

# How EFL, Linguistics and Translation Instructors Engaged Students in Distance Learning during the COVID-19 Second Wave

*Reima Al-Jarf, Ph.D.*

## **Abstract**

This study reports 15 types of activities that EFL, linguistics and translation instructors at a sample of Saudi universities used in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples include searching for linguistic and translation key terms and concepts, problem-solving questions, online debates, summarizing a research paper, attending a thesis defense, inviting guest speakers, project-based assignments, connecting writing and speaking topics with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, collecting and analyzing translation errors, translating Wikipedia articles, interpreting contests, linguistic analyses of family speech and videos, student-created podcasts and digital stories, dynamic online speaking activities, and integrating technology such as Slido and Padlet. The participating students found those activities beneficial, enjoyable, and helpful. Their skills improved as a result of reading, preparing and synthesizing information and the feedback received.

## **Keywords**

COVID-19 – online activities – distance learning – Saudi Arabia – language and translation

## **1. Introduction**

As in many countries around the world, there was a sudden transition from face-to-face to distance learning (DL) at Saudi universities starting in March 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, all college courses have been delivered online using a variety of platforms such as Blackboard, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Google Classroom and others. A study by Al-Jarf (2020b), conducted end of Spring Semester 2020, showed that more than half (55%) of the students and instructors at language and translation colleges in Saudi Arabia were not happy with DL, found it ineffective and frustrating and preferred face-to-face instruction. In addition, 59% of the students had difficulty understanding online lectures. Instructors used the same class material that they were using before the pandemic. No supplementary digital material or multimedia resources were made available for the students. To 58% of the students, online learning was a lot of hard work. 69% of the students indicated that they had difficulty communicating with their instructors and classmates. It was not possible for some students to follow the online lectures, thus preferred lecture recordings.

Similarly, 64% of the instructors surveyed by Al-Jarf (2020b) reported that many students were not interested in doing assignments for their online courses, refused to give oral presentations, did not ask questions as they used to when they were studying face-to-face before the pandemic.

The students did not participate in online class discussions and did not do homework or assignments. They were not enthusiastic, were disappointed and demotivated. There was little interaction between the students and the instructor and among the students themselves in the DL environment. More than two-thirds of them (74%) indicated that the online course attendance was not high as in face-to-face classes. Most students preferred lecture recordings, which they could play without having to attend the live online lectures. The university administrations canceled the marks allocated to attendance and classwork during the lockdown. In online translation classes, the students did not revise, nor correct their own translations, and did not participate in the online discussion of their translations, nor other classmates' translations. They did not post anything relevant on Blackboard. They were not willing to consult additional online dictionaries or translation sources.

The most common concern for the large majority (91%) of the students was course grades and passing their final exams with high marks. Furthermore, 69% of the instructors indicated that online exams during the lockdown in spring 2020 were ineffective. To avoid students' complaints about grades and to alleviate the negative effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on students' morale, university administrators in Saudi Arabia mandated that instructors be lenient in grading exams, give easy and straightforward questions on final exams, rather than higher-level thinking questions, and give the students extra exam time. Only 20% of the total course mark was allocated to final exams rather than the usual 50% stipulated before the pandemic. The students were given several options: to drop the course, to have the course marks included in their GPAs, to choose between a letter grade or a pass/fail result for their courses. As a result, all the students passed their final exams and did not feel that they had to work hard to earn their grades.

Moreover, 57% of the instructors reported that they had no prior experience with DL, and they could not adjust to DL as a new mode of teaching and learning. They did not know how to use the different tools of the DL platform, and how to adapt the course material to the new online teaching environment.

Furthermore, during the lockdown in spring 2020, some students did not have devices and internet to access their online courses. A big majority (83%) of the participants reported that the internet was slow, and they had difficulty logging into the platform. No technical support was available to the instructors and students during online classes and the technical support staff did not respond to their needs and solve Blackboard and connection problems quickly. The instructors received no academic support to help them prepare online teaching material, activities, and assignments (Al-Jarf, 2021d).

In the summer and fall of 2020, Saudi universities had taken numerous actions towards offering online pedagogical training workshops and support for the instructors, helping students, who had devices or no devices, to gain internet access, solving platform problems, and improving internet connection. In appreciation of such efforts, Umm Al-Qura<sup>1</sup> University won the Blackboard Catalyst Award 2021 for training and professional development at the world level (Al-Jarf, 2021d).

Since language, linguistics and translation courses require intensive practice, the present study aims to explore the changes that have taken place in the delivery of these courses, and the types

---

<sup>1</sup> [twitter.com/uqu\\_edu/status/1419736748595290116?s=08](https://twitter.com/uqu_edu/status/1419736748595290116?s=08)

of online activities that a sample of language and translation instructors at some Saudi universities were using during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., in the fall 2020 and spring 2021. It aims to find out how language, linguistics and translation instructors engage students online in the absence of face-to-face activities and interaction and to report students' views on those activities.

Findings of the present study are significant for EFL, linguistics, and translation instructors at Saudi university because there is a need to deliver good online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings will raise instructors' awareness of the new types of online language, linguistics and translation activities that can be practiced during the pandemic and how students engaged in them. It will give instructors an opportunity to share and exchange their online teaching experiences in the areas of EFL, linguistics and translation teaching and learning.

