



## Using activities with online distance learning methods to improve students' overall activeness

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### Abstract

The current study investigates the usage of activities with online distance learning methods to increase the students' activeness. The study population is 30 high-school students that have shifted from the traditional frontal learning to distance learning. The instrument of the study is a questionnaire that contained 10 items that reflect on today's situation. The study findings showed that distance learning methods showed a significant effect on the students' overall activeness. The researchers recommend the use of distance learning should involve students, teachers and parents. Otherwise, teachers and students might feel lost. Additionally, more studies on distance learning should follow up on this issue of inactiveness in distance learning lessons between multiple populations.

**Keywords:** distance learning, on line activities, students' activeness

### Introduction

Distance learning, or distance education, is a method of studying in which lectures are broadcast or classes are conducted by correspondence or over the internet, without the student's need to attend a school or college (Oxford languages). Traditionally, distance learning was aimed at nontraditional students, such as full-time workers, military personnel, nonresidents, or people living in remote areas who are unable to attend lectures in a classroom (Curley and Simonson, 2012). According to Gilbert (1995) <sup>[10]</sup>, distance learning generally is identified as all types of formal instruction that are conducted when teachers and learners are not located in the same place. Nowadays, distance learning is trending all over the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But, with new methods come new problems or barriers.

As mentioned above, distance learning is now trending all over the world and teachers must use it instead of teaching face-to-face and that led to the appearance of new barriers. As such, this study seeks to tear down one of the biggest barriers that have appeared: inactivity. Distance learning, on the word of Hardy and Boaz (2002) <sup>[6]</sup>, "requires students to be more focused, better time managers, and able to work independently and with group members than most face-to-face learning environments."

Teachers worldwide complain about cases of students' inactiveness. Students leaving their computer on, students not paying attention or not even attending the class at all. With technology everything is possible, and students improvised and found ways to be lazier when it came to school and learning. Furthermore, distance learning is not something that has taken or will take a little period; distance learning has been going on for a long time and will stay trending for a longer period. As such, students not paying attention to those classes will have difficulties and be led to miss out on a lot of material provided by teachers. The researchers want to draw attention to this issue of inactivity by investigating what causes the students to go inactive during these classes and then find new methods that will work with this new trend of E-learning (electronic learning).

Moreover, the study recommends several new methods mentioned below to be interested around the world to help teachers and students alike, to adapt to this new era of E-learning.

Previous studies had been conducted on this same topic before the pandemic erupted; more new research is being conducted on this matter under the pandemic period as this issue is a hot take in schools right now. The current research investigates the usage of activities with distance learning methods to increase the students' activeness in the Arab sector in Israel.

### Literature Review

In this section, the researchers will stress the role of technology and show some of the positive and negative outlooks on distance learning made by multiple scholars (pros and cons), examine the differences and similarities of related studies and finally shed light on activities that can be used.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is playing a vital role in distance learning to meet the requirements and expectations of the learners in large scale. Modern ICT offers tremendous resources for efficient communication. It is believed that communication and interaction in the virtual learning environment can be more student-centered and less daunting and can facilitate greater engagement than classroom interactions (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Ni, 2013) <sup>[2, 17]</sup>. There is also a great deal of evidence that the efficiency and quantity of contact improves the general experience and enjoyment of student-learning (Sloan, 2002) <sup>[15]</sup>. However, whether the implementation of ICT is likely to affect the efficacy of schooling is still a highly controversial question (Allen *et al.*, 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, some attempts should be made to make use of the opportunities for ICT communication in a simulated learning environment.

One of the reasons why students don't get too much involved with online learning consistent with Wilson and Whitelock (1998) is time. They maintain, "The majorities of students did not collaborate online with others or become

involved in extra work that was available to them because they said it was too time consuming.” In other words, teachers must understand the students’ situation. Some students are lazy, but others are simply busy with life matters and other with online assignments. If teachers keep piling up more online assignments onto their students, who’re trying to adapt to the new methods of teaching, students are going to get frustrated and annoyed by distance-learning and that leads the students to be less active and makes distance-learning less effective.

Guri-Rosenblit (2009) <sup>[11]</sup> noted that the process of learning will not be influenced by every encounter, whether it’s face-to-face or online, especially when the connection is positive between teachers and students.

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) recommend frequent, thorough, and informative reviews. They conclude that teachers only have immediate and detailed guidance that helps students to maintain control of their learning and track their own success. Distance learners may also feel greater pressure to work and be part of the team because of their experiences (Valentine, 2002) <sup>[24]</sup>. These teamwork and engagement challenges must be carefully addressed in the curriculum design and student support programs. Resources and assistance from teachers are crucial to the success and engagement of students in virtual learning environments.

