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Emotional Engagement and Digital Interaction in Virtual English Classrooms: Exploring the Mediating Role of Teacher Immediacy

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المشاركة العاطفية والتفاعل الرقمي في الفصول الافتراضية لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية: دراسة الدور الوسيط للاستجابة الفورية للمعلم

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الملخص:
تناولت هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين التفاعل الرقمي والمشاركة العاطفية للطلاب في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية عبر الإنترنت. ورغم الانتشار السريع للتعليم الإلكتروني، فإن وجود الطلاب على المنصة لا يعني بالضرورة اندماجهم أو ارتباطهم عاطفيًا بالتعلم. هدفت الدراسة إلى معرفة كيف يمكن للتواصل الرقمي، إلى جانب سرعة استجابة المعلم وحضوره، أن يعزز شعور الطلاب بالدعم والانتماء والمشاركة.
اعتمدت الدراسة على استبيان شمل 420 طالبًا ممن درسوا اللغة الإنجليزية عبر الإنترنت لفترة طويلة، وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام أساليب إحصائية متعددة. وأظهرت النتائج وجود علاقة إيجابية قوية بين التفاعل الرقمي، وسرعة استجابة المعلم، والمشاركة العاطفية للطلاب. كما تبين أن استجابة المعلم السريعة تلعب دورًا وسيطًا مهمًا، حيث تسهم في جعل الطلاب يشعرون بأنهم مفهومون ومدعومون وآمنون نفسيًا، مما يزيد من اندماجهم العاطفي في عملية التعلم.
وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن نجاح التعلم الإلكتروني لا يعتمد فقط على استخدام المنصات الرقمية، بل أيضًا على جودة التواصل الإنساني وسرعة تفاعل المعلم مع الطلاب. وتوصي بتعزيز حضور المعلم، وتقديم تغذية راجعة سريعة، وبناء تواصل شخصي داعم لتحسين تجربة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية عبر الإنترنت.

الكلمات الدالة: الاستجابة الفورية للمعلم، المشاركة العاطفية ، التفاعل الرقمي، الفصول الافتراضية للغة الإنجليزية ،تعلم اللغة عبر الإنترنت.

Abstract
Virtual English classes have become very popular very quickly, but it's still hard to keep students mentally linked because being online doesn't always mean being connected. They studied how teaching worry can be used to connect digital contact with emotional participation. The purpose was to find out how cyber-communication can become important to people's feelings. Digital engagement included live talks, chats, platform tasks, and

exchanges between teachers and students. teaching timing theory and an online presence, too. Individuals were informed that emotional connection means having fun, being thrilled, calming down, and being ready to participate. A quantitative analytical design used a poll of 420 students who had been taking English lessons online for a long time. Digital touch, how on-time teachers were seen to be teaching, and emotional connection were all scored using standard and context-adjusted methods. We looked at basic screening, measurement proof, reliability assessment, association analysis, structure modeling, and bootstrapped mediation tests. Digital touch, teaching on time, and emotional involvement were all strongly linked to each other. According to structural models, digital contact was a good predictor of both teacher immediacy and emotional engagement. On the other hand, teacher immediacy was a better predictor of emotional engagement. Based on the bootstrapped indirect effect, partial mediation was supported. This means that contact helps with emotional engagement in part because instant teacher conversation makes students feel understood, supported, and emotionally safe. This study adds to the body of research on online English language learning by going beyond platform-use theories and showing that the emotional value of digital involvement relies on how quickly people can interact with each other. The results have important implications for real-life situations because they support emotionally responsive online teaching, prompt feedback, teacher presence, and individual contact in online English classes.

Keywords: Immediate teacher response, emotional engagement, digital interaction, virtual English language classes, online language learning.

1. Introduction

Universities, language centres, and private learning platforms are relying more and more on synchronous and unstructured digital settings to help people learn English. This is why virtual English classes have become an important part of modern language education. Because of this change, the classroom looks different now. When students are in an English class in person, they can usually tell that the teacher is there by the tone of voice, body language, quick corrections, easy conversations, and responses from other students. In virtual classes, these kinds of presences are possible with the help of meeting rooms, mics, cameras, screens, texts, polls, chat boxes, and written notes. So it's not enough to just use technology to learn English online. Also, school is a place where people learn socially and emotionally, and the quality of their digital contact affects how sure, happy, nervous, like they fit in, and eager to learn they are. Many times, people who are learning English have to show others how they say things, what words they don't know, how sure they are with language, and how well they can speak. This study on student involvement looks at how they feel about the learning process, their teacher, and their friends (Fredricks et al., 2004; Hiver et al., 2024)—not just what they do or how they think. A lot of people believe that the fact that students can be active in many ways is one of the best things about online learning. Students can talk on the mic, use comments, join group chats, turn in platform-based assignments, talk to the teacher at any time, talk about their work with each other, or answer questions in online English lessons. These methods can help students stand out and give them more chances to participate than they might get in a normal class. But touch doesn't always mean that you're thinking about something. Even if they share a lot, some students may still not feel linked to the rest of the class, stressed, or at odds with them. There are people who click, send, and reply who are not trying to learn English. Touch isn't just about how often or how high-tech it is, as a lot of study on online learning has shown. More emphasis should be put on quality, fairness, and teaching value (Abrami et al., 2011; Bernard et al., 2009; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes,

