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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Teachers' Teaching Presence in Online Learning Communities in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of teachers' teaching presence in Online Learning Communities (OLCs), focusing on their role in facilitating and organizing learning activities. Using a sequential exploratory mixed methods design, Phase 1 involved 13 in-depth interviews with staff and administrators based on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. Phase 2 used survey data from 607 participants (101 paid, 506 unpaid) selected through stratified random sampling across six OLCs. Findings reveal strong teacher engagement but highlight gaps in facilitation and instructional design. The study underscores the need for structured facilitation strategies, interactive pedagogy, and well-designed activities to enhance student engagement and higher-order thinking. By identifying key areas for improvement, it offers practical insights for educators and administrators to refine instructional approaches, fostering more effective and student-centered online learning environments.

Keywords: Teaching Presence, Online Learning Communities, Student Engagement, Instructional Design, Online Education.

Introduction

Teaching presence is a fundamental element in effective online learning environments, shaping student engagement, cognitive development, and overall educational experiences. This term refers to the role of instructors in designing, facilitating, and guiding instructional processes to ensure meaningful interactions and knowledge construction. Research suggests that faculty members play a key role in fostering a shared learning community, which is enabled by raising critical questions, setting standards for student progress, and validating student contributions in an unbiased manner (Nicholson, 2004). Instructional presence includes course design, direct instruction, and facilitation of dialogue, which have a significant impact on students' perceptions of community and engagement (Lewin, 2007). The theoretical background for this study is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, 2016), which focuses specifically on instructional presence in online learning communities (OLCs). In the CoI model, instructional presence has three primary roles: designing the instructional experience, facilitating it, and guiding the learning process to ensure educational engagement. An effective instructional presence helps students build deep academic connections, where they value the ideas of the instructor and fellow students and contribute to the creation of knowledge. How students perceive the instructor's presence influences their sense of engagement and motivation in the online learning environment (Miller, 2014). Research shows that regular course announcements, personalized feedback, and clear communication rules enhance students' sense of community and academic satisfaction (Lin et al., 2007).

Furthermore, interaction emerges as a central element in explaining effective instructional presence. Research shows that instructors who engage in meaningful discussions, share personal experiences, and provide constructive feedback create more effective and student-centered learning environments (Delahanty et al., 2013; Fisher & Beard, 2010). This concept is consistent with sociological constructivist theory, which explains that knowledge is constructed through interaction and sharing within a community (Rovai et al., 2004). Instructors play a key role in structuring discussions, designing learning activities, and providing instructional support to guide students toward deeper learning. However, despite the recognition of the importance of instructional presence, research on its long-term effects in online learning environments is lacking. Most studies focus on social and academic presence, while the effects of instructors' engagement strategies, feedback methods, and instructional design choices on student retention and academic performance are rarely examined. Research also shows that students quickly sense the instructor's absence, which can lead to discouragement and isolation in online courses (Wilson et al., 2004). Paloff and Pratt (2007) emphasize that instructors should play a facilitator role in online learning environments, allowing students to take responsibility for their own learning while providing them with necessary guidance. Furthermore, Delahanty et al. (2013) explain that interactive exchanges in learning communities enhance student engagement and collaboration, which are key aspects of effective instructional presence. Scott et al. (2016) acknowledge the importance of the CoI model in the analysis of online teaching strategies and explain that teaching presence has a direct impact on student participation, understanding, and overall learning outcomes. This study will address this gap by examining the role of teaching presence in promoting student engagement and academic achievement in online courses. It will examine how

instructors' teaching strategies, feedback methods, and communication methods affect students' perceptions of teaching presence and the effectiveness of learning. Thus, the research will contribute to the establishment of more structured, interactive, and student-centered online teaching environments in line with international standards. This study specifically focuses on the assessment of teaching presence in online learning communities (OLCs) in Pakistan, where the concept is still in its infancy. Existing teaching platforms lack structured teaching strategies to enhance student engagement and academic engagement. There is limited research data available on how Pakistani instructors facilitate discussions, provide feedback, and design online courses. This study will fill this gap by examining the role of instructional presence in online learning communities by using the CoI model. It will analyze the challenges that instructors face in maintaining instructional presence and identify instructional strategies that can make online teaching more effective and student-centered. This study is important in identifying key aspects of improving instructional presence, so that instructors can make instructional facilitation methods more effective, better organize the learning experience, and increase student engagement. The research findings will highlight the importance of interactive and collaborative instructional strategies to promote active participation.