Thorpe (2002) <sup>[21]</sup> stated that it is time to incorporate students’ assistance into instructional design rather than just implementation, considering the level of cooperation and engagement needed for successful online learning. This is likely to reduce the anxiety of students around ICT and make their online learning smoother, which leads to more fun and productive learning experiences.

According to both Thorpe and Valentine (2002) <sup>[21]</sup>, teachers require extensive training on how to utilize new technologies in order for the students to fully benefit from the interactive potential of online learning. The ability to adapt is the most necessary skill in this environment for both teacher and student.

In 2003 Koohang & Durnate conducted a research on 106 students to identify their perspective on web-based distance-learning activities in a hybrid learning program. The descriptive results of this study indicated that overall students positively perceived that the Web-based distance learning activities/assignments portion of their hybrid program promoted distance learning. This research proved that activities play a huge role even in distance-learning and are truly effective.

Tatiana Markova, Irina Glazkova and Elena Zaborova (2016) conducted research on two different universities to check out students’ feelings toward distance learning through a questionnaire. According to the results of their questionnaire, the students were actually happy about online distance learning. In accordance with the feedback, it’s mostly due to several factors such as: the flexibility of time, options to study at your own residence, and the ability to combine both work and studying. Along with the participants, at the end of the day, distance learning is more professional if you consider the right workload.

### Previous research differences and similarities

The eruption of Covid pandemic caused a drastic change in people’s understanding of distance learning. In the past, the participants of the online distance learning were mostly

adult students with a full schedule, and as such, they found distance learning a good fit for their schedules and were open and appreciative of distance-learning. Sadly, that’s not the case for everyone. According to Shem Unger and William R. Meiran (2020) <sup>[23]</sup>, there is some evidence of student anxiety toward online learning when compared to more traditional, or in person, in class learning environment. It could be said that the sudden entrance to distance learning for everyone was part of this problem as not everyone was ready for it when it came to the usage and the required tools. A lot of students and teachers faced problems when using the new digital tools because they had no previous ideas concerning rising unexpected technical problems, or did not have the necessary equipment, etc....

In addition, similar research was conducted in Indonesia for medical students. In the opinion of Amir *et al.* BMC Medical Education (2020), students coped with the difficulties and were able to adapt to the new full distance learning techniques, and the majority thought that blended learning, which combines classroom and distant learning, should be employed in the future. Furthermore, this COVID-19 epidemic affects not only the use of technology in education, but also future pedagogy initiatives. Looking at the issue from a different perspective, it’s preferred that the next step in education be a mix of distance learning and classroom learning in order to satisfy the needs of everyone and move on with technology. After all, technology is a means to use time efficiently and make learning easier and accessible to everyone.

### Distance learning in the Arab world

According to Abdelhai (2010) <sup>[1]</sup>, the Palestinians were the first in the Arab world to establish a distance education university, Al-Quds Open University. Other Arab projects, such as the Open University in Tripoli, Libya, which has many branches in Libyan cities, the University of Continuing Training in Algeria, and the virtual university in Syria, were announced later. There are preliminary distance education projects in Yemen, Morocco, Lebanon, and other Arab countries and Egypt’s experience with employing distance education to train teachers during service.

Some predict that new technology will stay out of reach for target populations in distance education for many years in undeveloped countries (Bates 2005) <sup>[4]</sup>. Governments have been forced to close educational facilities due to the COVID-19 epidemic, depriving 89 percent of learners (or more than 1.5 billion people) in 188 nations of access to education. Arab universities are working to resurrect the remote education system to continue to participate in educational activities (UNESCO 2020) <sup>[22]</sup>.

This sudden shift to distance education in an emergency has caused shock and tension among students and faculty members, both personally and professionally, because the process necessitates extra effort, in addition to several unusual obstacles for schools and universities, such as a lack of time, poor infrastructure, and insufficient digital content (Khalaf 2020) <sup>[14]</sup>. In such a crucial circumstance, reliability and sufficient availability of technology infrastructures, such as learning tools and digital learning resources in online courses, e-books, and e-notes, are critical (Huang 2020) <sup>[13]</sup>.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, Girik (2020) researched attitudes of online learning and the development of an

online learning system in Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI) Toraja, finding that learners desired explanations before material and assignments recommending the use of specific media such as Voice Note. His research not only found that online learning was influential during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also shed light on such issues as free internet access, financial concerns, and other online learning applications.

