Asynchronous Engagement through Online Discussion Forums: Experiences from English Language Students in a Philippine State University

Joseph P. Nacionales

Eastern Visayas State University, Tacloban City, Philippines

Abstract

The creation of a well-developed ecological environment for English language teachers in digital platforms is a relevant and humane practice amidst the pandemic. During these times of crisis, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines need to adopt new learning modalities. However, some students find it difficult to attend in synchronous mode of classes, as an alternative way, teachers need to employ asynchronous activities such as conducting online discussion forums (ODFs) where students can freely interact and share their insights on a topic within the given timeframe. Studies conducted on ODFs in the English language classrooms remain scant, especially in the Philippines, which examined the same or related focus. Thus, through qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted to 21 freshmen English language students in a Philippine state university. Further, the data was analyzed using conventional content analysis method (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The findings indicated the students’ insights on the use of ODFs such as its risk for cheating during the asynchronous forums, its accessibility through Facebook as a platform for asynchronous engagement, encourage the exchange of ideas for new learning opportunities, and helps review the previous lessons discussed. There were notable challenges encountered by the students, however, specific strategies they have employed were disclosed. Also, when ODFs will be managed well by classroom teachers, students will become more engaged in asynchronous discussions.

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INTRODUCTION

The creation of a well-developed virtual ecological environment for second language classroom is a relevant practice and input for L2 teachers in time of the
pandemic. The term ecology is an adopted concept to give a clear picture as to what constitutes interactions in digital spaces like during the students’ talk-in-interaction in Facebook comment threads and in interacting with online forums. Just like in the field of science, the context of ecologies in interactional practices in digital networks composes the participants (teacher and students), the environment itself (Facebook) and the text used for interaction (comment threads) (DeVoss and Eidman-Aadahl, 2010). Facebook has been very useful in the conduct of flexible teaching modalities during the pandemic. As it is evident in the recent local study in the Philippines conducted by Santiago et. al (2021) which revealed that Facebook was considered as the topmost convenient platform used by students because of its accessibility feature compared to Zoom and Google meet. This notion was also supported in a study with the same focus conducted by Arciosa (2022) wherein his respondents preferred the use of Facebook in online interaction during the conduct of flexible modality amidst the pandemic.

As a common tool in class asynchronous engagement, Facebook become popularly used platform for flexible learning in the Philippines. This platform effectively caters both teachers and students on the delivery of the course content and at the same time foster the interaction among them (Meishar-Tal, Kurtz, and Pieterse, 2012). The engagement of Filipino learners in this kind of virtual platform was further enhanced due to the milestone of ICT in the Philippine education context (Lazaro, 2016). A study conducted by the University of the Philippines (UP) Open University stated the engaging characteristic of Facebook as a Web 2.0 tool in the educational landscape (Esteves, 2012). It can be deduced from these insights that the said platform was beneficial among young learners in the Philippines since most of them are already equipped with its navigation features. Hence, Filipino students did not find it difficult to adapt with the transition of traditional learning to the use of Facebook.

In the 21st century educational landscape, online class discussion forum (ODF) is defined and considered as the new tool in educational platforms and a creative means of learning though it is uncommonly known before because of the common tradition of conducting face-to-face classes. The employment of ODF becomes a common tool to make the students be fully engaged in the virtual classroom and this allow the students to post messages or comments to their teacher’s discussion thread which makes it more interactive (Balaji and Chakrabarti, 2010). This kind of activity
foster deeper understanding among students which discusses a specific topic, and they could review their exchanges of thoughts at any time. During these times of crisis, institutions need to adopt new learning modality through online classes, like on the use of social media sites where anyone can create their own learning community and they will be able to learn and gain new ideas that may be helpful in academic situation of learners. This mode can assess themselves and improve their availability in using electronic devices like cellular phones, computers and etc., in additional, both teachers and students will be responsible users of social media sites and receive same benefits to it.

