

«مقاله پژوهشی»

پویایی‌های عاطفی و مشارکتی در فضای آموزشی شاد: رویکرد قوم‌نگاری مجازی

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چکیده

هدف این پژوهش، بررسی پویایی‌های عاطفی و مشارکتی میان معلمان و دانش‌آموزان در محیط دیجیتال شبکه شاد با استفاده از روش قوم‌نگاری مجازی است. این تحقیق با رویکردی کیفی و بر پایه نمونه‌گیری هدفمند، تعاملات موجود در چهار گروه آموزشی در شبکه شاد را طی شش ماه (مهر تا اسفند ۱۴۰۲) مورد تحلیل قرار داده است. داده‌های جمع‌آوری شده شامل پیام‌های متنی، صوتی و واکنش‌های عاطفی ثبت شده در این گروه‌ها بوده که از طریق مشاهده غیرمشارکتی و با بهره‌گیری از نرم‌افزار ATLAS.ti تحلیل شده‌اند. نتایج نشان می‌دهد که شبکه شاد علاوه بر ایفای نقش رسمی در اطلاع‌رسانی و آموزش، به فضایی برای حمایت عاطفی و اجتماعی کاربران تبدیل شده است. تعاملات کاربران شامل سه نوع اصلی بوده است: تعاملات آموزشی، تعاملات اجتماعی، و حمایت‌های عاطفی و مشاوره‌ای. همچنین، شبکه شاد به بستری برای تبادل منابع آموزشی، تسهیل ارتباطات غیررسمی، و تقویت ارتباطات انسانی میان معلمان و دانش‌آموزان تبدیل شده است. یافته‌ها حاکی از آن است که ویژگی‌های تعاملی و انعطاف‌پذیر شبکه شاد نه تنها به بهبود فرآیندهای یادگیری کمک کرده، بلکه ظرفیت‌های قابل توجهی در ایجاد همبستگی اجتماعی و حمایت روانی در محیط‌های آموزشی دارد. این پژوهش، با تأکید بر روش قوم‌نگاری مجازی، اهمیت بررسی فضاهای دیجیتال در تحلیل روابط انسانی و نقش آن‌ها در تحول محیط‌های آموزشی را برجسته می‌کند.

واژه‌های کلیدی

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Emotional and Participatory Dynamics in Joyful Virtual Learning Spaces: A Virtual Ethnography Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a virtual ethnography approach to investigate the emotional and participatory dynamics between teachers and students within the digital environment of the SHAD platform. Employing a qualitative methodology and virtual ethnographic research design, the study purposively sampled interactions from four educational groups on the SHAD platform over six months (October 2023 to March 2024). The collected data—including text messages, voice notes, and emotional reactions—were analyzed through non-participant observation using ATLAS—ti software. The findings reveal that beyond its formal role in communication and instruction, SHAD has evolved into a space for emotional and social support among users. User interactions were categorized into three main types: instructional, social, and emotional-counseling support. Furthermore, SHAD has served as a medium for sharing educational resources, facilitating informal communication, and strengthening human connections between teachers and students. The results indicate that the platform's interactive and flexible features enhance learning processes and offer substantial potential for fostering social cohesion and psychological support in educational settings. By emphasizing the virtual ethnographic method, this research underscores the importance of examining digital spaces in understanding human relationships and their transformative role in academic environments.

KEYWORDS

Virtual Ethnography, SHAD Platform, Emotional Interactions, Educational Communication.



Introduction

Effective communication between teachers and students is a fundamental pillar of the learning process and academic development. Daily, teachers and students spend approximately one-quarter of their time interacting, a duration that can significantly influence both the quality of learning and their emotional experiences related to educational processes. In this context, one of the key theoretical frameworks addressing the impact of such interactions is Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the human need for strong and stable interpersonal relationships, a sense of belonging, and being accepted as essential psychological needs (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). The teacher, as the first significant adult outside the family, plays a vital role in establishing supportive connections. Consequently, the quality of teacher–student relationships can enhance students' motivation and performance across academic, emotional, and social domains (Davis, 2003). Fostering a healthy and positive connection within this space can contribute to improving students' emotional attitudes toward school and learning, while also preventing feelings of insecurity and pressure that may hinder their academic and social growth (Iqbal, Diba, & Raza, 2024).

In recent years, the intersection of emotions and learning, particularly in the context of virtual education, has garnered increasing scholarly attention. Studies have shown that emotional dynamics play a significant role in both individual and group learning environments, influencing students' academic performance and levels of engagement. Given the growing reliance on online learning platforms, understanding the impact of emotional states on learning outcomes and the overall educational experience has become essential (Skagby, 2011).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to school closures and the necessity to continue educational activities, teachers were compelled to utilize social media and digital platforms for instruction. This sudden shift in teaching modalities prompted diverse responses across countries; however, the majority opted to continue the academic year through online systems. In Iran, these changes led to the adoption of domestic platforms such as SHAD, as well as televised lessons, for delivering education. These transformations, especially in the domain of online learning, gained critical importance as they not only addressed instructional gaps but also opened new avenues for leveraging the potential of virtual environments (Jacquez & Shahin, 2021).