### Distance learning in Israel

The Israeli school system was caught off guard by the COVID-19 outbreak back in March 2019. Despite the problematic media coverage surrounding the virus's likely spread, the Israeli Ministry of Health's formal announcement of a total physical lockdown of universities and colleges caught many institutions and their leaders off guard. All primary and secondary schools were closed at the same time, and preschools and particular education frameworks were closed two days later, on the 15th. All educational staff in schools and higher institutions have been told that they must begin teaching online immediately. No prior research has been conducted in the Bedouin sector of Israel about distance education. As such, this research aims to follow up on this sector and group of population and come up with a solution for the issue of inactiveness.

### Methodology

As the researchers explored some of advantages and disadvantages of distance learning, it's known for a fact that some students tend to get more distracted when it comes to distance learning. Furthermore, previous research indicates that activities are loved by students because of its practicality. The study conducted a quantitative approach in order to firmly view the point of the participants.

This section will put out a questionnaire to view out the participants' opinions of activities in distance education. In the questionnaire, the statements were ranging from one to five according to Likert's five answer scale-strongly disagree to strongly agree. The research was conducted through an online application known as Google forms.

### Activities

There are various activities that researchers implemented in teaching through distance learning. The following seven are activities that were shown to have a positive impact on students through distance learning:

- **Show and tell:** It is a perfect way to break the ice by asking the students to pick an object and share it with the class. In so doing, teachers learn about students' personal sparks and make them be open up to the class. In relation to Piecka, D.C.B (2008) <sup>[19]</sup>, learning with video conferencing and activities such as show and tell supported 4 tenants, the social origins of learning, sign and tool use through activity, the importance of language, and lastly, the zone of proximal development.
- **One truth and two lies:** It is a classic game considered as another effective icebreaker. Its goal is to help the students be active by asking them to share 3 of their sparks and only 1 statement is the truth, and the other students have to pick up which statement it is.
- **Kahoot:** It is a famous game-based learning platform that every student loves. Its competitive generated quiz-style is why students love using it to compete during

classes. Djannah, Zulherman, and Nurafni (2021) <sup>[7]</sup> stated that Kahoot's application as a learning tool is effective and appropriate for use in learning and teaching because Kahoot applications allow students' interest and motivation to be more likely focused on the learning process for a better learning outcome.

- **Tell a joke:** Who doesn't love jokes? It's a great way to lessen the tension mid-class and keep the students interested. Ziv, A. (1988) <sup>[25]</sup> conducted a research in Tel-Aviv about teaching and learning with humor; in keeping with her, there are many explanations why humor in the classroom can influence student learning as the experimental group scored a high score.
- **Class story:** It is another classic method that's effective in keeping the class entertained. When the students are distracted and spacing out, what's better than hearing once upon a time to get their attention back? It's for sure very entertaining!
- **Various websites:** If teachers use technology to teach remotely, why not take full advantage of that technology and use it to its full extent? Websites such as 'Padlet' where students can share their work, and post about themselves, are the most welcome way to adapt in this distance-learning era.
- **WhatsApp:** It is about using WhatsApp as an educational app to calibrate between the teacher and students. As we know, WhatsApp is already popular in the classroom and used by almost everyone today, sometimes we even see students using it stealthily in the classroom to communicate with each other. As such, instead of banning it completely, we can take advantage of the app and use it for the benefit of our students by trying to educate while using it. According to Levent Cetinkaya (2017) <sup>[5]</sup>, pupils formed favorable attitudes on the use of WhatsApp in their classes. They required the same behavior in all of their classes. They claimed that learning may happen unconsciously, and that messages with visuals were more successful in helping them learn.

### Problem Stated

Being teachers in the pandemic era, the researchers noticed a lot of unfairness and frustration amongst teachers and students: The frustration of teachers who felt like talking to themselves because no one was paying attention, and the injustice some students faced when they had group projects but were left to work alone, etc. It felt like it was everyone's duty to do something about the issue and help people adapt to the new teaching methods. Hence, the researcher came up with the idea of using activities in distance learning to make everyone involved more active during those classes.

### Research aim

This research aims at testing out if activities during distance learning classes will improve students' activeness and help them adapt to the new methods of teaching, and clarify how students feel about distance learning overall. Hopefully, these results may rid teachers of a lot of frustration and help them with their future distance learning classes, and make students feel more interested in them.

### Population and sample

The study was tested on two groups of high-school students

in the southern district of Israel consisting of 30 eleventh grade participants. The participants were divided equally into two groups, one being the experimental and the other being the controlled.