## 2. Literature Review

In education, *student engagement*<sup>2</sup> refers to the degree of attention, interest, curiosity, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught. Learning improves when students are interested, inquisitive, or inspired. On the contrary, learning tends to suffer when the students are bored, disaffected, dispassionate, or disengaged. Stronger and improved student engagement are common instructional objectives expressed by educators. Student engagement can be intellectual (cognitive), emotional, physical, social, and/or cultural. It has many benefits:<sup>3</sup> higher grade point averages, learning life skills, developing leadership skills, learning inclusive practices, interpersonal skills, learning with peers, having fun and others. Student engagement can be achieved through:<sup>4</sup> educational technology and blended learning, classroom management strategies, active learning, quick writes, reciprocal teaching, class participation strategies, culturally responsive teaching, cooperative learning, personalized learning, service learning, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, gamification, and interdisciplinary teaching. In brief, student engagement can be achieved through effective learning activities and strategies.

In the foreign language, linguistics and translation teaching and learning context, a review of the literature has shown numerous studies that utilized a variety of activities for promoting students' engagement in DL before the outbreak of the pandemic. In a Spanish language course for beginners at the Open University (UK), Fernando Rosell-Aguilar (2005) designed a full set of online tutorial materials for distance language learners utilizing an online audiographic conferencing virtual learning environment (VLE) for synchronous oral interaction.

In Australia, a class of sixteen French-speaking students enrolled in an M.A. course created multimedia resources for a group of students with no prior knowledge of French. Graduate students worked in pairs in creating multimedia activities for real students in a different location based on their culture. The students communicated with each other during weekly classes and via a group-exchange technology (Develotte et al., 2005).

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.edglossary.org/student-engagement/#:~:text=In%20education%2C%20student%20engagement%20refers,and%20progress%20in%20their%20education>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.csusb.edu/student-engagement/benefits-engagement>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/student-engagement-strategies/>

At Universidade Aberta (Open University) in Portugal, Nobre (2018) employed curricular paths, which included online oral and written communicative practices. They followed a student-centered, task-oriented approach, with some examples of training activities in French, German, and English, focusing on oral practice, and based on digital resources consisting of multimedia materials, either produced by the instructor or students, in addition to other materials available on web 2.0. The researcher concluded that the multimedia resources were suitable for the online teaching and learning of foreign languages, especially for professionally engaged adult students, providing them with real-life situations that foster foreign language teaching and learning in virtual settings.

A second group of studies integrated social media in DL courses such as Ucar and Goksel (2020) who found that use of supplementary activities on Facebook contributed significantly to EFL students' motivation, interest, volition, and academic performance in an online distance course. Similarly, Moghadam and Shamsi (2021) found that Facebook could serve as a motivating and effective tool for engaging students in combination with the online platforms used during the global lockdown.

In Kunka's study (2020), Twitter increased students' engagement in the college classroom. Students who were hesitant to speak up in class were able to participate in class discussions held on Twitter. Twitter helped the students overcome their feelings of isolation due to a lack of communication intimacy and immediacy. It provided another communication channel, a space to share assignments, and a medium where students can actively engage with each other, the course content, and the instructor.

Likewise, Instagram was used as an interactive communication channel to engage first-year students during an introductory course. An open Instagram account was created where students' questions were gathered and answered by creating educational images and videos. Results showed that Instagram could serve as a useful pedagogical tool to complement existing distance learning platforms, even beyond the COVID-19 pandemic (Ye et al., 2020).

Moreover, at the Italian Language Program at Indiana University, Bloomington, Ardeni et al. (2021) extensively used social media, such as Instagram and Facebook and a Karaoke Project that involved a series of video portraits, as community-building activities during and after the transition from face to face to online instruction.

A third group of studies focused on the strategies and activities that proved to be effective in enhancing engagement in DL courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples include the following: using a learner-centered approach that offers rich learning choices to the students (Zayabalaradjane, 2020); promoting active learning in learners by providing opportunities to read, write, discuss, think, ask questions, solve problems, analyze and create new things depending on the learning content (Zayapragassarazan, 2020); involving cognitive engagement, metacognitive language learning strategies, self-regulated learning, English language learning motivation, critical thinking as a manifestation of students' cognitive engagement, and connecting teaching materials to the students' daily life (Yundayani et al., 2021); conducting interaction-based classes (Krause & Goering, 2021); doing small group activities and projects (Orlov et al., 2020); using asynchronous videos instead of synchronous, live meetings (Lowenthal et al., 2020); giving formative assessment (Chen et al., 2021); (8) building student-instructor relationships (Gares et al., 2020); supporting students through the course community and

students' personal community (Borup et al., 2020; Billings & Lagunoff, 2020); and developing a social presence in communities of language learners (Lomicka, 2020).

In addition, Abou-Khalil et al. (2021) found that the most effective teaching-learning strategies in DL are student-content engagement strategies (screen sharing, summaries, and class recordings), followed by student-teacher strategies (Q and A sessions and reminders) and the least effective are student-student strategies (group chat and collaborative work). They also found that the effectiveness of the engagement strategies depended on the students' gender and degree of access to technology.