Material and Methods

This study employs a sequential exploratory mixed methods design to assess teaching presence in Online Learning Communities (OLCs). The research is conducted in two phases: a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase, ensuring an in-depth exploration of teaching presence and its impact on student engagement and learning experiences.

Phase 1: Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The first phase involves in-depth interviews to gain insights into how teaching presence is structured and perceived in OLCs. A semi-structured interview protocol based on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model is used, comprising 19 open-ended questions exploring teaching, cognitive, and social presence. The population includes staff members and administrators of OLCs, selected through purposive sampling to ensure expertise in online teaching and course facilitation. The sample consists of 13 participants (7 staff members and 6 administrators). All interviews are audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed, following an inductive coding approach to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings from this phase inform the development of the survey instrument for the quantitative phase.

Phase 2: Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The second phase involves a survey questionnaire designed based on findings from the qualitative phase. The survey consists of scenario-based items assessing participants' perceptions of teaching presence, instructional design, and interaction in OLCs. The target population comprises members of six OLCs, including both paid and unpaid members. Stratified random sampling is employed to ensure proportional representation of these groups. The final sample includes 607 participants (101 paid and 506 unpaid members). The survey data is analyzed using SPSS to conduct descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) and inferential statistical tests (t-tests, MANOVA) to examine the teaching presence in online learning communities.

Results

Section I (Qualitative phase)

In section 1, I present the results from the phase one of data collection activity, in which thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data from online learning communities' admins and teachers. The purpose of phase one of the data collection activities was to develop in depth understanding regarding stakeholders' teaching' presence in OLCs. The findings are divided into four sections as follows:

Table 1

Teachers' views about engagement strategies in OLCs

Sub-themes	Evidence/supporting phrases
Purpose of community Formation	"Our primary aim was to provide a platform for students to prepare effectively for their tests from home. Two years ago, we started our own educational group with the goal of helping students succeed, and Alhamdulillah, we have seen success in our efforts. Initially, we were part of Bakher Education Academy, where we conducted sessions. We then transitioned to our academy, which we started in early 2021" (QEA). "The purpose was to advance my education subject, prepare it, and work extensively on my research. I thought, why not integrate my research work into it and share it with others. The topic of my research was the "Role of Technical Education" and "Development of Human Capital." I created this group and ran a WhatsApp community. On Facebook, I published a book named "Education Marathon," and I worked on both platforms, integrating them" (EM).
Target audience	"To target the audience, I designed and posted content on my Facebook page. Eventually, people began to follow it, and some of my classmates and others with a connection to education joined my WhatsApp group. Through my Facebook page posts, which were related to exam preparation and teaching, people showed interest and messaged me directly, joining the community" (BEA). "We targeted students who couldn't pay high fees, especially males who had more financial responsibilities. We knew many such individuals from our own circle, and we engaged them by offering very low fees or even free participation for those who couldn't afford it. This approach helped build a strong community of students who benefited from our initiative and contributed to its growth"

	(ZE).
Learning activities	"We engage our audience through various platforms. Discussions are held on WhatsApp and Facebook groups, where students can interact and ask questions. I upload lectures on YouTube to provide easy access to learning materials. By using these platforms, we have been able to develop a robust learning community" (DOC).
	"Different activities for different session, it depends on post of exam. To engage with my audience, I conduct sessions for both experienced candidates and beginners. For experienced candidates, I schedule sessions in the evening, while beginners can join at any time. I offer live sessions after 3pm and record them for future access. I also share video lectures, PDF notes, and Google Docs tests to aid preparation for various exams" (BEA).

Teachers' comments revealed that different communities target audience using different strategies like the use of social media i.e. WhatsApp, YouTube channel, Facebook, Instagram. To engage the learner in learning communities, different types of learning activities are shared in groups such as quizzes, tests, and conduct online session daily in which all participants' queries are addressed related to content and give opportunity to all participants to express their own point of view regarding academic content.

Trust Building Measures

When we start any learning groups, communities, then first question raise in mind is how we can build trust of audience? This study also highlights the answer to this question. Interview data showed that trust of audience build on the content quality, activities in group.

Table presents the teachers' excerpts regarding trust building measures in communities.