2005). Touching someone on the internet can be interesting, but it doesn't always lead to an emotional bond. Being able to answer digital texts quickly can make teachers more popular. Andersen (1979) and Gorham (1988) say that teacher proximity is the mental and social gap between teachers and students that is reduced through spoken and unspoken contact. In regular classes, timeliness can show up through humor, direct response, movement, motions, eye contact, speaking clearly, and good manners. By using a warm tone during speaking tasks, calling students by name, giving quick and helpful feedback, being visible on camera when it's appropriate, responding personally to chat contributions, using humor carefully, asking open-ended questions, and correcting mistakes in a way that builds learners' confidence, these behaviors can be seen and heard in virtual English classrooms. Because of this, teacher urgency is not just teacher kindness. Learners feel heard, valued, and mentally safe through this instructional and communication process. Being anxious, afraid of making mistakes, or embarrassed can make people less likely to talk to others. But when teachers talk to their students in a helpful way, it can boost their happiness, confidence, and participation (Dewaele et al., 2018; Hu & Wang, 2023; Lee, 2020). Different areas are often looked at individually, even though these have been looked at in earlier studies: online contact, teacher presence, teacher timeliness, social presence, and student involvement. However, studies on online learning have shown that interaction is important, they also warn that interaction by itself is not enough unless it is led by teaching presence and useful communication (Garrison et al., 2000; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Wang, 2022). Different studies on teacher urgency have shown that certain actions are linked to students' desire, readiness to interact, and how they feel about learning (Baker, 2004; Dixson et al., 2017; Mazer, 2013). Alrabai & Algazzaz (2024); Liu & Zhou (2024); Sadoughi & Hejazi (2021); and Yuan (2024) have all done recent study on English as a foreign language (EFL) that shows a link between teaching help, social support, happiness, and interest in language learning opportunities. While some studies talk about how digital contact can lead to emotional involvement in virtual English classes, others don't go into as much detail. Finding out if touch leads to engagement isn't enough; this gap is actually very important. An description of how touch gives students mental value is needed. This research looks at whether the speed of the teacher changes the link between how emotionally involved students are and their digital touch in online English classes. Students can be seen, talked to, reacted to, and involved through digital contact, but how those chances are felt depends on how close the teacher is. When teachers respond quickly, warmly, and positively to students' online chats, they are more likely to feel safe and like their involvement has meaning. Feeling like you fit could make learning English more fun, give you more confidence, connect you mentally, and make you want to keep doing it. Unlike other studies, this one looks at virtual English learning from the point of view of how people are engaged and how their moods change instead of how easy it is to access technology. The research doesn't just assume that using a platform makes people more interested; it also looks at how students find emotional meaning in digital classroom touch through the social process of perceived teacher urgency. This method is useful because it combines ideas about teaching urgency, online touch, and social activity in learning English.

This research is based on the idea that digital contact should predict emotional engagement, perceived teacher immediacy should predict emotional engagement, and teacher immediacy should predict emotional engagement. Most importantly, the link between digital contact and emotional participation is thought to be mediated by teacher urgency. This is why the study asks if students who connect more in virtual English classes become emotionally

involved. This could be because being able to talk to the teacher right away lowers the psychological gap between them and the students and makes them feel more recognized, supported, and like they belong.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Emotional Engagement in Virtual English Classrooms

Empathetic involvement is the emotional connection that students make with the material they are learning, their classmates, and the school itself. In virtual English classes, this concept shouldn't be boiled down to general drive or contentment with learning online. Fun in learning English, a feeling of joining, interest, confidence, less worry, and a willingness to engage even though speaking a foreign language comes with risks. Beyond behavioural and cognitive engagement, emotional engagement has long been seen as one of the most important aspects of student involvement (Fredricks et al., 2004). But when learning a language, the emotional aspect is especially important because English classroom involvement often subjects students to being graded, having trouble pronouncing words, being afraid of making mistakes, and being embarrassed in front of their peers. According to new study, feelings like happiness,

worry, boredom, and teacher-related support have a big effect on how engaged language learners are. Teachers and students can affect how much a person enjoys a foreign language. This shows that a student's mental state is affected by both internal and external factors in the classroom (Dewaele et al., 2018). Similarly, studies in EFL situations suggest that good academic feelings and teacher support lead to better engagement (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021), while emotional support can affect learners' psychological needs, emotions, and emotional engagement (Alrabai & Algazzaz, 2024). With digital tools, students may feel physically alone, less noticed, or afraid to speak up in virtual English lessons. This makes it even more important for them to connect emotionally. Therefore, emotional involvement is seen in this study as a measured subjective learning result that is shaped by the quality of interactions and how well teachers communicate, not just a general feeling of liking the course.

2.2 Digital Interaction as More Than Technical Participation

Digital engagement in virtual English classes is how students use online tools to join, talk, and answer questions. Participation in live meetings, chat messages, teacher-to-student messages, peer replies, talks in group rooms, joint papers, reactions, images, polls, tests, LMS comments, and task-based platform activities are all part of it. In spite of this, digital contact is more than just a count of hits, texts, or attendance records. When people are trying to learn a language, contact only has meaning if it lets them use English, get answers, discuss meaning, ask questions, work together with others, and feel like their presence is important.