The above literature review shows lack of studies that explore online activities that EFL, linguistics and translation instructors at Saudi universities are using in developing language and translation skills to help students apply and practice those skills in the DL environment during the COVID-19 pandemic in fall 2020 and spring 2021. Therefore, the current study aims to fill a gap in the EFL, linguistics and translation literature and shed some light on how instructors and students at a sample of Saudi language and translation departments are coping with the emergency DL environment.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Subjects**

Subjects of the current study consisted of 35 female college instructors teaching a variety of EFL, linguistics and translation courses at seven Saudi universities: King Saud University, Princess Noura University, Prince Sultan University, King Abdul-Aziz University, Umm Al-Qura University, King Khalid University, and the Saudi Electronic University. *Almost half* (45%) of the instructors have a Ph.D. and 55% have an M.A. degree in TESOL, linguistics or English Literature. In addition, 75 female students enrolled in a variety of EFL, linguistics and translation courses at the sample institutions were selected. One fifth of the sample (20%) of them were M.A. students and 80% were undergraduate students in different college levels.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

The instructor survey consisted of several open-ended questions that asked the instructors about the following: (1) the kind of online EFL, linguistics and/or translation activities they have been using in the Fall Semester 2020 and Spring Semester 2021, (2) benefits and shortcomings of teaching EFL, linguistics and/or translation via DL, (3) how instructors engage, encourage and support students in online EFL, linguistics and/or translation courses, (4) course material and teaching techniques used in online EFL, linguistics and/or translation instruction, (5) attendance, homework, participation, self-efficacy and level of perseverance in online EFL, linguistics and/or translation courses, (6) interaction and communication between the students and instructors in online EFL, linguistics and translation courses, and (7) how feedback is given by instructors and classmates.

Similarly, the questionnaire-survey for the students consisted of open-ended questions that asked the students about their experience practicing EFL, linguistics and/or translation skills online, and their reaction to online EFL, linguistics and/or translation activities, and whether they

prefer to continue to practice EFL, linguistics or translation online after the pandemic is over and why.

One limitation of this study is that it was not possible to get students' marks in face-to-face EFL, linguistics and/or translation courses before the pandemic and students' marks enrolled in the online EFL, linguistics and/or translation courses offered during the spring 2020 and fall 2021. Therefore, comparisons of the face-to-face speaking and online speaking activities and the effect of online EFL, linguistics and/or translation activities on students' EFL, linguistics and/or translation skills development are based on students and instructors' responses to surveys sent to them via WhatsApp. Assessing the degree of engagement in each activity mentioned by the subjects was beyond the scope of the current study.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Responses to the instructor and student surveys were analyzed qualitatively as it is more important to report and describe the kinds of EFL, linguistics and/or translation activities used by the sample of instructors rather than reporting percentages or frequencies of instructors and students giving the same response. The activities will not be classified according to subject area, because some of the activities can be used in any subject area such as attending thesis defenses, debates, searching for concepts and specialized terminology, project-based and problem-solving questions, student-created videos or student-created podcasts.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Types of Activities Used by the Sample**

Results of the survey in fall 2020 and spring 2021 showed that EFL, linguistics and/or translation instructors in the sample went beyond using a PPT (PowerPoint) in DL as it was the case in fall 2020. They started to use online activities for increasing students' engagement in EFL, linguistics and/or translation. Students usually learn through activities that are meaningful and relevant to them, driven by their interests and self-initiated with guidance from teachers. The types of activities that EFL, linguistics and/or translation instructors reported are as follows:

#### **4.1.1 Searching for linguistic and translation key terms and concepts**

The students are given some key terms and are asked to search for definitions, and give examples about them. This is a very common activity in almost all linguistics courses such as pragmatics, semantics, contrastive analysis, text linguistics courses and others. Some translation instructors use this activity when they teach introduction to translation or problems of translation courses. Examples of translation terminology given are foreignization, domestication, modulation, calque, eponym, transliteration, polysemy, ambiguity and others.

#### **4.1.2 Answering problem-solving questions**

This is the second most popular activity. It is similar to the oral presentations described above. The difference is only in the EFL, linguistics and translation topics selected. Here, the students may propose solutions to first and second language acquisition, listening,

speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, specific translation problems and/or linguistic issues with or without prior preparation at home. Further problem-solving questions given are:

- Solving the digital gap during COVID-19
- Creating new jobs for the COVID-19 era
- Misunderstanding Islamic expressions by foreigners
- High school students' low proficiency level in English
- Combating spelling weaknesses

#### 4.1.3 **Online debates about some issues**

This is the third most common activity. Here, the students are divided into two teams with contradictory points of view. Each team tries to convince the audience with their point of by giving examples and justifications. Some of the debate topics given are:

- Should we teach English to children under the age of six?
- Is the grammar-translation method effective in teaching English to beginners?
- The best theory of second language acquisition
- The best foreign language teaching methodology
- Does educational reform start from the teacher or the curriculum?

#### 4.1.4 **Summarizing a research paper**

The students find research papers of their choice on first and second language acquisition, linguistic theory, discourse analysis, error analysis, translation studies, and translation errors in writing or giving an oral presentation about it showing its strengths and weakness. This assignment is usually given to graduate students.

#### 4.1.5 **Attending a thesis defense**

The students attend an M.A. or Ph.D. thesis defense in EFL, applied linguistics, theoretical linguistics and/or translation, and write a report about it (strengths and weaknesses). This activity is more common with graduate than undergraduate students.