The collaborative nature (Zhong and Norton, 2018) of ODF makes it interesting for the students to get engaged in the comment threads, and its feedbacking opportunity would help learners to further improve their language ability (Mohammadi, Jabbari, and Fazilatfar (2018). Also, the integration of language plays such as GIFs and emoticons make it interesting for the learners to participate in an interactive discussion (Bailey and Almusharraf, 2021). The researcher argued that ODFs provide a more meaningful language practice among learners of English given the multimodal features it covers. Despite of its drawbacks when integrated in flexible learning, generally, ODFs could assist both teachers and students achieve a meaningful discussion when properly managed.

Hafner and Ho (2020) states and elaborates the fundamental roles and usage of ODFs where it also facilitates the techniques, strategies and approaches being used in online class community; helping learners to join and interact within virtual online classes; motivates and uplift the knowledge both on educators and students to have literate skill on using technology devices; and understand the purpose of online class discussion forums. Those roles are helpful at this time, especially that face-to-face classes are prohibited by the government that is why conducting online class discussion forums are very essential to the students and as well as to the teachers in providing sufficiency in terms of educational needs of the students more particularly to English Language learners where the common language used in online websites is English.

Meanwhile, several scholars have contended the beneficial use of these online forums in developing the communicative competence of the learners such as those studies conducted by other researchers in the field. For instance, Balaji and Chakrabarti (2010) quantitatively examined the use of ODFs in traditional classes.
Their study integrated the “theory of online learning” and “media richness theory” as tested when used to ODFs. It was also revealed from their analyses that perceived richness of ODFs results to having a significant positive impact to the participation of the students and the quality of their learning. Further, instructors play a very significant role in ODFs as revealed in their study since they are the one who are in the authority to lead the class interaction.

The same focus of study was explored by Krish (2011), de Villiers and Pretorius (2013) wherein they have studied the discourse of the students when engaged in ODFs. Using mixed-methods research, their study revealed that ODFs has established a conducive and comfortable environment for social responsibility. It was evident in the results that interpersonal relations were highly developed and this becomes very effective in fostering the students’ collaborative learning. Also, Kent (2013) explored the use of Facebook as a platform for the students’ online learning activity in Internet Communications course. The quantitative study disclosed the fact that ODFs has changed the interaction of the students in class where they become more involved and expressive in the discussions. On the same vein, the employment of ODFs during the pandemic was very useful as being noted in the study of Rinekso and Muslim, (2020) and Al-Jarf (2021) wherein the students expressed positive response towards the use of this platform for online discussions. Also, essential skills such as developing the students’ critical thinking skills together with their writing skills was evident in their findings.

In view of the significant findings disclosed in previous studies, the present investigation focused on exploring the use of ODFs in asynchronous settings among English major students in the Philippines. It is crucial to understand the experiences of the students from a qualitative perspective, in contrast to the cited studies conducted that employed quantitative methods. Thus, this study was conducted. Moreover, the researcher observed how COVID-19 pandemic changed the pedagogical approach of language teachers to teach English through the use of online platforms. Specifically, some language teachers are using online discussion forums to elicit their students’ insights about the topic being discussed at hand in an asynchronous manner. However, to date, there were only very few studies that focuses on examining the experiences of the learners in engaging with ODFs in the Philippine context. Hence, it is high time to investigate the students’ perception, challenges and the strategies they employ to lessen these issues as they participate
in ODFs as part of the flexible learning modality in Philippine higher education. The findings of this study might provide relevant implications as to how language teachers will effectively manage this kind of asynchronous activity that could promote students’ interactional competence during the conduct of online classes which is considered as an important skill in second language learning especially in the Philippine context.

