Does teacher contact in an online environment increase pupil engagement?

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Group: 2E

Rationale

Throughout 2020 and 2021, children and teachers turned to remote learning in their education. Engaging children in online learning became a challenging goal for teachers across the country. Children no longer had the motivation from their teachers and peers to support them in their learning, resulting in a lower rates of engagement than what would be expected in a face-to-face environment. A case study on student engagement in virtual classrooms found that 48% identified that keeping students interested and engaged was the biggest challenge in online teaching (Glover, 2020) As a result, teachers had to implement different strategies and techniques to increase engagement and motivation of the children in their class. The 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): impact of school building closures – equity audit' published by the Scottish Government discussed that during the first school closures in March 2020, communication, including virtual meetings and phone calls, were highly valued by learners and parents (Scottish Government, 2021). During the school closures in 2021, many teachers decided to implement increased teacher communication to try and tackle the issues related to online engagement. This enquiry will look closely how at increased teacher contact on an online setting can impact engagement in the online classroom.

Aims

The aim of this enquiry is to investigate if increasing teacher contact online, in the form of video lessons and check ins, increases pupil engagement in remote learning.

Methodology

The research within in this enquiry was conducted with a Primary 3 class of 26 pupils via the platform 'Microsoft Teams'. The research was conducted with the whole class over a four-week period of home learning. Each week, the teacher would include at least one live lesson in the weekly plan sent out to children. The live lessons/check-ins consisted of a story time, class quiz, show and tell and bingo game across the four-week period. Engagement with the learning online was tracked daily, this included tracking who had logged on and who had returned assignments. Finally, questionnaire was distributed to pupils in the class to gather their perspectives on online learning and live lessons.

Data was collected through the tracking engagement template created. Each day the teacher would record who had logged on online and who had returned assignments. Doing this allowed for a comparison to be made between engagement on days where there was no teacher contact and days where the live lesson occurred. A post-study questionnaire was also used. This was sent to the children on the last day of the study. This questionnaire allowed the children to express their thoughts and feelings related to home learning and the live lessons. Questionnaires are a frequently used method in educational research. They are very useful in providing structured and easily measurable data and can be administered without the presence of the researcher. This means it is often a straightforward way to collect and analyse data (Menter et al, 2011; Cohen et al, 2011). The questionnaire in this enquiry collected quantitative data. This is data collected in the form of numbers rather than qualitative data that collects non-numerical data (McLeod, 2019). The questionnaire created on 'Microsoft

Forms' and was multiple choice. It was designed to be extremely child friendly to ensure it was easily understood by the children (Table 2).

Findings

Tracking and Monitoring Engagement

On Week 1 of the data collection, there was a 7% increase in engagement between the day where the live call occurred and the day where there was no live call. This was the first time implementing these calls and the children were very eager to participate in the discussions throughout the call. Across the rest of the weeks, there was a decline in engagement between the day with the video call and the day without the video call. Several factors could have contributed to this. For example, on Week 3, the highest decline in engagement occurred between the days. However, this could be a result of the holiday weekend that was approaching and the live call occurring on the Friday of that week. Furthermore, Week 4 was the final week of online learning before the return to school. This also could have had an impact on engagement.

It is evident that over the 4 weeks of data collection, engagement levels fluctuated. Therefore, it is difficult to say if the video calls did have an impact on the levels of pupil engagement over the 4-week period.