#### 4.1.6 **Inviting specialized guest speakers**

This is a common activity among some instructors and is suitable for any college level being easily adaptable to the students' proficiency level. A subject specialist is invited to join the online class session to talk about research methodology in language teaching, linguistics and/or translation, translation strategies, translation problems. Sometimes graduate students studying abroad are invited to talk about their experience studying abroad and some of the challenges that some female students, in particular, face, or any other topics. Before the online session, the students prepare questions to ask. During the session, they take turns to ask the questions one at a time. They listen to the answer and take notes. After the session, they write a report in which they summarize the guest's answers to the issues raised in the interview.

#### 4.1.7 **Project-based assignments**

Since plants and flowers in the environment around the students have common and botanical names, an intriguing assignment given by a lecturer at King Saud University to undergraduate students enrolled in her translation and linguistics courses is about plant/flower names in English and Arabic. The instructor asks each student to choose a plant/flower, plant it, take a picture of it and write a post about it. In the post, the students are required to explain the metaphorical meaning of the plant or flower name in English and/or Arabic, explain why the metaphorical name was adopted, then translate the common and/or botanical names from English to Arabic and vice versa as in the examples in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Some flower names in English and Arabic

English (common) Name	Latin (botanical) name	Arabic Name
Frangipani, red paucipan, red-jasmine, red frangipani, common frangipani, temple tree	plumeria	الفتنة الياسمين الهندي
Snap dragon, great snapdragon, lion's mouth, rabbit's mouth, bonny rabbits, calf snout, toad's mouth, bulldogs, lion's snap	antirrhinum majus	فم السمكة حنك السبع
Flaming Glorybower	clerodendrum splendens, verbenaceae	طربوش الملك اكير
Elephant bush, dwarf jade plant, porkbush, spekboom	portulacaria afra	دمعة الطفل العقيق غذاء الفيل نبات الفيل
Rose moss, eleven o'clock, Mexican rose, moss rose, sun rose, rock rose, moss-rose purslane	portulaca grandiflora	صباح الخير زهرة الصباح رجلة الزهور
Paper flower, Santa Rita, Napoleón	bougainvillea bugambilia, veranera, trinitaria, papelillo	الجهنمية المجنونة البوغنڤيلية البوغنڤيليا

#### 4.1.8 Connecting writing and speaking topics with the Kingdom's Vision 2030

In writing assignments, few instructors choose topics based on the Kingdom's Vision 2030 such as improving life quality, humanizing cities, ecological balance and others. The students are asked to write an essay in which they relate such topics to Vision 2030.

#### 4.1.9 Collecting and analyzing translation errors



Few instructors ask the students to collect English/Arabic and Arabic/English translation errors from subtitled TV movies, news broadcasts, canned food labels, candy wrappers, street signs, billboards and ads. They are asked to correct the errors.

#### 4.1.10 **Translating Wikipedia articles from English to Arabic**

Students enrolled in translation courses select some Wikipedia articles that they would like to translate. The translated articles are posted online for the instructor and classmates to make comments on the translation quality and accuracy. However, students enrolled in the same course are not usually critical of their classmates' translated articles. They mainly give compliments and positive rather than negative feedback and judgments of the translation quality.

#### 4.1.11 **Interpreting contest**

Sometimes, interpreting contests are held online where the instructor can play parts of an audio of a lecture or conference talk, which the students listen to, and engage in interpreting each part. Contests are held for both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting.

#### 4.1.12 **Analyzing family speech**

Few instructors give some assignments that require the students to listen to family members in spontaneous speech at home and focus on particular linguistic issues that the students study in linguistics (pragmatics, semantics, stylistics, etc.) classes such as:

- analyzing errors in daily speech (قاعدة أمشي)
- collecting examples of collocations and idiom (طار من الفرح، نجوم السماء اقرب له (محللك سر، هلا وغلا، كفيت ووفيت، اصل وفصل)
- collecting examples of slips of the tongue
- collecting examples of mannerisms (فاهمة علي، سامعتني، ماشي، تمام)
- observing and collecting phrases or forms that small children use such as overgeneralizing the sound feminine plural (هديات)

#### 4.1.13 **Linguistic analysis of a video**

Few instructors who teach undergraduate students enrolled in pragmatics, semantics, and linguistics courses ask the students to select a stand-up comedy, an Oprah Winfrey Talk Show or a speech video and analyze it in terms of (1) the formal, lexical, conceptual semantic theories, (2) the speech acts contained in it, (3) interaction, and (4) pragmatic relations and other linguistic issues. The students give examples and discuss them in writing or orally.