With the abovementioned gaps and observations, this research was conducted. This study primarily aims to determine the case of freshmen English major students in a state university in the Philippines in terms of their asynchronous engagement in online discussion forums via Facebook closed group in their major subject for S.Y 2020-2021. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following question: (1) what are the perspectives of the freshmen English major students on the use of online discussion forums? (2) what are the challenges met by the freshmen English major students on the use of online discussion forums? and (3) what strategies are employed by the freshmen English major students on the use of online discussion forums?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed qualitative approach to investigate the participants’ lived experiences and concerns with the aid of conventional content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) as the specific method in analyzing the interview data which did not impose predetermined categories and perspectives. The researcher aimed to describe the perspectives, experiences and observations of the participants with their engagement in ODFs and identify the employed strategies of the chosen participants to cope with the experiences. The study attempts to capture the subject matter in a detailed manner, devoid of restrictions so that more could be drawn from analyzing it (Flick, 2010) with the use of semi-structured interviews. The interview data obtained focused at the perspectives, challenges met, and the strategies employed in online discussion forums in a closed Facebook group.

Setting and Participants

The participants of this study were twenty-one (21) first year Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BAEL) students in a state university in Tacloban City, the Philippines. These students were enrolled in Introduction to the English Language
System (ELS 123) class in the second semester of school year 2020-2021. The said subject used online discussion forums (ODF) as asynchronous activities in class. The students commented in the ODFs via their Facebook closed groups as part of their graded interaction in class. Moreover, purposive-convenience sampling was used to determine the participants since only those BAEL students who were in the first year level in the program in the said school were asked to voluntarily join the study following ethical agreements. Also, the study was conducted between February and May 2021 where the COVID-19 restrictions was strictly implemented, only those students who were available and had the access to internet for the conduct of virtual interviews were accommodated.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The data gathering process was done during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines through virtual mode. Semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted via Google Meet which took for about 20-30 minutes for each participants including some probing questions for further clarifications. Prior to the gathering of the needed data, consent forms were secured from the target participants, and codes were used to anonymize their identity. Specifically, the interviews were composed of open-ended questions that elicits detailed answers from these aspects: the perspectives, challenges and strategies used in engaging with ODFs. The collected interview data were sent back to the participants enable to give them the time to recheck and evaluate the accuracy of their responses for validity purposes. The said data was carefully “transcribed, read and reread” (Widodo, 2014), and the content analysis followed by extracting the themes and subthemes from the interview data. Further, the data in this study was analyzed using conventional content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) wherein the researcher allowed the themes and subthemes to flow naturally and directly from the data obtained.

In addition, the coding of themes and subthemes using conventional content analysis of Hsieh and Shannon (2005) which followed the following major processes. First, the data were read several times by the researcher enable to obtain immersion of the text. Second, specific codes were derived by highlighting the exact phrase or words from the text that reveals the key thoughts. This includes the writing of notes on the researcher’s first impression and initial analysis of the interview data. Third, the specific codes were sorted out to various emergent categories and grouped into
meaningful clusters which were then organized into smaller number of categories. Lastly, sample excerpts from the interview data which reflects the meaning conveyed by each code and category are determined. This approach of analysis included relevant theories and significant research findings in the discussion part of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to establish an empirical study that could explain the lived experiences of English major students when interacting with ODFs in a Facebook group, especially in the Philippine context. Specifically, this section discusses the findings framed through conventional content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) within the scope of the research questions such as the participants’ perspectives, challenges and the strategies used when they encounter with these challenges when engaging with ODFs.

1. Perspectives of the Freshmen English Major Students on the Use of ODFs

This study explored the perspectives of the freshmen English major students on the employment of online discussion forums. After analyzing the significant statements from the respondents, the researcher came across with the following emergent themes: (1) ODFs provide risk for cheating during the asynchronous forums, (2) ODFs ensure accessibility through Facebook as a platform for asynchronous engagement, (3) ODFs encourage the exchange of ideas for new learning opportunities, and (4) ODFs helps review the previous lessons discussed.

