutual interaction, teacher-student rapport, comprehension of target content and learners' motivation. It seems to suggest that this mutual interaction helps in enhancing learners' understanding of target teaching content and mutual rapport which in turn motivates the students to actively engage themselves in various classroom proceedings. The participants have



also considered ‘learners’ discussion forum’ most effective in promoting learning engagement in classroom proceedings and instrumental as well in enhancing mutual interaction, teacher-student rapport and comprehension of target content. The findings are supported by a growing mass of research in the field of online pedagogy. The results presented by Crichton & McDaid (2016) indicate that enhancing communication opportunities between the teachers and students significantly increase effectiveness of online teaching. Same findings have been reported by Frazer, Sullivan, Weatherspoon & Hussey (2017) as the participants of their study “viewed the interaction that takes place in the online learning environment as the essence of teaching effectiveness and quality indicators that enhance positive outcomes” (p. 5). Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guardia & Koole (2020) have recommended that EFL learners’ participation and active mutual communication play a significant role in achieving much sought-after goal of successful online pedagogy and they have reiterated that EFL teachers should “help make the online learning experience more satisfying and effective: (1) effective planning, (2) learner preparation, and (3) enhanced interaction” (p. 6). Similar findings have been reported by study of Javid, Farooq & Gulzar (2012) conducted in the same academic context and stated that both faculty members and students have stated that for effective EFL teaching, classes should be interactive. Mahyoob (2021) has also reported that majority of Saudi EFL learners from Taibah University have reported their dissatisfaction with online teaching mainly because of lack of communication opportunities and technical challenges they faced. Oraif & Elyas (2021) have investigated Saudi EFL learners from a high school and reported that the participants have assigned medium low mean value of 3.81 to interaction engagement in online classes during COVID-19. They have suggested that to ensure active communication, a teacher “needs to change from being authoritative to being cooperative and engaging” as in cooperative classrooms, “teachers are part of an interactive environment that focuses on aural and visual stimulation” (p. 13). Zhong (2020) has also stated that mutual interaction is extremely important for effective comprehension of target content and it is difficult to maintain active interaction during online teaching. The findings of Dhawan (2020) are also in line with the results of the study in hand who has stated that frequent communication is mandatory during online learning and the faculty members should try their level best to achieve it through virtual platforms, messaging apps and video calls. Dhawan (2020) has suggested that it is

imperative for faculty members to reach out to the students by using multiple sources including audio, video and text to ensure active participation and mutual interaction for successful teaching during online pedagogy. Faculty members' oral feedback and comprehension questions have been perceived as other most preferred teaching techniques which also include active communication between the teachers and students. The findings confirm previous study conducted by Bao (2020) who has recommended that to ensure effective online teaching, the faculty members should try their level best to provide timely feedback which will motivate them to participate actively to enhance comprehension of target content. Frazer, Sullivan, Weatherspoon & Hussey (2017) have also supported frequent use of these strategies and concluded that "answering questions, providing detailed feedback, and asking probing/prompting questions in the discussion forums lend themselves not only to building that feeling of connection in an online environment but towards student reflection and construction of meaning" (p. 5). Frazer, Sullivan, Weatherspoon & Hussey (2017) have recommended that to increase students' participation and understanding of target content through frequently using comprehension questions from the students. They have stated that when "instructors then ask questions that make the students think more deeply about a topic in the discussions, they [students] actually are finding out new information or delving into the topic more deeply than they would have otherwise" (p. 3). The findings of the study are in line with the recommendations of Chickering & Gamson (1991) who have investigated medical students and suggested that success of online teaching depends on following seven principles which are 1) strong student-teacher interaction, 2) timely feedback, 3) use of varied teaching strategies, 4) active learning, 5) efficient cooperation among learners, 6) maintaining high level of expectation and 7) meeting deadlines in completing various tasks. All these principles help maintain mutual interaction and ultimately paves way to successful learning. The results generated through the descriptive analyses of the least preferred teaching strategies also suggest that the teaching techniques which do not preoccupy EFL learners in active mutual interaction bear marginal effectiveness in promoting learners' overall performance and the findings are in line with the trend exhibited in most preferred teaching techniques of this investigation. 'Lectures' have been identified as the least preferred teaching strategy in promoting learners' engagement in classroom proceedings, mutual interaction, teacher-student rapport, comprehension of

target content and learners' motivation. The findings confirm Javid, Farooq, Gulzar & Khan (2017) who have stated that Saudi EFL learners show negative attitude towards lectures and prefer to have activities which actively involve them as well. This finding confirms the results of most preferred items of this study which have clearly suggested that only those teaching strategies contribute towards content comprehension and effective online teaching which ensure active communication between the faculty members and students. The next two least preferred teaching strategies in promoting learners' motivation, mutual rapport, mutual interaction and learners' participation in classroom proceedings have been 'written feedback and E-portfolio'. In line with previous findings of this study as well as various studies, these teaching strategies have not been favored by the participants of this study as they do not involve mutual communication during classroom proceedings.