Foundational study on online learning separates interactions between students and teachers, between students and content, and between students and content. This shows that contact is an important part of internet learning (Moore, 1989). There is also meta-analytic proof that different kinds of contact can help people learn, but it depends on how they are set up and led (Bernard et al., 2009). This is very important because you might not connect much in online classes if you can only help with technology issues. According to Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005), touch alone isn't enough to make deep learning happen; it also needs cognizant present and useful teaching. According to

Ekwunife-Orakwue and Teng (2014), dialogic touch is important for both online and mixed learning outcomes as it reduces trade distance and boosts student participation. One student may send a lot of short chat answers without feeling emotionally involved, while another student may feel strongly connected emotionally after one deep conversation and then receiving positive feedback from the teacher. As a result, digital interaction in this study is thought of as a complex term that includes student initiative, verbal exchange, and the depth of the interaction.

2.3 Teacher Immediacy in Online English Learning

When teachers and students talk to each other in ways that make the psychological gap between them smaller, this is called teacher immediacy. Early studies on immediacy found that teacher immediacy is linked to how well they teach and how much their students learn (Andersen, 1979). Similarly, verbal immediacy behaviors were linked to how much students learned and how they felt (Gorham, 1988). Eye contact, facial expressions, motions, moving around the classroom, laughter, direct speech, voice expression, and personal recognition are all examples of urgency in standard classes. People who do these things show that they are available, friendly, and close to each other. Instantaneity doesn't go away when you learn English online; it just gets turned into digital versions of it. Calling students by name, answering chat messages quickly, using a warm and expressive voice, going on camera when it's appropriate, asking open-ended questions, writing personalized comments, using humor in a way that doesn't hurt confidence, and correcting mistakes without hurting confidence are all ways that a teacher can show immediacy. Emotional support can also be given online, like telling language learners that making mistakes is a normal part of learning a language or recognizing how hard it is to speak English in public. In online classroom studies, teacher quickness has been linked to both emotional and cognitive learning (Baker, 2004), and nonverbal immediacy behaviors are still important for keeping students interested in online classes (Dixson et al., 2017). In EFL settings, teacher immediacy has been linked to students' readiness to talk and their interest in school (Hu & Wang, 2023). Structural equation modeling has been used to look at teacher trustworthiness and nonverbal immediacy (Nayernia et al., 2020). Being attentive as a teacher is more than just being nice, as these findings show. It is a way to teach that shortens the distance between students, makes them feel safer, and helps them feel seen in the virtual classroom.

2.4 Linking Digital Interaction, Teacher Immediacy, and Emotional Engagement

Teachers who are available right away can help explain the link between digital contact and mental engagement. Digital interactions make it possible to communicate, but how important that communication is mentally depends on how quickly the teacher responds. Students are more noticeable to the teacher and their peers when they answer questions in chat, take part in open talks, answer polls, or work together in meeting rooms. But being seen can either boost confidence or worry, dependent on how the teacher reacts. It could be mentally weak or even dangerous to connect with the teacher if they don't respond to comments, do so slowly or impersonally, or correct mistakes sharply. However, the way a teacher acts right away can turn involvement into a good emotional experience. This method is especially useful for learning English because interacting with other people often involves risking your feelings. Learners may be worried about how they sound, their language, their accent, or what other people will think of them. By recognizing students, being friendly, giving them feedback at the right time, and correcting them in a helpful way, teachers can lower these risks. To put it another way, internet contact makes it

possible to bond, while teaching speed makes that relationship more personal. This makes sense if you look at the Community of Inquiry framework, which says that teaching presence and social presence shape meaningful online learning experiences (Garrison et al., 2000). It also makes sense if you look at new EFL research, which says that teacher support, enjoyment, and engagement are all closely linked (Li, 2023; Yian, 2024). So, emotional involvement should be highest when digital contact is combined with immediate teacher support.

2.5 Hypothesis Development

The research we looked at suggests that digital contact can help with emotional involvement because it lets students take part, talk, and be seen in the virtual English classroom. But digital contact is also thought to make students feel more connected to their teachers because it gives teachers more chances to react personally, give feedback, and lower psychological distance. It is then thought that teacher responsiveness will boost emotional involvement by making students feel seen, cared for, sure of themselves, and emotionally safe. This is why the study comes up with the following hypotheses:

H1: Digital interaction has a positive significant effect on emotional engagement in virtual English classrooms.

H2: Digital interaction has a positive significant effect on perceived teacher immediacy.

H3: Teacher immediacy has a positive significant effect on emotional engagement.

H4: Teacher immediacy mediates the relationship between digital interaction and emotional engagement in virtual English classrooms.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To look into the direct and secondary links between digital contact, teacher responsiveness, and emotional involvement in virtual English classes, the study used a quantitative explanatory cross-sectional design. The study's goals were to not only find out how students felt about learning English online, but also to try a theoretically-based mediation model that explains how digital contact can become socially important when students feel like they can talk to a teacher right away. A large group of students who had already been to virtual English classrooms were surveyed using a cross-sectional method, and structural equation modeling was used to look at latent constructs and estimate direct, indirect, and total effects within a single analytical framework.
It was best to use structural equation modeling because the three main factors were not easily observed as single-item measures. We looked at digital contact, teaching responsiveness, and emotional involvement as hidden ideas that were shown by many signs that could be seen. This made it easier to measure things correctly, and the study could make sure the measurement model was right before trying out the structure routes. The main goal of the study was to find out if teacher stress can help explain some of the connection between digital touch and emotional participation in online English lessons. The method worked with that goal in mind.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