In the postmodern era, the role of emotions in online learning has attracted considerable interest from researchers. Emotional connection, identified as a core element of human interaction, encompasses the recognition, expression, and sharing of emotional states among individuals. This form of connection is particularly significant in online settings, where the absence of face-to-face and physical cues is more pronounced (Visca, Cornelia-Caterina, Roxana et al., 2017). Emotions may manifest explicitly or implicitly during educational processes, and notably, the expression of negative emotions tends to be more visible in virtual environments compared to face-to-face settings (Gillmor & Warren, 2007). This phenomenon has a profound impact on online education, as it can reshape the perception and interactions between teachers and students.

Technological advancements and the growing demand for flexible learning solutions have accelerated the transition to virtual classrooms. Virtual education not only reduces geographical barriers but also enables learners to progress through courses at their own pace.

Despite these advantages, maintaining student engagement in online environments remains a significant challenge for educators, necessitating innovative approaches to enhance the learning experience (Iqbal, Diba, & Reza, 2024).

To optimize educational outcomes in virtual learning, integrating emotional elements into instructional design is essential. Strategies such as personalized feedback, community-building activities, and the use of engaging multimedia resources can help evoke positive emotions among learners. Collaboration between teachers and students in designing compelling content and fostering active participation is vital for achieving meaningful learning outcomes in virtual educational settings. Personalized feedback, gamification, and community-building activities are key techniques for cultivating supportive virtual learning environments.

Virtual ethnography, which examines social interactions and cultural practices in online spaces, highlights the importance of social presence and equity in effective communication and collaboration. In the current era, rapid changes in information and communication technologies—particularly in online education—have profoundly impacted teaching and learning methods (Sodaba & Baraghiour, 2019). Among these challenges, emotional connection and its effect on students' motivation and performance have become especially critical in online education, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Kafi, 1999). Despite its numerous benefits, virtual space may encounter difficulties in establishing and strengthening effective emotional relationships between teachers and students (Hein, 2000).

This raises the question of how teachers can leverage existing technologies to establish meaningful emotional connections, thereby enhancing learning quality and increasing

student motivation. This challenge becomes more pronounced in social networks and messaging platforms like SHAD, widely used to continue education during the pandemic. In such circumstances, the need for empathetic and supportive communication from teachers to bolster students' motivation and sense of security is increasingly vital. This study aims to explore how teachers can utilize various communication tools in online environments to foster empathy and trust among students, ultimately improving the quality of learning.

The integration of digital spaces into everyday life has introduced a new way of examining social reality. Beyond epistemological and methodological debates, this research is grounded in the ethnographic paradigm, focusing on new sites of technological mediation, such as social networks. This form of ethnography differs from classical ethnography because the opportunities afforded by digital environments vary considerably compared to observing and interpreting physical, face-to-face spaces. However, as Angelone (2019) points out, the concept of "virtual ethnography" does not imply a distinct research paradigm, nor does it claim to be fundamentally different from classical ethnography. Rather, virtual ethnography is a research method that concentrates on studying social interactions and cultural practices within virtual spaces such as online communities, forums, and social media platforms. This approach adapts traditional ethnographic techniques to the digital realm, enabling researchers to observe, participate in, and analyze digital behaviors and identities in real-time (Mehlenga, 2024).

Despite its significance, there remains a scarcity of studies addressing emotional content in virtual environments. Some research indicates that emotions are widely expressed in online

communications, with negative emotions being more prevalent than in face-to-face interactions within virtual settings (Angelone, 2019). This phenomenon may reflect the complexities inherent in online communication and underscores the necessity of paying special attention to emotional and affective interactions in digital spaces. Such approaches can enhance emotional understanding and effective interactions in online learning processes and in teacher–student engagements.

Therefore, the present study examines these dimensions by analyzing the effects of emotions on online learning as well as the role of teachers in shaping emotional connections between themselves and students within virtual environments. Existing research indicates that virtual spaces, particularly messaging platforms like SHAD, can have significant impacts on the quality of learning, student motivation, and emotional relationships, serving as effective tools for fostering emotional bonds and enhancing students' learning experiences.