### Findings and Conclusions

The results of this investigation have revealed that successful online teaching depends on active communication among Saudi EFL learners as well as with their teachers. All those teaching techniques which ensure sustained participation of the students and provided Saudi EFL learners with ample opportunities to interact actively have significantly contributed to achieve enhanced engagement in classroom activities, teacher-student rapport, comprehension of target content and learners' motivation. The results have offered valuable insights into the fact that 'teacher-student communication' has been favored the most in achieving all target indicators of successful EFL teaching procedure during COVID-19 crisis in Saudi universities. EFL learners' 'discussion forum' was next technique which also provides them sufficient opportunities to get actively engaged in mutual interaction. The next most successful teaching techniques have been frequent use of comprehension questions and timely oral feedback by the faculty members. It has also been revealed that oral feedback does not contribute much to generate mutual communication but it is extremely instrumental in increasing mutual rapport, learners' motivation and comprehension of target content. The descriptive analyses of the least preferred teaching techniques have also confirmed the findings of highest-ranked items of this study. Lecturing technique has remained the least effective in contributing to all target fields of effective online pedagogy. Similarly, maintaining E-portfolios by Saudi EFL learners and their written assignments failed in

producing active participation and interaction; therefore, remained the least successful in producing desired results in online pedagogy during COVID-19 crisis in higher education context in the KSA.

It is recommended that university teachers should plan their online lessons in a way which motivate EFL learners to participate actively in various classroom activities and maximize successful learning possibilities. EFL teachers need to pose frequent comprehension questions, during online sessions, to their students to keep them alert and check their understanding continuously so that they remain actively engaged and motivated. The faculty members should try their level best to provide oral feedback to their students as soon as possible as well. It is also suggested that Saudi EFL students should be motivated right from the beginning of each term to develop discussion forums which provide them opportunities to continuously interact with each other and with their teachers related to various target content to enhance understanding and learning.

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Appendix # 1

Interview Protocol

Name: .....

Teaching experience: .....

University: .....

1. What online teaching techniques did you find effective in promoting your students' engagement in classroom proceedings during covid-19 period?
2. What online teaching techniques did you find effective in enhancing mutual interaction during covid-19 period?
3. What online teaching techniques remained effective in enhancing rapport between you and your students during covid-19 period?
4. What online teaching techniques remained effective in promoting comprehension of target content among your students during covid-19 period?
5. What online teaching techniques did you find effective in enhancing your students' motivation during covid-19 period?

## Appendix 2

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	20	100.0
	Excluded <sup>a</sup>	0	.0
	Total	20	100.0
a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.			
Reliability Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items	
.984		49	

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
VAR00001	245.9500	1759.734	.561	.984
VAR00002	245.2500	1776.934	.622	.983
VAR00003	245.2500	1762.303	.728	.983
VAR00004	245.7500	1789.566	.315	.984
VAR00005	245.6000	1759.411	.762	.983
VAR00006	245.6500	1750.134	.770	.983
VAR00007	245.8000	1757.853	.791	.983
VAR00008	246.1000	1773.463	.582	.984
VAR00009	245.8000	1782.905	.540	.984
VAR00010	245.5000	1767.421	.769	.983
VAR00011	245.6000	1771.832	.693	.983
VAR00012	245.7000	1770.853	.657	.983
VAR00013	245.6500	1795.818	.331	.984
VAR00014	246.1500	1743.608	.825	.983
VAR00015	245.7000	1771.274	.701	.983
VAR00016	245.3500	1774.555	.673	.983
VAR00017	245.7500	1786.197	.368	.984
VAR00018	245.5000	1758.579	.782	.983
VAR00019	246.0500	1766.261	.723	.983
VAR00020	245.9500	1771.524	.665	.983
VAR00021	245.8500	1766.766	.626	.983
VAR00022	245.7000	1775.063	.780	.983
VAR00023	245.5500	1769.313	.706	.983
VAR00024	245.6500	1769.818	.648	.983
VAR00025	245.5500	1766.892	.691	.983
VAR00026	245.7500	1778.724	.573	.984
VAR00027	245.9500	1757.103	.723	.983
VAR00028	245.5500	1785.103	.649	.983
VAR00029	245.3000	1768.116	.759	.983
VAR00030	246.0500	1754.997	.737	.983
VAR00031	246.2000	1752.168	.767	.983
VAR00032	245.9000	1771.884	.588	.984
VAR00033	246.0000	1764.842	.661	.983
VAR00034	245.8000	1782.589	.596	.984
VAR00035	245.6500	1764.661	.766	.983
VAR00036	245.7000	1751.695	.772	.983
VAR00037	245.4500	1756.261	.848	.983
VAR00038	245.8000	1768.379	.700	.983
VAR00039	246.3500	1742.029	.732	.983
VAR00040	245.5500	1755.418	.793	.983
VAR00041	245.5500	1753.524	.868	.983
VAR00042	245.6000	1796.989	.304	.984
VAR00043	245.6500	1749.187	.866	.983
VAR00044	246.0000	1751.263	.827	.983
VAR00045	246.1500	1755.924	.722	.983
VAR00046	245.9000	1771.463	.631	.983
VAR00047	245.7000	1758.221	.829	.983
VAR00048	245.4500	1760.997	.784	.983
VAR00049	245.8000	1743.642	.874	.983