About 420 people who had taken English classes online made up the study group. These numbers were chosen because they were bigger than the smallest level that most people said should be used for models with lots of hidden variables and lots of marks that could be seen. Before they could answer, people had to have taken at least eight weeks of online English lessons and passed. This was done to make sure that the answers they gave were real. For kids to feel like they can connect, act quickly, and be deeply involved, they need to see and hear from the teacher, as well as their peers, in the online classroom over and over again. Someone showed that they were in a different grade or level of English. To help them get used to learning English online, they used learning management systems for things like notes, jobs, and talks based on tasks. Tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet were also used. Different people in the group had different ideas about how safe the internet was, how often they used pictures, and how many hours a week they spent learning English online. Because not every online English class is the same, these changes to the setting were helpful. There are different ways for students to talk to each other, based on the features of the site, the rules for participation, and the way the teacher talks to them.
People were picked in a way that didn't use chance because the study wanted people who had tried virtual English classes before. Statistics can't be used with this method, but it works well for educational study that tries to explain things by testing links between categories that make sense for a certain group of students. The people who answered the question knew it was an attempt to find out how they felt about contacting and joining an online English school.

3.3 Measures and Operationalization

The study mostly looked at three things: emotional link, computer touch, and teaching reaction. Five-point Likert scales, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," were used to rate each question. The tool wasn't made to find out how students felt about learning English online in general; it was made to find out how they felt about their certain online English classes. This difference was important because the study was mostly about how students and teachers talk and work together when they learn English online. Researchers said that digital participation means that students use tools to talk to each other and do things in a virtual classroom. Students and teachers talked to each other and teachers on a stage, and students took part in tasks connected to their work. The app tracked how much people shared in chat, answered live questions, spoke in the meeting room, answered their peers, took polls or quizzes, and did English learning tasks on the platform. Moore wrote in 1989 that online engagement includes students talking to each other and the text. This operationalization drew attention to the fact that real contact is more than just technical tasks; it also includes deep talks and working together. Teachers' "immediacy" was measured by how students thought teachers behaved in virtual English classes to lessen psychic distance. The concept included immediate feedback, emotional support, custom, teacher love, and immediate verbal or nonverbal feedback. Item examples included calling students by name, replying quickly, using a positive tone, correcting students in a way that encourages them, recognizing their efforts, communicating in a friendly way, and making them feel like they are being noticed during online English lessons. Classical teacher immediacy theory (Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988) and online immediacy study (Baker, 2004; Dixson et al., 2017) both supported this method. Instantaneity is still important in virtual classes.

Feelings connected to the online English school were used to define emotional involvement. Among the construct's elements were participation, interest, emotional link, trust, less worry, and desire to participate. It was measured by items that asked students if they liked participating, felt personally linked to the class, felt like they belonged, were less afraid of making mistakes, and were more ready to talk in English. The basis for this study was multidimensional engagement theory (Fredricks et al., 2004) and new research on language learning that focuses on the emotional side of EFL involvement (Hiver et al., 2024; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021).

Table 1. Construct Operationalization and Measurement Sources

Construct	Dimensions	Example Indicators	Scale Type	Expected Role
Digital Interaction	Student-teacher interaction, peer interaction, platform-based interaction, task-related interaction, interaction frequency and depth	I participate in chat discussions during virtual English classes; I respond to classmates' contributions; I use platform tools to complete English tasks	5-point Likert	Independent variable
Teacher Immediacy	Verbal immediacy, non-verbal/video-mediated immediacy, feedback immediacy, emotional support, personalization, teacher warmth	The teacher calls students by name; the teacher gives quick and supportive feedback; the teacher uses a warm tone during online lessons	5-point Likert	Mediator
Emotional Engagement	Enjoyment, belonging, interest, emotional connection, confidence, reduced anxiety, willingness to participate	I enjoy participating in virtual English classes; I feel emotionally connected to the class; I feel more confident speaking English online	5-point Likert	Dependent variable

The idea is easier to understand because Table 1 shows how each secret variable was created, tried, and added to the mediation model. This also shows that the question wasn't meant to find out how happy everyone is with learning online in general. It was meant to be a focused way to look at speed, touch, and how people feel about each other in online English lessons.

3.4 Instrument Adaptation and Validation Procedures

The questions on the form were changed based on previous study about how you feel about learning English as a second language, being in touch with people online, and teachers being on time. The work that went into adapting was motivated by the need to study how people participate in synchronous virtual English classes rather than other types of online classrooms. There are now things like chatting back in chat, meeting room talks, LMS notes, and English tasks that can be done on a phone or computer in contact items. When students spoke English, their teachers gave them immediate comments. This came in the form of quick digital input, a friendly tone online, a camera or voice presence, knowing who you are, and making changes that were helpful. Psychologists, applied linguists, and people who teach languages online all looked over the first evaluation form to make sure it was correct. These people made sure the tests were clear, the ideas were useful, the words were good, and the tests fit with how people learn

English in online classes. Parts that were too broad, repeated, or didn't seem to have anything to do with learning English online were taken out. Then, a small group of students who had taken English lessons online were given a test. Tests with small groups of people helped figure out how to better arrange things, words that were tough to understand, and reactions that got old. Dependability was checked for the first time during the testing stage. After that, the whole sample was used to test it again. Things that ideally fit into the three groups and worked well with statistics to show the numbers were kept in their final form. A very important thing about the tool was that it saw digital touch, teaching urgency, and emotional relationship as three separate but linked ideas.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

In order to get the information, online surveys were sent to students who had finished at least eight weeks of online English classes. In order to complete the questionnaire, participants were given a short description of the study's goal and were told that their involvement was optional and would remain anonymous and private. According to them, there were no right or wrong answers and the study was only interested in how they felt about interacting with others in the classroom, talking to teachers, and being emotionally involved in virtual English learning.