ODFs provide risk for cheating during the asynchronous forums

The emergence of flexible learning during the pandemic has equipped some students on different forms of cheating online. The primary perspective that was mentioned by the students was the risk for cheating in providing answers during the asynchronous forums. The academic integrity of the students in higher education has been tinted due to the absence of face-to-face conduct of classes, some of them would tend to cheat many times (San Jose, 2022) One of the students expressed during the interview that their other classmates tend to commit academic dishonesty when providing answers in the discussion forums. Since the classes are conducted online, some students are very dependent to get their answers from the different online platforms that results to cheating. These insights can be inferred in the following responses:
I think it’s just right, but there’s always risk for cheating since our lessons are only online. While we are engaged in the forums, we could just easily open Google website and browse the answers we could provide in the comment section...Plagiarism is not anymore checked in the forum, so it is okay to just copy and paste our answers, especially when we have a lot of tasks to do. [P1]

Most of us could maximize the use of our data. We sometimes use Google chrome to search for answers that we could copy and paste in the comment thread of the online forums. [P14]

This becomes a common practice among students, especially during the virtual conduct of classes. Some of them would tend to use internet tools such as chrome and other search engine as sources of their answers without making some necessary revision or paraphrasing. However, despite on the students’ awareness of academic integrity, their practices in accomplishing academic related tasks still resort to the practice of cheating. A corollary to this insight, online cheating is rampant during the conduct of asynchronous examinations (Karaman, 2011). It can be deduced from this finding that the nature of Facebook as an online platform is being abused by some students that results to committing academic dishonesty. Since the use of ODFs is done asynchronously, some learners resort to online cheating.

**ODFs ensure accessibility through Facebook as a platform for asynchronous engagement**

Facebook becomes an accessible tool for both students and teachers in the conduct of classes. This was considered as an efficient tool especially when students are expected to interact with one another asynchronously. One of the participants mentioned that accessibility of using Facebook as a platform for asynchronous engagement is very efficient specifically when engaging in the online discussion forums. They find Facebook as a very accessible platform when interacting with the online forums, as expressed by one of the participants:

> It’s helpful for a lot of people since most have FB accounts they can use. And only with mobile data, we could already use it in class for few days. [P4]

Moreover, most of the Filipino youth are equipped with mobile phones and part of their daily routine is the use of Facebook. During the pandemic, face-to-face classes in higher education institutions has been disrupted, and most teachers integrated Facebook as their platforms in engaging with their students (Avila and Cabrera, 2020). These insights are reflected in the following responses:
Like I said earlier, it’s helpful for those with FB accounts, it’s easy to access for a lot of people, and can be used if someone doesn’t have internet load. [P1]

The use of fb group as a platform in this online learning is commendable. It was easily accessed by the students and there will be no difficulty to participate in the class….integrating Facebook in our classes is such a good idea for its easy access. [P8]

It was also highlighted by Santiago et al. (2021) that Facebook was considered as top of the most convenient educational platform that was used during the new normal setting. As expressed by the participants, even if they do not have an internet load, they could still view the updates in their FB private groups through free data. Hence, social media tools such as Facebook helps the efficacy of student engagement of the teaching and learning process even in the midst of abrupt crisis.

**ODFs encourage the exchange of ideas for new learning opportunities**

With the interactive nature of ODFs, this tool would encourage the students to share their insights by just typing in their answers in the comment section. This is one of the comforting features of ODFs when it comes to letting the students participate in their classes (Hurt et al., 2012) especially when it is integrated in Facebook. Based on the responses of the participants, encouraging the students in exchange of ideas for new learning opportunities is another perspective that emerged from the in-depth interviews. They believe that sharing their answers in the comment threads would help other students to learn new knowledge, as reflected in the responses below:

A lot of people can see what your insights are and you can also learn the insights of others since the post is made public. [P2]

The said forums also encourage the students to discuss issues in a particular topic and rebut the insights shared by other students.

This allows us to share our thoughts and opinions about the given questions and come to disagree and agree with our classmate’s perspective unto it. [P12]

Also, ODFs help the students develop their critical thinking skills as they counter argue with their classmates’ insights in the comment threads, and this supports the idea of Jamali and Krish (2021) that ODFs foster the students’ reasoning skills that is essential in developing their linguistic competence.