Table 2

Teachers' views about trust building measures in OLCs

Sub-themes	Evidence/supporting phrases
Content quality	"In Pakistan, trust-building is a significant issue, as people often consider everything to be spam or a scam, even when interacting through various means. Your profile or identity becomes crucial. We build trust through our punctuality, honesty and content worth" (BEA). "Building trust among students took time, and it was our honesty and dedication that helped us. We focused on providing value without expecting much in return initially. This approach has paid off, as many students have successfully cleared their exams and secured jobs, further strengthening our community" (ZOE).
Responsiveness/Feedback	"We build trust by being readily available to address any issues and by maintaining high-quality content. We also ensure that the educators in our group are experts in their respective fields. By providing reliable and relevant educational materials and being responsive to students' needs, we establish a trustworthy learning environment" (DOC). Trust is built by handling complaints, separating male and female groups, and setting clear guidelines for interaction. Regular feedback and adherence to code of conduct also contribute to trust-building" (BEA).

Teachers' views showed that participants' trust is built in communities depending on content quality that is provided in online learning groups, being punctual and honest within the community. A trustworthy environment is very necessary for participants in which participants feel comfortable, interact with each other without any hesitation. Another thing which is revealed through interview data is to being available for participants at any time for their help related to learning, handle their complaints on time, provide timely and reliable feedback on their performance.

Conflict Management Processes

Building healthy relationships among participants and maintaining a positive environment is very crucial in any organization. Data generated through this study revealed that community admins or teachers used different strategies for managing conflicts within the communities.

Table 3 presenting these strategies used in conflict management process.

Table 3

Teachers' views regarding conflict management process

Sub-themes	Evidence/supporting phrases
Conflict resolution strategies	"Conflicts, often arising from disruptions between students or disagreements between students and teachers, are managed by addressing issues directly. For student disputes, I mute disruptive participants and remind them of online etiquette. If disagreements with teachers occur, I provide additional examples to clarify misunderstandings" (BEA). "Conflicts depend on their nature. If someone is trying to undermine or attack another person, then you must make them realize this behavior and address it appropriately. However, if the conflict is about a topic where there are differing opinions, then students should understand that both sides might be valid. The key is to present logical arguments with references, and the side with the more logical and well-supported arguments will be considered correct. If it involves grammatical or technical issues, you should provide references to clarify" (DOC).
Maintain a positive environment	"I strive to remain calm and professional, avoiding any angry or harsh responses. I listen to all opinions, even if they are critical, and handle conflicts by addressing concerns diplomatically. I maintain a positive and supportive atmosphere in the group to ensure that all students feel valued and respected" (QEA). "The admin ensures that any sensitive information is handled confidentially and only shared as necessary to maintain privacy, security and positive environment" (ZOE).

Teachers' comments showed that conflicts can be handled by its on nature. If conflicts related to academic content, then it is handled by positive discussions in which

everyone express their own point of views with strong logic or reference. If conflicts arise in groups out of the academic topics of personal attack, then admin changes the group privacy and remains group inactive for some time. Sensitive or private information related to participants should be confidential and encourage positive discussion for maintaining a positive and healthy environment within the community.

Feedback Practices

Timely and constructive feedback is the best indicator of strong teaching presence in online learning communities. It creates strong interaction among teachers and students which is necessary for students effective learning. Interview data expressed that different assessment tools are used in communities for assessing participants' performance and give timely feedback to participants on their performance.

Table 4 presents the assessment practices prevailed within the OLCs.

Table 4

Teachers' views regarding assessment practices in OLCs

Sub-themes	Evidence/supporting phrases
Assessment tools	"Performance is assessed through regular tests conducted via Google Sheets and Google Forms. This method provides detailed feedback and allows students to track their progress over time. If students struggle initially, I remind them that improvement will come with time and practice" (QEA).
	"During live sessions on platforms like Zoom or Google Meet, instructors incorporate questions related to the lesson. Specific students are nominated to answer, ensuring active participation and immediate feedback. Tests are a significant part of the evaluation process. Scores from these tests are shared with students in the WhatsApp group" (ZOE).
Continuous feedback	"We offer timely feedback and support through direct communication and structured feedback sessions. Internal motivation is fostered by providing incentives such as cash prizes for top performers in tests, which encourages students to actively participate and excel" (DOC).
	"Feedback is provided through daily test scores shared via Google Forms and an Excel sheet. Performance is further evaluated by sharing a manual list of top

performers to motivate students" (EM).