It was sent online through learning tools and methods for communicating with other students. Prior to research, responses were checked to find missing information, duplicate records, and sloppy answer patterns. A total of 420 correct answers were included in the final collection. Demographic and environmental factors in the collection included gender, age, academic level, English proficiency, experience with virtual classrooms, platform used, weekly hours spent learning English online, camera use, and internet security. The learning situation was described by these factors, which also helped show if the users had useful experience with virtual English classes.

3.6 Data Analysis Strategy

There were several steps to the data study. First, it was checked to see if there were any missing numbers, wrong answers, really strange answers, or answers that didn't fit with the rest. After, numbers were used to describe the three secret groups and the people who were in them. The skewness and kurtosis numbers were used to check if the data was usually spread out. To find the basic links needed for mediation analysis, we looked at the connections between digital touch, being on time for class, and emotional engagement.
Second, the readings were checked to make sure they were correct and reliable. We used Cronbach's alpha to see if the measurement model was internally consistent and composite reliability to see if it was build reliable. To make sure that the numbers we saw were in line with the secret thoughts they were meant to show, we used confirmatory factor analysis. To see if the convergence was valid, the average range and factor loadings were used. We used HTMT ratios or the Fornell-Larcker method to make sure that digital touch, teaching speed, and emotional link could be easily separated from each other.
To finish, structural equation modeling was used to check how well the structure model did its job. People thought that there would be straight lines that would connect digital interaction to emotional engagement, teacher speed to emotional engagement, and digital interaction to teacher responsiveness. After that, bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to test mediation. If the 95% bootstrapped confidence range did not include zero, the indirect effect was thought to be significant. It was important to do this because you shouldn't just look at different regression

lines to find interaction. Last but not least, Harman's single-factor test, common latent factor checks, and variance inflation factors were used to look for common method bias and collinearity. These checks were more reliable because all of the important factors were found through self-report polls.

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Data Screening and Descriptive Statistics

The material was first screened, and then the models for measuring and building were put to the test. One hundred and twenty-two correct answers made up the last group. No split cases were saved for the main study. In order to code the answers, a five-point Likert scale was used. The total results for emotional link, digital touch, and training on time were found. The main things that students cared about in their virtual English lessons were digital touch, teacher speed, and getting mentally involved. An average score of 3.52 for digital connection, 3.66 for teaching responsiveness, and 3.58 for emotional involvement. The respondents obviously thought their virtual English lessons were involved, relationally helpful, and emotionally interesting.
Using skewness and kurtosis numbers, normality was checked. Skewness values were between -0.35 and -0.17, and kurtosis values were between -0.46 and -0.38. Within acceptable ranges, these numbers showed that the construct-level data did not deviate significantly from normality. Additionally, the correlation matrix revealed that the three categories were statistically significantly linked in a good way. Both digital contact and teacher responsiveness were linked to higher levels of emotional participation. Further research into structure models and interaction analysis was deemed appropriate based on these earliest results.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Normality, and Correlations among Latent Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
1. Digital Interaction	3.52	0.72	-0.35	-0.38	1		
2. Teacher Immediacy	3.66	0.68	-0.17	-0.39	.512***	1	
3. Emotional Engagement	3.58	0.79	-0.30	-0.46	.533***	.613***	1

*Note. ***p < .001.*

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

Prior to testing the proposed structure links, the measuring model was looked at. Reliability study showed that all constructs had good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was.80 for digital interaction,.85 for teacher nearbyness, and.89 for emotional involvement. These numbers show that the items that were kept were fairly consistent in measuring their respective constructs. Between.86 and.91, the composite reliability numbers also backed the build reliability.
Standardized filling ranges worked well for all three designs. Findings for digital connection, teaching responsiveness, and emotional involvement all had scores between.66 and.74. Based on these numbers, it looks like the hidden constructs were meaningfully linked to the measured indicators. Although the average value for digital contact was.50, the average value for emotional engagement was.56, which was higher than the.50 level. The adult venipuncture effect (AVE) was.49, just below.50 and very close to the number that was predicted. Within the structure model, the construct of teacher immediacy was kept because it had good item loadings, strong internal consistency, and high composite reliability.

Table 3. Measurement Model Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Model Fit

Construct	Items Retained	Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Digital Interaction	6	.66–.74	.80	.86	.50
Teacher Immediacy	8	.65–.74	.85	.89	.49
Emotional Engagement	8	.71–.77	.89	.91	.56

The CFA model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2/df = 1.91$, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .047, and SRMR = .041. Based on these indicators, the suggested three-factor measurement model made sense from a theory and statistical point of view. There was no item taken out because all the ones that were kept made good contributions to their intended structures and helped to show the difference between digital contact, teaching timeliness, and emotional engagement.

4.3 Discriminant Validity and Common Method Bias

To see if the three categories were actually different, discriminant validity was tested. As expected, the HTMT values were lower than.85. They were.619 for digital interaction and teacher immediacy,.630 for digital interaction and emotional engagement, and.704 for teacher immediacy and emotional engagement. The numbers show that the constructs were connected but not the same. In virtual English classes, digital contact, teacher urgency, and emotional connection may all happen at the same time. However, they all play different roles in the learning process: participation, teacher speech, and student affective reaction.