**Research limitations**

The study was limited to Arabs in the Bedouin sector only, south of Israel. As such, the results may vary in different geographical areas and when tested with different population groups.

**Research questions**

Does including activities for distance-learning classes help students be more active?

And will those activities enhance the students' adaption to the new methods of distance learning during this sudden pandemic?

**Gathering data and data collection**

The researchers used a variety of distance learning activities that functioned as icebreakers, lessens stress, and fun during the learning process and much more.

**Questionnaire**

The researchers used a questionnaire to remotely gather data over time for the activities that helped the researchers to understand the response of groups of students towards the activities that were used.

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents, Gault, RH (1907) [8]. The responses ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 being Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither agree or disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree.

The questionnaire that was given to the students in the pre-test is the same questionnaire that was applied in the post-test for both the experimental and controlled groups.

**Pre-test**

A questionnaire was sent to all 30 students in order for the researcher to gather data for the pre-test results, and to discover any changes after the pre-test ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The survey which the students went through helped the researcher discover the students' feelings about the current situation of the sudden distance-learning and online activities

**Treatment**

The researchers split the students into two groups, the experimental group, and the controlled group. The controlled group kept learning the 'distance-learning semester' as instructed by their curriculum and had no changes at all. On the other hand, the experimental group

had the researcher's planned activities implanted into their learning curriculum for the distance-learning semester. The implantation of these activities differs from one another; some activities are meant to be introduced at the start of the distance-learning semester (icebreakers) and some are introduced halfway the lessons to better the atmosphere and so on.... These activities are meant to attract the students' attention during zoom classes and keep them entertained as they learn.

**Post-test**

At the end of the distance-learning semester, the researcher gave the same questionnaire that he handed out in the pre-test to be done again by the students of both groups, to check if his theory has worked and if there's any difference after applying the planned activities.

**The validity of the research tool**

The activities that were picked by the researcher, and the methods of their implantation, were presented to the researcher's English major colleagues, fellow teachers and educated friends before presentation. The selected group of juries confirmed that the activities are valid for this research purpose and matches the needs of this research problem.

**The reliability of the research tool**

The reliability of the research tool was established through several stages.

- The researchers gathered data through the scoring system he implemented for the questionnaire as it follows: each question has a scale from 1 to 5; these numbers indicate how the students feel about distance learning: 1 being very bad, up to 5 being very good. The researchers' aim throughout the research was to help students adapt to the new methods of distance-learning by using activities, as such, the researcher wanted to pump up the scores to help the students as much as he can.
- In order for the researchers to test out the implementation of the tool and to get a fair comparison between pre-testing and post-testing, the researcher divided the students into 2 groups, the experimental and controlled groups.
- With the scoring system in place, 1-5 points for each of the 10 questions > 30 students > the sum up score should be in the scale of 300 to 1500. The higher the number is after the pre-test, the more proof of the research's reliability (findings, table 4).

Due to the confidentiality agreement, all participants' names will be replaced with numbers, S1-S30 (Student 1-Student 30). Only the researcher himself knows the names of the participants.

**Table1:** The pre-test for all students as a one group.

Participants	Scores
S1	20
S2	18
S3	16
S4	22
S5	18
S6	24
S7	30

S8	10
S9	17
S10	22
S11	22
S12	25
S13	30
S14	18
S15	22
S16	14
S17	10
S18	10
S19	14
S20	18
S21	15
S22	16
S23	30
S24	40
S25	22
S26	15
S27	16
S28	33
S29	18
S30	18
Sum	603

According to the Table, the sum we got in the pre-test is 603, which is way below average on the collective scale of 300-1500. This shows how much the students are dissatisfied with the current distance-learning methods of this sudden outbreak.

**Stage 2:** Dividing the students into two groups, experimental and controlled groups. The researcher has decided to split the students into the groups according to their given number, every student that is odd numbered is in Group A, and every student that an even numbered is in Group B.