#### 4.1.14 **Student-created digital stories**

Few instructors ask the students to create a video that is 3–4 minutes long in which they tell a digital story using some semantic notions. For example, a students created an ethnographic profile of herself.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuxPs2Vc87o&ab\\_channel=MadaAlk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuxPs2Vc87o&ab_channel=MadaAlk)

#### 4.1.15 **Student-created podcasts**

A lecturer at the English Department at King Saud University created a Speaking Center on Twitter where volunteer students enrolled in her online courses create their own podcasts on topics of their choice. The students record, stream and/or upload their podcasts using the SoundCloud App. During the pandemic, the students have created a total of 17 podcasts. The following are examples of student-created podcasts:

- Acacia Iteaphylla <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/acacia-iteaphylla>
- Foreign Language in a Nutshell <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/foreign-language-in-a-nutshell>
- Are We Evil? <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/are-we-evil>
- Self-sufficiency <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/are-you-being-your-best-self>
- What Shaped Our 90's <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/what-shaped-our-90s>
- Flat Earth Theory <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/>
- Code-switching: With or against, and why? <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/code-switching-with-or-against>
- What could possibly happen in our sleep? <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/what-could-possibly-happen-in>
- Being Mindfully Present <https://soundcloud.com/user-902447197/being-mindfully-present>

#### 4.1.16 **Integrating Technology**

##### *Slido*

Some instructors ask questions about an issue and the students use Slido to answer the questions. The answers appear on a PPT slide. The students vote for the best answer and give reasons for their choice. They can also write a one-page reflection on an issue that was discussed.

##### *Padlet*

Some instructors in the sample use Padlet, an app that is similar to paper for the screen. The instructor starts with an empty page and then puts whatever she likes on it. The instructor or students can upload a video, record an interview, or snap a picture. Students write their own text posts, upload some documents, and watch their Padlet come to life. Once other students add to it, the page will update in real time. Students write comments on each other's views and expectations.

##### *ConnectionYard*

Instructors at the Saudi Electronic University use ConnectionYard, a social engagement platform that can be integrated with Google Classroom, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Edmodo, Moodle, Canvas, Blackboard. It has different types of messaging (text, social media, or email) to reach everyone using their current devices on their preferred messaging channels. It allows interaction with learning content, improving measures of

performance and attendance. It has an analytics capability that allows measuring and tracking high performing classrooms, teachers, and students.

#### 4.2 ***Student-Instructor Communication***

The students reported that during the DL English, linguistics and/or translation classes, they communicate with their instructors and sometimes make comments and/or ask questions via the platforms' hand raising tool and chat. Before and after classes, they mostly communicate with their instructors via WhatsApp. Some instructors form a WhatsApp group for students enrolled in a particular section or course. A student may communicate with her instructor privately if she does not wish to ask questions or seek help in public. Other social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, or Instagram are not used for student-instructor communication.

#### 4.3 ***Motivating the Students***

Most of the online EFL, linguistics and/or translation activities used to develop the students' English, linguistic and translation skills in the DL environment are student-centered, project-based, and require problem-solving. Students search for and prepare the assigned topics at home, read about the topic, summarize and/or synthesize information from different sources. They usually prepare an online oral presentation or a written response. Students take their activities seriously and work hard because they are given marks for each assignment. Unlike DL during the lockdown when marks allocated to attendance and semester work were cancelled and only 20% of the course mark was allocated to final exams; in fall 2020 and spring 2021, the instructors used formative assessment in the online EFL, linguistics and translation courses as the university administration emphasized the allocation of marks to attendance and classwork. The instructors gave marks for participating in the online activities, class attendance, and completing written or oral assignments. Some instructors used an assessment rubric such as creativity 2 marks, originality 1 mark, grammar 1 mark, accuracy 2 marks, division of work 1 mark, presentation of examples 1 mark, and clarity 1 mark. The components of the assessment rubrics and marks allocated to them differed from one type of activity to another, from course to course, and instructor to instructor.

#### 4.4 ***Students' Views***

Analysis of the students' responses to the survey showed that the online EFL, linguistics and translation activities were beneficial, enjoyable, and helpful. Their English language, linguistic analysis and/or translation skills improved a lot as a result of reading, preparing and synthesizing information from different resources and the feedback given to them from their instructors during the online class sessions. Although at the beginning of the semester, many students were shy, nervous and were hesitant to participate, but at the end of the semester they gained self-confidence due to weekly practice and instructors' encouragement, and support. The online sessions reduced their stress especially because they could turn off their video and just focus on listening to the content presented. Some students wrote:

- *Samia*: The activities are valuable. My translation skills have improved as a result of weekly assignments, preparation and online discussion.
- *Hana*: the teacher was kind, patient, and she paid attention to each student.

- *Sara*: the teacher provided valuable feedback. I learned a lot from the commented on my translation, grammatical and stylistic errors.
- *Madawi*: the online practice we received in the pragmatics course was beneficial. I learned how to apply pragmatic theory to real-life situations.
- *Dalia*: practicing English writing on the DL platform helped me focus better on generating ideas and connecting them with the Kingdom's Vision 2030.
- *Lara*: The online class is quiet with no distractions. I go online in the comfort of my home. I can turn my webcam off. Thus, I concentrate better.

The students found the hand-raising tool useful because they could use it to ask questions. During the online EFL, linguistics and/or translation practice, the students chose to turn off their video and use the audio only.

Other advantages of online EFL, linguistics and translation courses reported by the students were that they could join the platform through their laptop or smart phone. They did not have to commute to college and waste time in the traffic jam. They could replay the recording of the class session, especially if they miss a live EFL, linguistics and/or translation session.

Conversely, some students indicated that online EFL, linguistics and translation activities are not like face-to-face activities in the sense of community they feel with their classmates in the classroom. In the real classroom, there is eye contact, gestures, and more rapport among classmates which are absent in DL. They can also engage in some collaborative, small-group activities and projects, which they could not engage in in DL as they cannot meet with some classmates in person due to the social distancing measures during the pandemic.