Table 1: Tracking Engagement
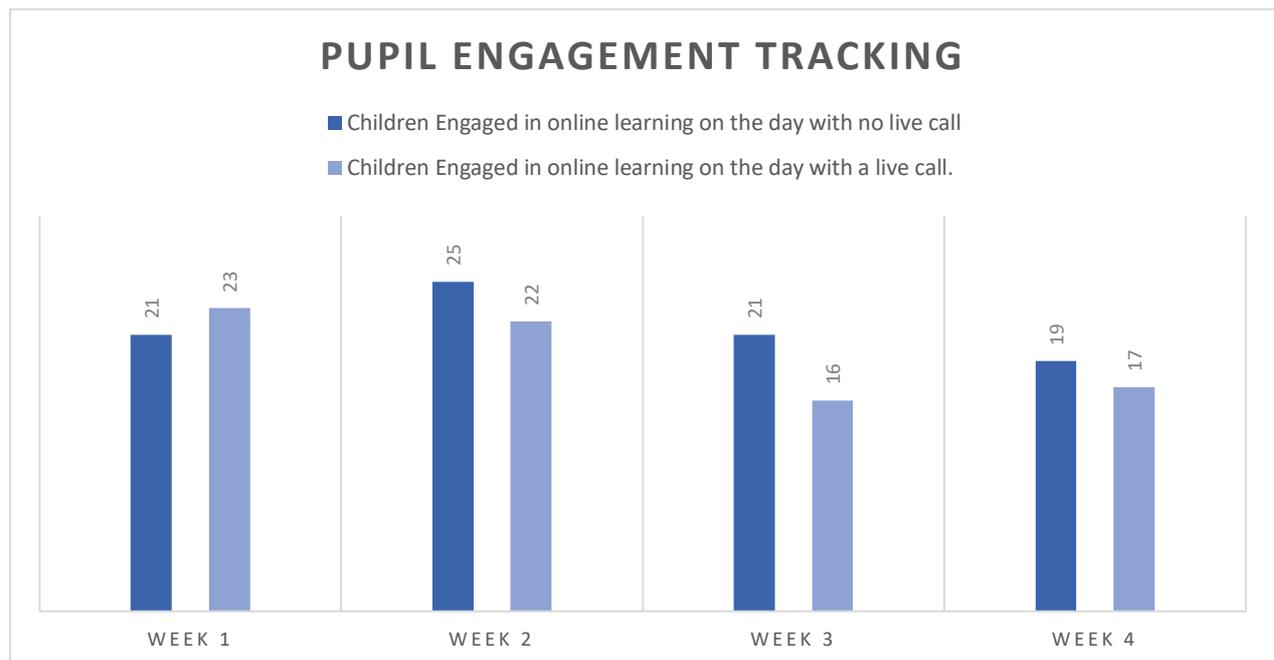
Questionnaire

The questionnaire was optional and 8 children in the class chose to participate. The questionnaire showcase the children's views of the live lessons. Table 2 shows the questions asked in the questionnaire, the child friendly manner they were asked in and the results from the questionnaire.

Table 2: Questionnaire Questions and Results

Question:	Answers:	Results:
How did you feel about Online Learning?	😁	50%
	😐	25%
	🙁	25%
Did you manage to log in during school hours?	Yes	100%
	No	0%
Did you like the video calls?	Yes	100%
	No	0%
How did the video calls make you feel?	😁	90%
	😐	10%
	🙁	0%
Did you find the video calls made you want to finish your work that day?	Yes	75%
	No	25%

The results from the questionnaire show that the children enjoyed the video calls and that they made them feel happy. The results also highlight that for the most part, the video calls motivated the children to complete their tasks for that day. The encouragement the children received from the video calls motivated them to engage in the tasks for that day. As a result, it can be argued that using the video calls did increase engagement, to a certain extent.

Conclusions
Overall, it can be argued that teacher contact increases engagement to a certain extent. Although the results from the tracking engagement show that on some days engagement dropped on the days of the live lesson, the results from the questionnaire allows us to see that the children themselves felt more engaged and motivated because of the live lessons. They also enjoyed the live calls and wanted to participate if they could.

It is important to note that there are a range of factors that can have an impact day to day on engagement in online learning. Children of key workers were working in school, due to the times of the school day, they were not always able to engage in the live lessons. Furthermore, as the children involved in this data collection are Primary 3, they needed support from parents and guardians accessing online learning. This was not always possible due to reasons such as parents working from home. As a result, some children would not log on every day and therefore missed the live call. Finally, it is also important to note that not all children had access to online learning due to not having the appropriate equipment at home, internet access or having to share laptops or iPads with other siblings. Some of these children engaged in learning at home through home learning packs and others engaged at the weekend. As a result, they could not engage in the live calls.

Implications for Future Practice
The findings in this research will be very useful for future practice as it has investigated the opinions of children who have experienced online learning. The positive results from the questionnaire reinforce that the increased contact from the teacher supported the children.

The increased contact from the teacher and seeing and speaking to their peers supported their wellbeing during the difficulty of online learning. As a result, if online learning was to return, using these live calls more regularly would be a very beneficial in motivating, encouraging, and ensuring the wellbeing of the children in your class. Furthermore, teachers and pupils have developed and improved their digital skills throughout the period of remote learning. As a result, they are more knowledgeable about remote learning and what it includes and the expectations. This could result in higher levels of engagement if remote learning was to return.

One change to practice this research has made is that homework in my current school is now given to children online. Using the online setting means that children can ask questions about homework and there is increased teacher and pupil contact related to homework. It is also much easier to track and monitor who has engaged in homework when it is online.

Finally, I believe that it would be extremely beneficial to replicate this research in more classrooms across a range of stages. This would provide more conclusive and representative results.

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