The study looked at common method bias because it used self-report poll data. Harman's one-factor test showed that the first factor that wasn't spun explained only 37.03% of the variation, which is less than the 50% level. The results for the variance inflation factor (VIF) for the structural indicators were also good, with VIF = 1.35 showing that there was no major multicollinearity. These findings show that the connections between the concepts probably couldn't be explained by impacts of the data source being the same.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity and Common Method Bias Diagnostics

Test	Criterion	Result	Interpretation
HTMT	< .85	Highest HTMT = .704	Supported
VIF	< 3.3 or < 5	Highest VIF = 1.35	No serious collinearity
Common latent factor / single-factor check	No dominant single factor	No dominant factor detected	Acceptable
Harman's single factor	First factor < 50%	37.03%	Acceptable

4.4 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structure model checked the direct relationships between digital contact, immediate teacher response, and emotional participation. Digital contact had a good and significant effect on emotional engagement, as shown by the model. Students who said they were more involved in English learning tasks based on platforms, chat, and speaking with others tended to also say they were more emotionally connected, enjoyed it, felt more confident, and were more willing to take part in virtual English classes.

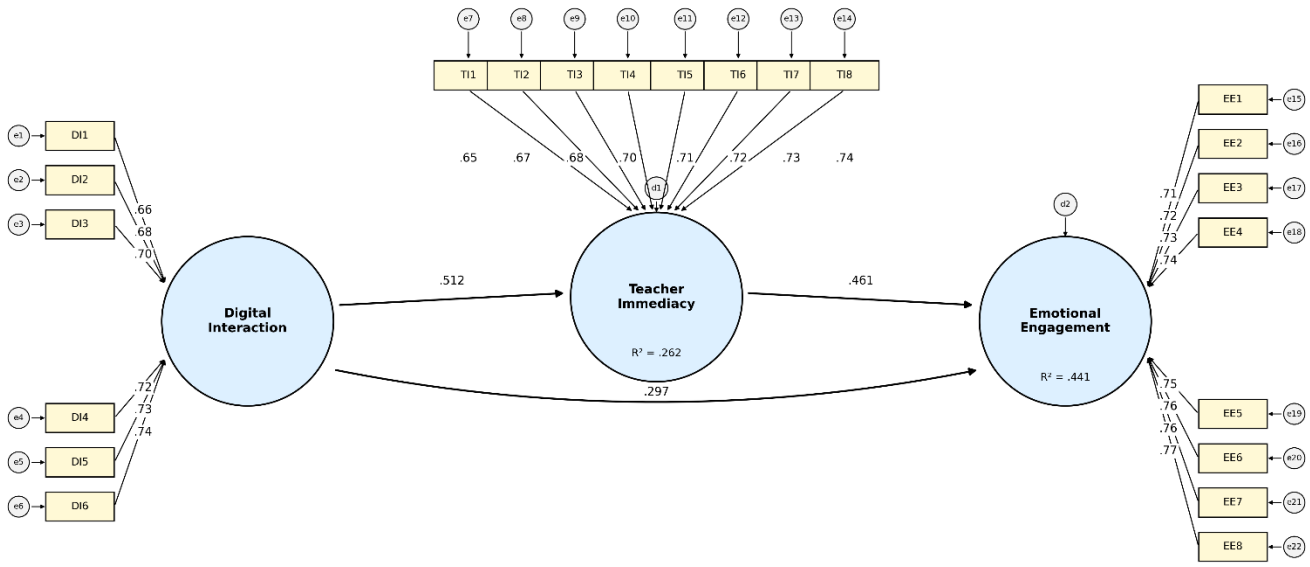

Figure 1. Standardized Structural Equation Model Showing Direct and Mediated Paths

Figure 1 presents the standardized structural model linking digital interaction, teacher immediacy, and emotional engagement. The model shows a positive path from digital interaction to teacher immediacy (β = .512, p < .001), a positive path from teacher immediacy to emotional engagement (β = .461, p < .001), and a remaining direct path from digital interaction to emotional engagement (β = .297, p < .001). The model explained 26.2% of the variance in teacher immediacy and 44.1% of the variance in emotional engagement.

Teachers need to get things done much faster now that they can use digital touch. This means that students who did more digital schoolwork connected with their teachers more deeply. It makes sense that this happened because digital contact gives teachers more chances to talk to their students, get to know them, give them feedback, and help them build their social profile. Kids felt more connected to the online English school when they thought their teachers were nice, loving, smart, and ready to help.

Table 5. Structural Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	SE	t / CR	p-value	Decision
H1	Digital Interaction → Emotional Engagement	.297	.043	6.97	< .001	Supported
H2	Digital Interaction → Teacher Immediacy	.512	.042	12.17	< .001	Supported
H3	Teacher Immediacy → Emotional Engagement	.461	.043	10.82	< .001	Supported

Most of the feedback about the framework came from the three straight ideas. There were 44.1% differences in how involved the student felt and 26.2% differences in how close the teacher was. Students are deeply involved in virtual English classes when they can explain this much of the difference. This suggests that digital touch and teacher familiarity work well together to explain this.