**ODFs helps review the previous lessons discussed**

The best platform to review the lessons discussed in class is another perspective shared by the respondents. Through reading the comment of other
students, it already served as a review about the lesson discussed in class. The insights shared by the students in the comment threads are stored in the Facebook group not unless the ODF will be deleted by one of the administrators, and the stored information in ODFs can be used useful for students in reviewing their lessons (Nor, Razak and Aziz, 2010). If they were not able to take down some notes, the exchange of comments in the ODFs could be of great support to them when studying, as reflected in P3’s and P11’s responses, respectively:

The benefits of using an online discussion forum for me are that after we have an ELs subject lesson, if we forget what we’ve studied, we can go back to the discussion forum and review the debate. [P3]

These discussion forums helped me with reviewing prior discussions and have paved way for a broader viewpoint from multiple responses in different perspective. [P11]

On this note, students can still look back on the previous online discussion forums enable to have a recap on what has been discussed in the previous lesson. Also, online discussion forums served as materials in reviewing the lessons discussed and guided the students when preparing to take their summative tests in their subject. This finding supports the argument of Onyema et al. (2019) that ODFs definitely assist the learners to recapitulate what has been discussed, and this tool is crucial with the guidance of the teacher during the interactive discussion.

2. Challenges Met the Freshmen English Major Students on the Use of Online Discussion Forums

This study also explored the challenges met by the freshmen English major students on the use of online discussion forums. After analyzing the significant statements from the participants’ responses, the researcher came across with the following emergent themes: (1) rereading the comment thread to keep updated in the forum’s engagement, (2) poor internet connectivity in accessing ODFs, and (3) lack of active engagement in the forums’ comment threads.

Rereading lengthy comment thread to keep updated in the forum’s engagement

The first challenge experienced by the students is their need to check the comment threads to keep updated in the forum’s engagement. Students need to be updated with the new notifications in the comment thread so that they will be able to catch up with the discussion. Rereading the history of exchange in the comment threads of ODFs gives them the details of what has been discussed, from there they will be able to effectively connect their thoughts. These ideas are evident in the following responses:
There are times that a notification does not pop up in my notification bar so I have to often check on it so that I will be able to read the history of the exchanges of comments. This will give me the idea what to share. [P2]

Sometimes when I come back in our discussion forums, many students have already given their responses, and what I do is I need to go back to the first comments then read until the last comment so that I will be able to catch up with their discussion. [P11]

Moreover, these insights relate on the findings of Jamali and Krish (2021) where students are guided in learning the subject when they are reviewing the exchange of comments in ODFs. Some of the participants are preoccupied with academic tasks in other subjects, hence, this lessens their time to get engaged in the ODFs, and some of them could not promptly interact in the forum. Thus, revisiting the comment threads in ODFs would help the students connect their insights relevant to the discussion.

**Poor internet connectivity in accessing ODFs**

Majority of the respondents shared the same problem that they are experiencing poor internet connectivity in accessing the discussion forums. Most of them are financially unstable that hinders them to avail for a stable internet connection. Given that the participants’ geographical location is in remote areas, most of them suffer from intermittent internet connectivity. This experience interrupts their engagement in the ODFs as reflected in the following responses:

Lack of load and poor internet connection hinders my early engagement in the forums. Most of us only use mobile data and it is commonly not stable in our area. [P7]

Unstable internet connection is one of the major interruption since we are living in the province and we are only using prepaid loads for our devices. [P12]

It can be inferred from the responses above that P7 and P12 are highly affected with the slow internet connectivity in their area, and this affect their engagement in ODFs. Eliveria et al. (2019) argued that one of the major reasons that hinders the students become more productive in the conduct of online classes is the unstable internet connection of our country. In time of the pandemic, all classes in the higher education institutions were conducted in virtual platforms. The participants expressed their dismay on the status of the internet connection in the country, especially in remote areas. Some of them shared that they need to wake up at midnight just to experience a good connection. These findings support the views in the studies of Joaquin et al. (2020) and Alvarez (2020) that this internet issue becomes a major concern especially during the conduct of flexible learning.
in the pandemic. Further, it can be deduced from the above responses that this issue is happening in reality, especially those students situated in the provinces.