#### 4.5 *Instructors' Views*

EFL, linguistics and translation instructors at the sample institutions in the current study indicated that DL in fall 2020 and spring 2021 has been more effective than DL in spring 2020. In the Fall Semester 2020 and the Spring Semester 2021, the students became more attentive, interactive, and interested in learning, participating, and doing assignments and working on projects. Most instructors in the current study had a positive attitude toward the online EFL, linguistics and translation classes. There was more engagement in the activities, interaction and communication among the students and instructors. Back in spring 2020, various issues occurred—the university dismissed the marks allocated to classwork and attendance, the students were not proficient enough to use the DL platform and its tools, they had no previous DL experience, and they had problems operating DL platforms and getting internet connectivity. As instructors, they gained more experience in handling the different tools in Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams and/or Blackboard. They had a chance to practice and explore and thus became more familiar with the platform. They also learned from colleagues who are more competent in using the DL platforms and digital material.

By contrast, in teaching EFL, linguistics and translation courses via Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, and similar applications, the instructors and students could only hear each other's voices but not see each other's faces on the screen as both instructors and students turned off their platform video.

Another challenge that the instructors have is reading the questions in the chat while listening and paying attention to students' online oral presentations, debates and discussions in addition

to responding to students' queries on WhatsApp. As the students stated in their responses, some face-to-face EFL, linguistics and translation activities cannot be performed in small groups via the platform as the students could not get together to work on their projects. Some instructors wrote:

- *Lana*: I am enjoying my online classes because the students are hardworking, and they submit intriguing responses to their projects and assignments.
- *Abeer*: I am pleased because the students are making progress and respond positively to feedback.
- *Muneera*: DL has given me a chance to explore new teaching strategies that I did not try face-to-face in the classroom.
- *Dana*: DL gives me an opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise about online activities and digital material related to the courses that I teach.
- *Salwa*: Students in my courses do not sufficiently interact with each other probably because they do not know each other, especially in lower college levels.

## **5. Discussion**

Findings of the present study showed that EFL, linguistics and translation activities utilized by instructors at the sample universities mainly focus on searching for linguistic and translation key terms and concepts, online debates about some issues, summarizing a research paper, attending a thesis defense and writing a report about it, translating Wikipedia articles from English to Arabic, interpreting contests, answering problem-solving questions, project-based assignments, inviting specialized guest speakers, linguistic analysis of a video, student-created digital stories, analyzing family-speech, relating writing and speaking topics to Vision 2030, collecting and analyzing translation errors, student-created podcasts, and using technologies such as Slido, Padlet and ConnectYard in combination with the platform. However, none of the instructors in the present study integrated social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for interaction, communication and learning purposes as in prior studies by Ucar and Goksel (2020), Moghadam and Shamsi (2021), Kunka (2020), Ye et al. (2020), and Ardeni et al. (2021). Similarly, none of the instructors in the current study used audiographic conferencing VLE, multimedia resources, asynchronous video, the Karaoke Project, or small group activities and projects as in prior studies by Rosell-Aguilar (2005), Develotte et al. (2005), Nobre (2018), and Lowenthal et al. (2020).

As in Abou-Khalil et al.'s study (2021), the activities applied by instructors in the current study seem to be effective in promoting students' engagement with the content and with the instructor but not as much with the students themselves. The students were able to engage with the content using screen sharing, summaries, and class recordings. They were able to interact with the instructor through question-and-answer sessions and reminders. There was little interaction-based learning among the students. The students did not show much interaction with each other through the group chat and collaborative work as most of the activities were conducted individually and the students made few comments on each other's performance.

Furthermore, the types of activities applied in the current study are consistent with the teaching approaches and strategies recommended by Yundayani et al. (2021), Krause and Goering (2021), Orlov et al. (2020), Zayabalaradjane (2020), Zayapragassarazan (2020),

Lowenthal et al. (2020), Chen et al. (2021), Gares et al. (2020), Borup et al. (2020), Billings and Lagunoff (2020), and Lomicka (2020). Activities in the current study are learner-centered. They promote active learning, cognitive engagement, metacognitive language learning strategies, self-regulated learning, motivate students to learn, encourage critical thinking, and connect the subject matter to the students' daily life. They also use formative assessment. In addition, they focus on student-instructor relationships, and a learning environment that supports students through the course community.

## **6. Recommendations and Conclusion**

Although most of the activities used by EFL, linguistics and translation instructors at the sample universities in the current study are intriguing and innovative in nature, they are not all-inclusive. More engaging, interactive, and interesting EFL, linguistics and translation activities can be utilized in the DL environment during the COVID-19 pandemic as in the following examples:

- Integrating mobile apps to help students use TOEFL, IELTS, prefixes, suffixes, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, literature, history of the English language and additional linguistics resources (Al-Jarf, 2020c, 2021f).
- Integrating mobile audiobooks only. Mobile audiobooks are those that combine reading and speaking activities and/or are those that combine listening and speaking activities which students can use on their own at home, and then perform some activities during the online class session such as summarizing the content, answering auditory comprehension questions, or reflecting on the story orally or in writing (Al-Jarf, 2021e).
- Using a variety of online speaking activities such as prepare a topic at home and giving an online oral presentation about it; using online debates; answering problem-solving questions; student-created podcasts; combining listening and speaking activities; using some apps (Al-Jarf, 2021b).
- Using TED Talks as a listening resource in EFL instruction (Al-Jarf, 2021h).
- Using a class blog to write about COVID-19 and current global events (Al-Jarf, 2022a, 2022b).
- Enriching students' vocabulary with online vocabulary tasks, mobile apps and mobile flashcards (Al-Jarf, 2021f, 2022c, 2022d).
- Struggling EFL college students may collaborative in mobile ebook reading (Al-Jarf, 2021a).
- Students enrolled in online EFL courses may read multicultural children's stories at home and give a summary, answer questions, or reflect on the story orally or in writing during the online class session (Al-Jarf, 2015).
- Inspirational quotes can be used as online activities for practicing reading comprehension, vocabulary skills, literary appreciation and linguistic analysis (Al-Jarf, 2021a).
- Integrating linguistic landscapes in reading and linguistics activities. Linguistic landscapes cover street signs, direction, warning signs, names of places and tourist attractions and ads displayed in public spaces. They are concise, and make use of authentic language, and specific grammatical structures, idioms and imagery. They can be used to practice vocabulary skills, abbreviations and acronyms, and British and American varieties of

English. They can also be used to practice on grammatical structures (negative structures, commands, passive, ellipsis, reduced clauses, and emphatic structures). Moreover, they are useful for building reading comprehension skills, working out inferring meaning of difficult words and the purpose of a sign, drawing students' attention to differences in font types and sizes in the signs, resolving anaphora, analyzing imagery, and making pragmatic and discoursal analysis (Al-Jarf, 2021d).

- Students can engage in synchronous or asynchronous collaborative Arabization and translation practice on Twitter or an online discussion forum (Al-Jarf, 2017, 2019, 2020d).
- Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram can be used for oral and written communication between students and instructors and among the students themselves (Al-Jarf, 2020a).

Finally, this study recommends that future studies investigate levels of engagement in each type of activity and assess the impact of each activity on EFL, linguistics, translation, and interpreting skill development. Since the students are going to be studying face-to-face starting from the Fall Semester 2021, research studies that explore whether instructors and students prefer to continue to practice EFL, linguistics and translation online in combination with face-to-face EFL, linguistics and translation classes is open for further investigation by researchers in the future.

## References

- [1] Abou-Khalil, V., Helou, S., Khalifé, E., Chen, M., Majumdar, R., & Ogata, H. (2021). Emergency online learning in low-resource settings: Effective student engagement strategies. *Education Sciences*, 11, Article 24.
- [2] Al-Jarf, R. (2015, April 23–24). *Enhancing reading and speaking skills in EFL through multicultural children's short stories* [Paper]. 7th International Conference, Building Cultural Bridges (ICBCB): Integrating Languages, Linguistics, Literature, Translation, and Journalism into Education, Suleyman Demirel University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3848464>
- [3] Al-Jarf, R. (2017). Exploring online collaborative translator training in an online discussion forum. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research (JALLR)*, 4(4), 147–160. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED613072.pdf>
- [4] Al-Jarf, R. (2019). Effects of electronic homework-assignments on Arabization skill development in student-translators. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching (JRSP-ELT)*, 16(3), 1–14. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED613087.pdf>
- [5] Al-Jarf, R. (2020a). Communication among instructors and students via Twitter. In I. Vassileva, M. Chankova, E. Breuer, & K. P. Schneider (Eds.), *The digital scholar: Academic communication in multimedia environment* (pp. 265–280). Frank & Timme GmbH. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3842161>
- [6] Al-Jarf, R. (2020b). Distance learning and undergraduate Saudi students' agency during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Braşov Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies*, 13(62), 2, 37–54. <https://doi.org/10.31926/but.pcs.2020.62.13.2.4>