Data generated through interviews on this theme is exposed that different assessment tools are used in OLCs i.e. test, quizzes, surprise test, google form, presentation etc. After assessing students' performance, detailed feedback in provided on their performance by sharing excel marks sheet in group, immediate feedback in online session, highlight their strength and weaknesses and give solution to overcome their weaknesses. Appreciation and incentives are also provided in the form of a cash prize to encourage competition and motivation of participants.

Content Relevancy

Providing relevant and up to date content in groups is included in the duty of teachers. If the content provided in the group is relevant, according to students' needs then community grows in a positive way. The findings of data showed that relevant and accurate content is provided in learning community.

Table 5 presents the excerpts of teachers' interviews regarding content relevancy.

Table 5

Teachers' views on content relevancy in OLCs

Sub-themes	Evidence/supporting phrases
Updated content	"We continuously update our content based on current trends and the needs of the students. For instance, we review and incorporate recent examination patterns and materials into our sessions. Regular updates ensure that students have access to relevant and current information" (DOC).
	"I stay updated by reviewing the latest papers from various commissions and adjusting my content to reflect any new developments or changes. This ensures that the material provided is current and relevant to the exams students are preparing for" (ZOE).
Student centric learning	"I create notes based on multiple books and reliable sources, simplifying complex concepts into easy-to-understand language. I continuously

	update and verify the content to ensure it aligns with current educational standards and student needs. I also provide additional resources and recommend other materials to supplement their learning" (QEA).
	"The content is aligned with the syllabus provided in job advertisements. Before starting a session, for example, for SST preparation, the syllabus is reviewed, and content is designed accordingly. This ensures that the content is up-to-date and relevant to the students' current needs. The focus is primarily on what is necessary for the examinations and job requirements. This avoids overwhelming students with unnecessary details" (BEA).

Teachers' views revealed that updated content is provided in learning communities which meet the needs of students and outdated content avoided. All learning communities are related to job exam preparation like PPSC, FPSC, SST etc. So, the content is designed according to pattern or syllabus of exam and ensures that the material provided is current and relevant to the exams students are preparing for.

Section II (Quantitative phase)

Descriptive Statistics

Table 6 presented descriptive data (frequency and %ages) of participants of study.

Table 6

Student Response percentages (%ages) on Teaching Presence

Sr#	Statements	SA	A	A+SA	N	DA	SDA	DA+SDA
1	Explained learning community	54.2	41.4	95.7	3.6	.5	.2	0.7
2	Learning activities provided are relevant	48.8	45.8	94.6	4.4	.8	.2	1
3	Quality of the content meets expectations	46	46.3	92.3	6.4	1.1	.2	1.3
4	Receive timely feedback from instructors	39.9	50.2	90.1	7.6	2.1	.2	2.3
5	Conflicts are handled effectively	32.8	52.4	85.2	11.7	2.3	.8	3.1
6	Instructor maintains a positive and respectful learning environment	50.7	43.5	94.2	4.4	.8	.5	1.3

7	Assessment tools used in community are fair	42.2	47.1	89.3	8.5	1.8	.3	2.1
8	Receive continuous feedback from instructors	36.9	45.6	82.5	12.3	4.9	.2	5.1
9	Content provided in the community is always up to date	47.1	45	92.1	5.3	2.3	.3	2.6
10	Content is tailored to meet students' learning needs	43	50.4	93.4	4.6	1.6	.3	1.9

Table 6 indicates that students' responses on teaching presence show a majority agreed upon the learning community clearly explained, learning activities provided relevant instructions, positive and respectful learning environment, assessment tools used in the community as fair, received continuous feedback, content up-to-date and tailored to their learning needs, and reflecting the adaptability of the course to students' individual requirements. On the other hand, some students disagreed with receiving continuous feedback, content quality met their expectations and handled their conflicts effectively.

The results showed that teaching presence is largely effective, with minor improvements needed in conflict resolution and continuous feedback.

Table 7
Examine teaching presence in OLCs

Variables	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Mean Difference
Teaching Presence	1.67	0.47	-173.345	607	0.000	-3.32566

Table 7 indicates the results of a one-sample t-test examining teachers' presence. The findings indicate a significant difference in teachers' presence as compared to the hypothesized mean value, which was 5, Mean = 1.67, SD = 0.47, t-value = -173.345, p = 0.000, Mean Difference = -3.32566. Overall, results indicate that insufficient facilitation and organization of learning activities with respect to teacher presence.

