

ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARDS: EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

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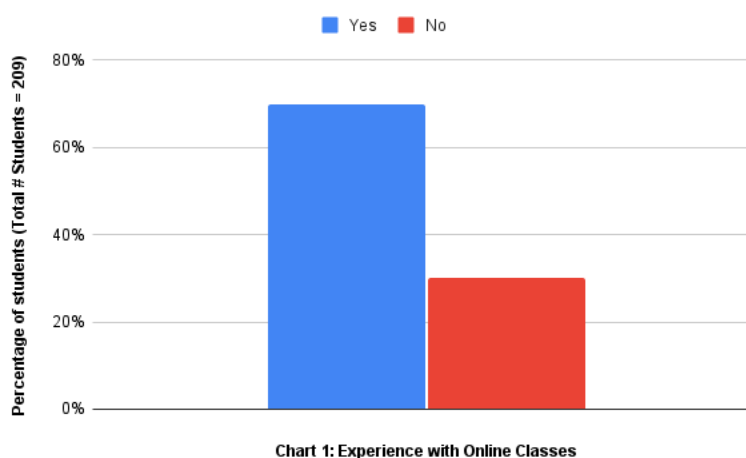
ABSTRACT

Online learning has gained momentum over the past few decades especially after the pandemic. Most schools these days are offering some online classes and many with complete degrees. This teaching modality is good fit for the students who have a busy schedule at work and have other responsibilities at home. However, to offer an effective online class poses a lot of challenges on the instructor's part. One such challenge is to keep the students engaged and help them achieve learning outcomes set for the course. The main reason as to why student engagement can become an issue in an online class is because in such classes, the students and instructor do not meet in person. To help overcome this challenge there is a need for a platform where there is an instructor-student interaction as well as peer interaction. This paper discusses the effectiveness of one such pedagogical tool "Discussion Boards" which is used widely by the instructors in their online classes to keep the students engaged and help them achieve the learning objectives. Further the paper will also discuss the results of a survey given to the students regarding their experience participating in these online discussion boards.

Keywords: Online learning, discussion boards, student engagement

1. BACKGROUND

This study was conducted at a community college (with IRB approval) over a period of two years in online classes from 2019 to 2021. The purpose of the study was to understand the importance of discussion boards in online classes, to find out the essentials of a meaningful and productive discussion board and to learn about student's experience participating in these boards and their expectations. Some of these classes were offered in a regular semester and some were offered in short semesters such as winter session and summer session. The total number of students who participated in this study were 209. For 30% of these students, this was their first time taking an online class and the remaining 70% students said they have taken an online class in the past (Chart 1).



About 13% of these students were freshman at college, 61% of them were sophomore, 11% were juniors, and 16% were seniors (Chart 2).