- [7] Al-Jarf, R. (2020c). Mobile apps in the EFL college classroom. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching (JRSP-ELT)*, 4(22), 1–5. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED613138.pdf>
- [8] Al-Jarf, R. (2020d). Issues in interactive translation practice on Twitter. In *Proceedings of the 16<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education* (Vol. 3, pp. 427–437). <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3842157>
- [9] Al-Jarf, R. (2021a). Collaborative mobile ebook reading for struggling EFL college readers. *IOSR Journal of Research and Methods in Education*, 11(6), 32–42. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED618023.pdf>
- [10] Al-Jarf, R. (2021b). EFL speaking practice in distance learning during the coronavirus pandemic 2020–2021. *International Journal of Research – GRANTHAALAYAH*, 9(7), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v9.i7.2021.4094>
- [11] Al-Jarf, R. (2021c). Enhancing EFL freshman students' reading skills with inspirational quotes. *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences (ARJASS)*, 13(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.9734/arjass/2021/v13i430219>
- [12] Al-Jarf, R. (2021d). Investigating digital equity in distance learning in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic. In *Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education* (Vol. 1, pp. 13–21). <https://doi.org/10.12753/2066-026X-21-001>
- [13] Al-Jarf, R. (2021e, April). Mobile audiobooks, listening comprehension and EFL college students. *International Journal of Research – GRANTHAALAYAH*, 9(4), 410–423. <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v9.i4.2021.3868>
- [14] Al-Jarf, R. (2021f). Standardized test preparation with mobile flashcard apps. *United International Journal for Research & Technology (UIJRT)*, 3(2), 33–40. <https://uijrt.com/paper/standardized-test-preparation-with-mobile-flashcard-apps>
- [15] Al-Jarf, R. (2021g). Teaching English with linguistic landscapes to Saudi students studying abroad. *Asian Journal of Language, literature, and Culture Studies (AJL2CS)*, 4(3), 1–12. <https://www.journalajl2c.com/index.php/AJL2C/article/view/30148/56568>
- [16] Al-Jarf, R. (2021h). TED talks as a listening resource in EFL college classrooms. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies (IJLLS)*, 2(3), 256–267. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v2i3.691>
- [17] Al-Jarf, R. (2022a). Blogging about the COVID-19 pandemic in EFL writing practice. *Journal of Learning and Development Studies (JLDS)*, 2(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jlds.2022.2.1.1>
- [18] Al-Jarf, R. (2022b). Blogging about current global events in the EFL writing classroom: Effects on skill improvement, global awareness and attitudes. *British Journal of Teacher Education and Pedagogy (BJTEP)*, 1(1), 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.32996/bjtep.2022.1.1.8>
- [19] Al-Jarf, R. (2022c). Learning vocabulary in the app store by EFL college students. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research (IJSSHR)*, 5(1), 216–225. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v5-i1-30>
- [20] Al-Jarf, R. (2022d). Online vocabulary tasks for engaging and motivating EFL college students in distance learning during the pandemic and post-pandemic. *International Journal of English Language Studies (IJELS)*, 4(1), 14–24.



- <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijels.2022.4.1.2>
- [21] Ardeni, V., Dallavalle, S. & Serafin, K. (2021). Building student communities in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Teaching and Learning with Technology*, 10, 88–102.
- [22] Billings, E., & Lagunoff, R. (2020). *Supporting English learners during school closures: considerations for designing distance*. Crisis Response Resource. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605945.pdf>
- [23] Borup, J., Jensen, M., Archambault, L., Short, C., & Graham, C. (2020). Supporting students during COVID-19: Developing and leveraging academic communities of engagement in a time of crisis. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 28(2), 161–169.
- [24] Chen, Z., Jiao, J., & Hu, K. (2021). Formative assessment as an online instruction intervention: Student engagement, outcomes, and perceptions. *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies*, 19(1), Article 4, 50–65.
- [25] Develotte, C., Mangenot, F., & Zourou, K. (2005). Situated creation of multimedia activities for distance learners: Motivational and cultural issues. *ReCALL*, 17(2), 229–244.
- [26] Gares, S., Kariuki, J., & Rempel, B. (2020). Community matters: Student-instructor relationships foster student motivation and engagement in an emergency remote teaching environment. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 97(9), 3332–3335.
- [27] Krause, A., & Goering, E. (2021). Like peas in a pod: A strategy for creatively transposing interaction-based classes into an online learning environment. *Journal of Teaching and Learning with Technology*, 10, 279–293.
- [28] Kunka, B. (2020). Twitter in higher education: Increasing student engagement. *Educational Media International*, 57(4), 316–331.
- [29] Lomicka, L. (2020). Creating and sustaining virtual language communities. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(2), 306–313.
- [30] Lowenthal, P., Borup, J., West, R., & Archambault, L. (2020). Thinking beyond Zoom: Using asynchronous video to maintain connection and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 28(2), 383–391.
- [31] Moghadam, M., & Shamsi, H. (2021). Exploring learners' attitude toward Facebook as a medium of learners' engagement during COVID-19 quarantine. *Open Praxis*, 13(1), 103–116.
- [32] Nobre, A. (2018). Multimedia technologies and online task-based foreign language teaching-learning. *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*, 5(2), 75–97.
- [33] Orlov, G., McKee, D., Berry, J., Boyle, A., DiCiccio, T., Ransom, T., Rees-Jones, A., & Stoye, J. (2020). *Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: It is not who you teach, but how you teach*. NBER Working Paper 28022. National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/nbr/nberwo/28022.html>
- [34] Rosell-Aguilar, F. (2005). Task design for audiographic conferencing: Promoting beginner oral interaction in distance language learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 18(5), 417–442.
- [35] Ucar, H., & Goksel, N. (2020). Enhancing online EFL learners' motivation and engagement through supplementary activities on Facebook. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 15(1), 154–168.

- [36] Ye, S., Hartmann, R., Söderström, M., Amin, M., Skillinghaug, B., Schembri, L., & Odell, L. (2020). Turning information dissipation into dissemination: Instagram as a communication enhancing tool during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 97(9), 3217–3222.
- [37] Yundayani, A., Abdullah, F., Tantan Tandiana, S., & Sutrisno, B. (2021). Students' cognitive engagement during emergency remote teaching: Evidence from the Indonesian EFL milieu. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(1), 17–33.
- [38] Zayabalaradjane, Z. (2020). COVID-19: Strategies for online engagement of remote learners. *F1000Research*, 9(246), 1–11.  
<https://doi.org/10.7490/f1000research.1117835.1>
- [39] Zayapragassarazan, Z. (2020). COVID-19: Strategies for engaging remote learners in medical education. *F1000Research*, 9(273), 1–18. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED604479>