**Lack of active engagement in the forums' comment threads**

Another challenge that emerged from the in-depth interviews is the nature of having a low interest of engagement by other students. ODFs are created for students' and teacher interaction, and if there is a low interaction, the exchange would not that become meaningful. As expressed by the participants, other students do not engage actively in the comment threads of the forums, and this can be seen in the following responses:

> Based from my experience in participation within the said forum, it was notable that some of the students dislikes the idea of rebuts or feedback which becomes a barrier to idea networking. [P10]

> Most of the students do not have a prompt engagement in the online discussion forums. They usually interact when the deadline is already fast approaching, which is commonly in the near end of semester. [P4]

This is one of the teachers' challenges when aiming to engage their students in the virtual classroom such as in Facebook closed groups. ODFs take part a great role for the students to participate in class asynchronously. However, due to several academic factors, some of them are feel hesitant to participate. According to Bailey and Almusharrat (2021), engagement of the learners in virtual forums need to be strictly guided by teachers to make it more interactive and be able to accomplish its purpose in the teaching and learning process. In the above extracts, the students were not that comfortable in arguing with their other classmates, and this limits the interactive nature of ODFs.

3. **Strategies Employed by Freshmen English Major Students on the Use of ODFs**

This study also explored the strategies employed by the freshmen English major students on the use of online discussion forums. After analyzing the significant statements from the respondents, the researcher came across with the following emergent themes: (1) prompt reading of new comment notifications in ODFs, (2) create responses' draft until the connection resumes, and (3) name tagging in the ODFs for the continuity of exchange.

**Prompt reading of new comment notifications in ODFs**

With the interactive feature of ODFs in Facebook groups, there is an influx of comments that eventually form into exchange of threads. Due to several tasks assigned to students in the university as part of their academic requirements, it usually take time for them to interact in the discussion forums. Hence, they make
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Effort to backread the previous exchange of comments enables for them to catch up with the discussion. In this sense, they make sure that they will be able to have a prompt reading of new comments in the ODFs, as reflected in the following responses:

I usually read the new messages as early as possible for me to catch up with what is being discussed in the comment thread. [P8]

Every time there is a new notification of comments in the online discussion forum in our group, I make sure that I will be able to read the message as early as possible for me not be left behind the current discussion...I need to be quick in reading those comments to grasp the updated discussion. [P12]

Also, it can be deduced from the above responses that the participants are aware that they need to be prompt when reading the comments in ODFs. In this way, it would not be difficult for them to catch up with the discussion. As digital learners, Balaji and Chakrabarti (2010) argued that students nowadays are very quick to grasp information in the virtual platforms. Just like in ODFs, students could still manage to accomplish their tasks in a limited time. The advantage of ODFs in Facebook is its easy accessibility feature (Kent, 2013) that anyone could interact at their own comfort.

Create responses’ draft until the internet connection resumes

Because ODFs can be done asynchronously, interruption in engaging with this task due to intermittent internet connection is not really a big problem. Students could still go back to the ODFs and be able to type in their answers in the comment threads. In the Philippines, students who are situated in remote areas normally experience unstable internet connection, and this interrupt their engagement in the ODFs. However, these students make use of their time by writing drafts of their answers in a piece of paper or in their cell phones’ note pads while waiting for the internet to resume. These insights are evident in the responses provided:

I usually wait for the internet connection to be better...and while waiting, I do some notes of my answers so that I could polish first my thoughts before I eventually send that in the comment section. [P4]

Most of the time, when I am currently experiencing an internet problem, I do write first the draft of my answers in reply to the insights of my classmates in the forums. This helps me develop my thoughts in response to my other classmates’ answers while waiting for my internet data to resume. [P11]

In most cases, majority of the participants disclosed from their responses that they are fond of making drafts of their answers before they share it in ODFs. It can be inferred in the above excerpts that P4 and P11 make use of the time on
crafting the content of their answers while waiting for the internet connection to resume. Since ODFs are done asynchronously, they are given enough time to be engaged in the interactive discussion. This argument is supported in the study of Rinekso and Muslim (2021) that ODFs would give the students ample time to construct their ideas if technical issues will occur such as the unstable internet connection which is a very common problem in the Philippines (Joaquin et al., 2020; Alvarez, 2020). Hence, in most cases, students do initiate some alternative tasks to fully utilize their time while offline.