4.5 Mediation Analysis

One way to test the role of teacher concern as a mediator was to use bootstrapping with 5,000 new samples. Using technology to connect with teachers directly had a good and statistically significant effect on students' mental involvement. This thing had an unstandardized indirect effect of.259 and a bootstrapped standard error of.031. Because the 95% confidence interval didn't go to zero and went from, it was clear that the interaction effect was important.From 201 to 322.

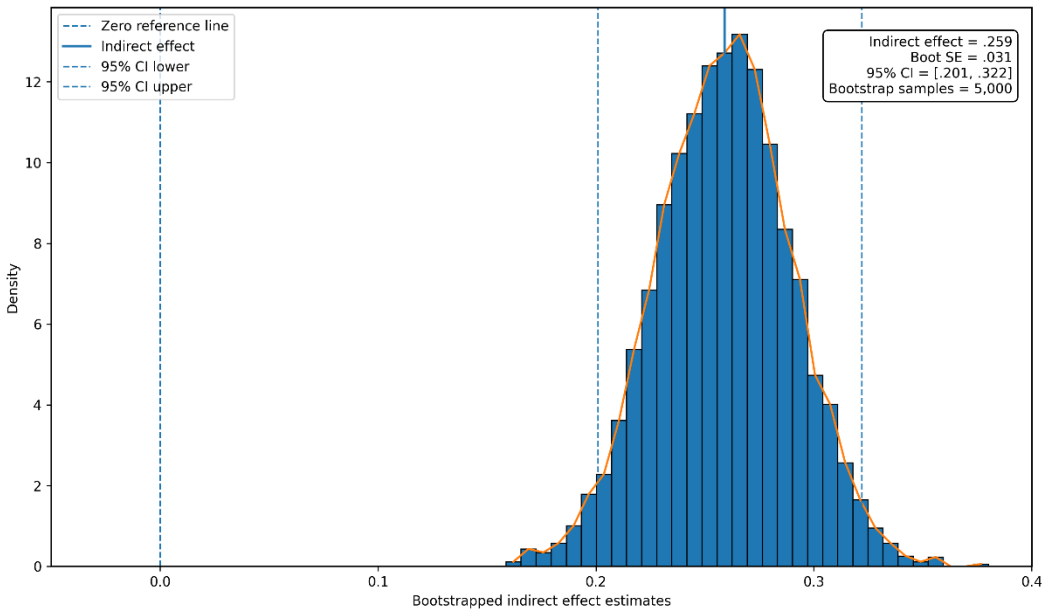

Figure 2. Bootstrapped Indirect Effect Distribution for the Mediating Role of Teacher Immediacy

After adding teacher urgency to the model, the direct effect of digital contact on emotional engagement stayed strong. That suggests that there were some disagreements about the deal. Although digital touch directly affects emotional involvement, teachers can also get involved right away. Responding to students in ways that bring them closer together, recognize them, and make them feel safe and important in their involvement gives contact more emotional value.

Table 6. Bootstrapped Mediation Effect of Teacher Immediacy

Mediation Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Mediation Decision
Digital Interaction → Teacher Immediacy → Emotional Engagement	.259	.031	.201	.322	Supported; partial mediation

The results back up H4. Teachers who are available right away play a part in the link between digital contact and emotional involvement in online English classes. The result supports the main idea behind the study: digital contact gives people chances to take part, but immediate teacher support turns those chances into socially important learning experiences.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Main Findings

Virtual English classes are more emotionally engaging when students can talk to each other online. According to this finding, students are more likely to feel personally linked to the online English learning setting if they take part in more activities such as chat, speaking, platform jobs, peer exchange, and communicate with teachers. The result shouldn't be interpreted as just means that more online action instantly leads to more connection, though. Because it lets students be seen, say what they want, get feedback, and be a part of the social life of the class, interaction seems to be a way for students to become emotionally involved in virtual English classes. The bigger body of research on online interaction, like Moore (1989) and Bernard et al. (2009), says that contact between students and material, between students and each other, and between students and teachers are all very important parts of distance education. The result also backs up the idea that the quality of interactions is more important than the number of interactions. According to Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005), touch is not enough by itself if it is not useful or informative. A lot of the kids in this study who said they used technology more often also said they were active. When used in an open classroom, this means that students may feel more involved, secure, and linked when they take part online.

It's very important to learn English because of this link. English language learners need to talk to each other, use words in strange ways, and show how well they can do. This isn't like content-based classes, where kids read, do work, and answer real questions all the time. These students are not just getting information when they talk and write English in chat, answers to other students, and online projects. Making them feel more active in this way can help. Digital touch helps students connect mentally because it lets them use English to make friends, talk to others, and get to know them. Even if they only use the tool, this is still true.

5.2 Teacher Immediacy as the Emotional Mechanism of Online Interaction

The main idea of this study is that teaching speed is linked to the connection between digital touch and mental relationship. It's clear that digital touch makes involvement possible, and the fact that the teacher can respond right away makes that participation feel real. They can talk, chat, use meeting rooms, leave comments, and do tasks in the LMS. But these things mean more when the teacher reacts in a way that makes the kids feel safe, seen, and cared for. Andersen (1979) and Gorham (1988) say that teachers and students should talk to each other in ways that make the psychological and social space between them smaller. What we found backs up that idea. Some English students who take classes online may feel alone, less noticeable, or like they don't know how to participate in class. It's possible that this gives the mind more room. This gap gets smaller when teachers respond quickly and with kindness, comment on time, call out students by name, correct them in a helpful way, speak in an interesting way, and ask questions that involve everyone. The student feels safe and important when the teacher calls them by name after they answer a chat question, gives them good feedback after they talk, or corrects a mistake without making them feel bad.