Table 8

Significant Univariate Effects for Gender (at p<.001 level)

Dependent Variable	*df*	*df* error	*F*	Gender	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	1	606	3.562	Male	17.5455	18.478	18.478
				Female	16.5658	18.478	18.478

Table 8 presents significant univariate effects for gender at the p<.001 level, indicating gender differences across teaching presence. For Teaching Presence, males reported a higher mean (17.5455) compared to females (16.5658), with males showing a wider confidence interval (18.478 to 18.478), while females had a slightly lower range (18.478 to 18.478). This suggests that gender plays a role in perceived teaching presence, with males scoring higher.

Table 9

Significant Univariate Effects for Age (at p<.001 level)

Dependent Variable	df	df error	F	Age Group	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	3	604	5.930	15-25	15.8208	14.928	16.713
				26-35	16.6357	16.193	17.078
				36-45	18.7143	17.616	19.813
				More than 45	12.0000	2.812	21.188

The results indicate significant differences in teaching presence based on gender and age. Males reported higher perceptions of teaching presence compared to females. Additionally, teaching presence varied across age groups, with the highest scores observed in the 36-45 age group, followed by 26-35 and 15-25, while those above 45

showed the lowest scores. This suggests that experience and maturity may enhance perceptions of teaching presence in online learning environments.

Table 10

Significant Univariate Effects for Educational Background

Dependent Variable	df	df error	F	Educational Background	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	4	603	2.453	B. A/B.SC	16.273	13.482	19.063
				M.A/M.SC/M.Ed	16.271	15.769	16.773
				M.Phil	17.476	16.870	18.083
				Ph.D	16.462	13.895	19.029
				Other	15.636	12.846	18.427

The findings suggest that educational background has a significant impact on perceptions of teaching presence. MPhil holders reported the highest teaching presence, followed by PhD and MA/MSc/M.Ed holders, while BA/BSc and other degree holders showed relatively lower scores. This indicates that advanced academic qualifications may contribute to a stronger perception of teaching presence in online learning environments.

Table 11

Significant Univariate Effects for Educational Status (at p<.001 level)

Dependent Variable	df	df error	F	Educational Status	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	3	604	1.655	Teacher	16.636	16.157	17.114
				Student	16.750	15.976	17.524
				Researcher	18.333	16.786	19.881
				Other	16.192	14.905	17.480

The results indicate that researchers perceive the highest level of teaching presence, followed by students and teachers, while individuals in the "Other" category reported the lowest perception. This suggests that researchers, likely due to their academic background and engagement with learning processes, are more attuned to instructional presence in online settings.

Table 12

Significant Univariate Effects for Geographical Location (at p<.001 level)

Dependent Variable	df	df error	F	Gender	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	3	604	1.785	Punjab	16.8764	17.436	17.436
				Sindh	16.4453	17.006	17.006
				KPK	16.3824	17.974	17.974
				Other	18.6000	20.456	20.456

The findings suggest that respondents from the "Other" geographical locations reported the highest perception of teaching presence, whereas those from Punjab, Sindh, and KPK had relatively similar but slightly lower perceptions. This variation may indicate differences in online teaching experiences, digital infrastructure, or institutional support across regions.

Table 13

Significant Univariate Effects for Native Language (at p<.001 level)

Dependent Variable	df	df error	F	Native Language	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	3	604	3.711	Urdu	16.4919	15.391	17.593
				English	16.1262	15.182	17.070
				Punjabi	17.3016	16.142	18.461
				Other	17.9157	15.391	17.593

The findings indicate significant differences in the perception of teaching presence based on native language. Respondents with Punjabi and "Other" native languages reported higher teaching presence compared to those with Urdu or English as their native language. This suggests that linguistic background may influence how individuals perceive instructor engagement and facilitation in online learning environments.

Table 14

Significant Univariate Effects for Experience in Community (at p < .001 level)

Dependent Variable	df	df error	F	Experience in Community	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	3	604	5.953	1 year	16.015	15.516	16.514
				2 years	17.467	16.281	18.651
				3 years	17.479	16.153	18.802
				More than 3 years	17.720	16.996	18.444

The results reveal that experience in the community significantly impacts the perception of teaching presence. Participants with two or more years of experience reported a higher teaching presence compared to those with only one year of experience. This suggests that prolonged engagement in the learning community enhances the recognition and appreciation of instructor presence, facilitation, and instructional strategies.