**Table2:** Pre-test grouping to experimental and controlled groups.

Group A		Group B	
Participants	Group A (Experimental) scores	Participants	Group B (Controlled) scores
S1	20	S2	18
S3	16	S4	22
S5	18	S6	24
S7	30	S8	10
S9	17	S10	22
S11	22	S12	25
S13	30	S14	18
S15	22	S16	14
S17	10	S18	10
S19	14	S20	18
S21	15	S22	16
S23	30	S24	40
S25	22	S26	15
S27	16	S28	33
S29	18	S30	18

Pre-test results & Grouping: Group A sum: 300 (150-750 scale) – Group B sum: 303 (150-750 scale) -Collective sum: 603 (300-1500 scale)

**Findings**

At the end of the distance-learning semester, the researchers sent the same questionnaire to the students again to fill it again. This time, the only difference is that half of the students went through a change to their learning methods

and learned using distance-learning activities. Here are the results of the post-test questionnaire:

**Table 3:** Post-test results for the experimental and controlled groups.

Group A Participants (Experimental)	Group A Scores	Group B Participants (Controlled)	Group B scores
S1	38	S2	18
S3	32	S4	22
S5	38	S6	24
S7	43	S8	11
S9	30	S10	22
S11	32	S12	26
S13	50	S14	18
S15	44	S16	15
S17	28	S18	10
S19	44	S20	20
S21	35	S22	16
S23	46	S24	40
S25	44	S26	16
S27	36	S28	35
S29	40	S30	17
Group A	580	Group B	310

\*Post-test results: Group A (Experimental) sum: 580 (150-750 scale) Group B (Controlled) sum: 310 (150-750 scale) Collective sum: 890 (300-1500 scale)

**Research results**

As seen in the research findings above, the controlled group score went from 303 to 310, almost the same as the pre-test; the experimental group’s score went skyrocketing from 300 to 580, which is nearly double the pre-test’s score. And as stated by the researcher earlier in the research, the higher the number is, the better it is; it shows that the students love distance learning more, and the more they’re into it, the more active they are. To answer the research’s question, “Does including activities for distance-learning classes help students be more active? And will those activities help the students adapt to the new methods of distance-learning during this sudden pandemic?” The answer is yes. Yes, it does make them more active. It seems like activities still

hold the same place, whether it's distance learning or face-to-face. Activities helped the students overcome and adapt to the new methods of this sudden outbreak and made them more active. More will be learned as we read more of the students' feedback in the discussion section.

### Discussion

In this section, the researcher compared the current research data with previously conducted studies. Moreover, the researcher discussed the results and the findings.

The study aims at examining distance learning activities to increase the students' total activeness during online classes. Moreover, it aims at the transmission and readiness of both teachers and students to use the distance education's technology. The following is an analysis of the responses of 30 ESL learners from the southern district of Israel.

The reason for this research was due to the lack of students' participation in Zoom classes, and the frustration caused. As a new educator, the researcher decided to do something impactful to change the students' feelings for distance learning. Some students loved the idea of Zoom just to leave it open and distract themselves in other matters, and some students got lost in these new sudden changes and couldn't handle it. Of course, teachers must pay attention to every one of the students and try to figure out how to deal with situations such as these mentioned. The researcher suggests fun activities to keep the student interested because students tend to love activities and enjoy doing them. Implementing fun activities into the lessons to hook the student's attention is the goal of this research.

The findings of the study showed positive results when it came to including activities and practical learning in distance education. The participants showed more interest in online activities that required them to learn by themselves and by playing games challenging their colleagues than listening to a zoom lesson and taking notes.

In line with previous studies and the conducted study, the inability to use the new technology, the lack of the requirements to fully connect with the class online presents a problem that can only be solved by a material interference such as the ministry of education support to its students. Furthermore, the inability to adapt to distance education due to the sudden change caused by COVID-19 is solvable by introducing and teaching both teachers and students how to utilize the technology entirely.

The researchers predicted that over time, the process of distance education will trend and be understood better by all involved parties as the side effects of the sudden change annoyed a lot of students and teachers altogether.

Bates (2005)<sup>[4]</sup> predicts that new technology will stay out of reach for some populations in distance education for many years in undeveloped countries. The researcher backs up Bates's claim as many of the students in the southern district of Israel lacked the necessary equipment. Furthermore, some of these students couldn't get their heads around the technology when they were supported with laptops by the ministry of education.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Consistent with the results above, the researchers concluded that distance learning activities are indeed effective; it made students more interested in distance learning, and it is known that "to be more interested" implies "to be more

active". According to Maria Montessori's *The Absorbent Mind* (2012), "The environment must be rich in motives which lend interest to activity and invite the child to conduct his own experiences."

On and on, all these feedback problems suggest that students and teachers should pay more attention to the receiving end and adapt to the new technology before starting to teach using classical methods, with new technology comes new methods.

### Students' feedback

Along with some of the participants, they couldn't handle their online classes because some teachers, students, and parents, didn't know how to use the technology, and some students felt overloaded with assignments and complained that their assignments were tough and they were loaded with had a lot of them and just couldn't handle school life anymore.

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