**Name tagging in the ODFs for the continuity of exchange**

Sometimes, these students are preoccupied with several academic activities in school, and they are lagged in commenting in the ODFs. One strategy that the other students use is the mentioning of their classmates’ names in the comment threads. This way, they will be prompted to respond in the exchange. This feature of Facebook in private groups would encourage the students to share their thoughts. Tagging their names would instantly notify them in their Facebook accounts, and this would prompt them to get engaged, as revealed in the responses below:

Our other classmates do not interact very well and actively in the forums, no matter how much pressure that our teacher would tell us in our GC. What we sometimes do is we tag the names of our classmates in the comment section of the forum, and solicit their insights about the topic. [P5]

We usually mention our classmates in the comment section, especially when we see that they are online. They are really forced to share their insights and ideas since our teacher is also there in our private Facebook group. [P9]

If there is a low interaction in ODFs, other students who have already shared their insights in the platform would name tag their other classmates who are not participative even though they are online. As expressed by P5’s and P9’s responses, the discussion is being limited since only few of them are interacting in the forums. As contended in the study of Avila and Cabrera (2020), the name tagging or mentioning feature in Facebook closed group’s comment section strategically help the teachers to get the attention of those students who are not participative, and the students also use this feature to encourage their classmates to interact.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Although the findings were drawn from insights shared by a limited number of English major students in the Philippine context, it may be agreed that ODFs has a potential in transforming the language classroom into making it more meaningful
and interactive. However, the teachers should be able to manage well the ODFs employed in their virtual classes, such as Facebook in this study, to encourage the students to become more participative. The findings indicate that there are pros and cons on the use of ODFs as perceived by students that might affect their learning engagement in the flexible modality. First, ODFs could manifest an interactive virtual class atmosphere and the students will be able to recapitulate the lessons discussed from the ODFs by just browsing the comments provided by the participants. Second, ODFs may develop students’ online cheating since this task is accomplished asynchronously. In terms of the challenges, it can be noted that the lack of interaction in the forums and the intermittent internet connectivity was disclosed as intervening factors that limit their participation in ODFs. However, despite of these challenges, the students are aware on the strategies they could apply in case these issues might occur again in the future. Promptness in interacting with ODFs, composing draft of their answers while waiting for the internet to resume and name tagging their classmates in the forum to foster interaction was the essential strategies they may apply to lessen the challenges they commonly encounter in ODFs. Further, strict implementation of specific guidelines in participating with ODFs should be established for its smooth conduct.

Future research may examine the teachers’ experience of employing ODFs in their language classes aside from getting the views of the students. Mixed-method techniques may be used to clearly understand the nature and use of ODFs in English language classes. If explored in full qualitative approach, ethnography and narrative inquiry would be more interesting to use for a more critical understanding of students’ discourses in ODFs. Also, studies on ODFs deemed necessary enable to provide significant inputs that might be used by teachers when using this kind of activity in virtual modalities. This research direction is also important to be considered by other researchers in various contexts enable to derive unique findings that could possibly contribute to recreating a linguistically and culturally sensitive ODF. Other than the use of ODFs in Facebook closed groups, other online platforms such as Google Classroom may be studied. Further studies likewise may investigate how the interaction of teachers and students in ODFs create a space for collaborative teaching and learning process. Moreover, it may be significant to consider the linguistic aspect of exploration on the participants’ responses in the comment threads, including the investigation of gender related issues encountered in ODFs.
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