Table 15

Significant Univariate Effects for Community Group (at p<.001 level)

Dependent Variable	df	df error	F	Community Group	Means	99.9% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Teaching Presence	2	605	12.373	Paid group	16.019	15.488	16.550
				Unpaid group	17.646	16.947	18.345

	Both	18.607	17.351	19.863

The findings indicate that the type of community group significantly influences perceptions of teaching presence. Participants engaged in both paid and unpaid groups reported the highest teaching presence, followed by those in unpaid groups. Conversely, participants in paid groups perceived the lowest teaching presence. This suggests that diverse interactions and voluntary engagement in learning communities may foster a stronger sense of instructor presence and support.

Table 16

Synthesized Results

Objectives	**Theme/Variable**	**Qualitative results (Phase-I)**	**Quantitative results (Phase-II)**	**Integrated results**
Examine the teachers' teaching presence in online learning communities (OLCs)	Teaching presence	Teachers maintain a strong teaching presence by engaging students through regular sessions, timely feedback, and providing resources to facilitate learning.	Teaching presence is largely effective (student responses), but the t-test highlights insufficient facilitation and organization of learning activities.	Teachers demonstrate strong presence and engagement, but there are critical gaps in facilitation and organization of learning activities.

Discussion

The research findings show that teachers in online learning environments demonstrate strong involvement and instructional presence, but there are significant gaps in the facilitation and organization of learning activities. Instructional presence is a fundamental element of online learning, encompassing course design, discussion

promotion, and direct instruction (Anderson et al., 2001). The findings suggest that although teachers actively engage with students and maintain their presence, their strategies for organizing and providing guidance for their learning activities need to be improved. One possible explanation for this gap may be the lack of a clear instructional framework for online teaching. Effective instructional presence requires not only active involvement but also a structured approach to content delivery, interactive discussions, and assessment strategies. Studies show that clear course design and organized instructional processes have a significant impact on student engagement and academic progress (Garrison et al., 2000). However, if teachers focus primarily on maintaining their presence but fail to provide a structured learning experience, students may find it difficult to understand course expectations, which can reduce overall learning effectiveness. Another important factor in this problem may be insufficient professional development opportunities for online teachers. Research shows that many teachers transition to online teaching without adequate digital instructional training, resulting in gaps in teaching methods and course organization (Baran et al., 2011). To address this problem, educational institutions need to invest in faculty training programs that emphasize course structure, interactive teaching techniques, and the integration of technology to enhance instructional presence. Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which indicates that students perceive instructional presence not only through teacher availability but also through clarity of course objectives, structured discussions, and meaningful feedback (Shea et al., 2006). Teachers who fail to effectively organize learning activities can create an environment where students feel disoriented and unconnected, no matter how proactive the teacher is. This highlights the importance of the balance that must be struck between teacher involvement and course structure,

so that learning experiences are interactive and structured. This study highlights the need for structured course design, teacher training, and student feedback mechanisms to enhance instructional presence and engagement in online learning communities (OLCs). As a result, although teachers demonstrate a strong presence in online learning environments and actively engage with students, significant gaps exist in the facilitation and organization of learning activities. These gaps can affect instructional delivery, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes. Addressing these issues requires a systematic approach to course design, interactive learning strategies, and instructional techniques to ensure a cohesive and supportive online learning experience. Strengthening these aspects will improve an effective and engaging virtual learning environment. It is recommended that teachers further improve their teaching practices through regular training programs, especially in effective online teaching strategies, course organization, and facilitation of interactive learning activities. The research findings indicate that teacher engagement is strong, but the facilitation and organization of learning activities need to be improved. As suggested by Garrison et al., (2001), developing these aspects will contribute to a more engaging online learning experience.

Authors' Contributions

Meimoona Riaz, PhD scholar (Education) conceived the research idea thorough the collaboration of her supervisor Dr. Bushra Naoreen, Associate professor, Department of Education, GCUF. She helped me to design the study framework, review the literature and perform the data collection and analysis in writing the manuscript. Both authors were involved in reading and approve the final manuscript.

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