The discussion also led to an answer for why some virtual classes stay mentally weak even when the site is busy. While students do their work, vote in polls, or send chat messages, the teacher might not notice. This could mean that their participation stays the same. When teachers respond quickly, on the other hand, even small acts of participation can become socially important. Earlier studies (Hu & Wang, 2023; Lee, 2020; Liu & Zhou, 2024; Yuan, 2024) also found a link between teacher support, happiness, the desire to interact, and a sense of relationship with English as a foreign language. Another study backs this up: for online learning to work, both the teacher and the student need to be there (Garrison et al., 2000; Wang, 2022). When it comes to business, the fact that there isn't much touch is also important. Even with teacher concern, digital touch still had a direct effect on how people felt connected to each other. It's still important to be able to talk to other people. Students may directly feel more linked and included when they talk to other people, do tasks, and work on a platform. Another thing is that teacher care is a big part of how this process works. The results don't mean that teaching quickness replaces computer contact; instead, they show that immediacy makes connection more emotionally powerful.

5.3 Contribution to Online English Language Learning Research

What this study adds to the body of research on learning English online is multifaceted. Firstly, it adds to studies on engagement by focusing on emotional engagement instead of engagement as a general concept that doesn't show differences. Especially in EFL and English learning settings, emotional involvement is key because students' participation is highly impacted by their confidence, happiness, nervousness, embarrassment, and desire to talk. The study reacts to recent calls for more exact meanings and measurements of interest in language learning by focusing on the emotional aspect (Hiver et al., 202400). Additionally, the study makes a contribution by describing the relationship-based process behind digital engagement. Numerous studies reveal that contact helps with online learning, but not as many explain why interaction is socially significant. Teacher speed is one answer to this question, according to the results we just saw. There are more chances to talk to people in the classroom through digital activity, but the teacher's immediate presence makes that contact more personal and helps students see involvement as praise rather than exposure.

Third, the study puts instantly available teachers in online English classes in their proper setting. Awareness isn't just limited to actions like making eye contact, gesturing, and moving around in class. Immenseness shows up in online English classes through quick responses, friendly voices, individual notes, helpful feedback, emotional support, and clear teacher presence. To make teacher presence theory more relevant for digitally mediated language learning settings, this is helpful. Finally, the study combines various ideas about dealing with emotions, being on time for class, and touching someone online into a single mediation model. It's important to connect because English lessons on computers aren't the only thing that goes on there. People can connect socially there, and what teachers say changes how students feel about participating, being sure of themselves, and fitting in.

5.4 Practical Implications for Virtual English Teaching

It's clear that these findings affect English teachers, groups that train teachers, and websites that offer English lessons online. The first thing that online English teachers should know is that adding more activities to the site won't make students more interested right away. In polls, chats, meeting rooms, tests, and speaking tasks, it's only helpful to ask questions if the teacher gives you a good answer. That's why teachers should give kids ways to connect that let them have real conversations instead of just clicking. They should also know how fast their internet is. To do this, you should call students by name, let them know when they do a good job in chat, answer their questions quickly and in a way that shows you care. When you grade speech tasks, it's especially important to be helpful. Online learners may feel nervous when they make spelling or speech mistakes, especially if mics or cameras make the activity feel public. Accordingly, corrective comments should help build trust while still helping with language development. Third, virtual English classes should have strategies for keeping students mentally safe when they participate. Students can practice before speaking, teachers can use meeting rooms to ease the pressure of performance, and it's okay to make mistakes when learning a language. These activities can help students feel less anxious and encourage them to talk to others over time. Finally, schools should teach online English teachers about digital speed as well as how to use platforms. Literally knowing how to use Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, or an LMS does not mean that you know how to use them to build relationships. Professional development should include learning how to give comments on time, communicate in a way that takes into account feelings, ask questions that include everyone, acknowledge learners, and build relationships online.

Overall, the useful message is that creating emotional connection in online English classes rests on how the students interact with each other and how the teacher talks to them. While digital contact makes involvement possible, having a teacher available right away makes students feel like their participation is valued.

6. Conclusion

This research looked at the link between digital contact and emotional involvement in online English classes by trying how teacher speed affects the relationship. It was found that digital contact makes emotional attachment stronger. This link is even stronger when teaching urgency is taken into account. Students can join in a variety of ways, such as through chat, group discussions, meeting rooms, peer answers, and platform-based tasks. However, all of these ways become more important to them personally when teachers react with warmth, praise, quick feedback, helpful correction, and one-on-one contact. So, the study shows that teaching timeliness is one way that digital contact can turn into happiness, belonging, confidence, emotional link, and a desire to learn English. The study can be used to improve online English classes. Interaction shouldn't just be a technical need for online

teachers. Instead, they should make contact a social process backed by direct acknowledgement, quick answers, chances to talk without fear of judgment, and positive feedback. English teachers should be taught more than just how to use platforms. They should also be taught how to behave in a digitally immediate way. Several problems should be pointed out. Since the study only used cross-sectional self-report data, it's not possible to say for sure what caused what. When students are at different skill levels, on different platforms, and in different places, they may have different experiences. In the future, researchers should use longitudinal designs, classroom observation, LMS data, teacher behavior coding, and the links between learning English in person and online. The study changes the way we think about online English classes in general, making them more than just places to use technology to learn.

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