The SHAD Educational Network, an acronym for "Student Educational Network," was developed and implemented by the Iranian Ministry of Education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to prevent gatherings in schools. This platform is a practical application designed to provide education in a safe and virtual environment for students. SHAD includes sections for administrators, teachers, and students to log in, offers educational content tailored to different grade levels, and provides communication channels for teachers and parents (Ejand & Farazandehpour, 2019).

Literature Review

In this context, Holmberg (2005), introducing the theory of distance education, emphasized the role of empathy in online environments, stating that empathy can enhance students' motivation

for learning and improve learning outcomes. Especially in online education, where direct interactions are limited, creating an empathetic and supportive atmosphere can significantly impact student engagement and motivation. Graham, West, and Schaller (1992), in their development of relational teaching methods, also stressed the importance of fostering teacher–student relationships as a vital process in learning, arguing that effective interpersonal communication skills are necessary to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

In a study conducted by Guo et al. (2024), the role of emotional intelligence as a mediating factor between social skills and social competence among elementary school teachers was examined. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence positively influences the development of social skills and social competence, and these two factors are significantly correlated. Emotional intelligence, by fostering emotional awareness and the ability to regulate emotions, facilitates improved social interactions and effective participation in educational settings. These findings highlight the importance of attending to emotional aspects to enhance the quality of teaching and the educational environment, serving as a foundational basis for investigating emotional and participatory dynamics in SHAD learning environments.

Sadaba and Baraguir (2019), along with Hein (2000), Kafi (1999), and Kozintseva (2019), argued that virtual ethnography comprises a set of methods for documenting and interpreting digital environments, adapting the concepts and guiding principles of classical ethnography to new sites of technological mediation.

In the study by Higuera, Horst, Galloway, and colleagues (2017), the principles of virtual or digital ethnography were adapted as an exploratory and empirical tool for investigating unfamiliar communicative environments. Similarly, Lametti, Collin, Glavino, and

colleagues (2022) described virtual ethnography as involving “continuous immersion,” while Soudaba and Baraghiour (2019) emphasized familiarizing oneself with codes and behaviors as a non-participant observer.

Research by Zich, Ortega-Riza, and Martin-Lopez (2017) indicates that positive emotional states such as enjoyment and interest can enhance students’ motivation and knowledge retention, leading to improved academic performance. Conversely, negative emotions like anxiety and frustration may disrupt learning progress and negatively affect focus and comprehension. Students’ emotional experiences in online learning sessions are critical for understanding their educational trajectories and can significantly impact the effectiveness of instructional design.

According to Al Almi, Fatma, Aaron, and colleagues (2019), in group learning environments, emotions are influenced by social interactions among peers, which can create both challenges and opportunities for learning. Emotional dynamics such as enjoyment and frustration play a crucial role in students’ ability to regulate their efforts and achieve learning goals. Therefore, implementing effective strategies to foster positive emotional engagement is essential for creating supportive virtual classroom environments.

Research Method

The present study was conducted in 2023 with a qualitative approach, focusing on lived experiences, using the method of virtual ethnography. The statistical population included all classroom groups in Nehbandan City that were active on the Shad network. Using purposive non-probability sampling and a set of specific criteria aligned with the research objectives, the sample was selected. Accordingly, the sample consisted of 4 Shad groups, covering a total of 150 students and 25 teachers from various educational levels.

Accordingly, the first step was to identify schools and active groups on the Shad network. Then, through coordination with school principals and teachers, groups were selected that represented the target population in terms of diversity of educational levels and teaching activities. Teachers and students participating in these groups were included in the study after giving informed consent.

The groups did not have a fixed or exact number of members, as membership in Shad groups is dynamic and flexible based on educational needs. The only available identifiers were the participants’ mobile phone numbers and usernames; therefore, the main focus was on analyzing communication patterns and the influence of emotional and interactive factors on teacher-student relationships.

The main criteria for selecting the research sample included direct experience of attending online classes on the Shad network, the ability and willingness to participate in discussions, and diversity in gender.

Data collection tools comprised informal online interviews, content analysis of interactions such as chats, comments, messages, and the researcher’s digital field notes. Non-participatory observation was conducted over six months (from October 2023 to March 2024), during which behaviors, reactions, and emotional expressions (including the use of emojis, text messages, and audio files) were recorded in a field journal. Throughout the study period, interactions within the groups were recorded and analyzed, with the highest activity observed in December 2023 and February 2024. In total, 600 conversation topics and 1,200 interactions were analyzed.

All necessary measures were taken to protect the participants, prevent any potential risks, and respect their autonomy throughout this study. After fully informing the participants about the

observed groups and the research objectives, informed consent was obtained. No risks were observed for the participants, and appropriate ethical safeguards were implemented during the research process. These measures included

maintaining privacy, anonymizing participant data, and respecting their cultural and personal sensitivities. Access to the data was restricted to the research team and was used solely for scientific purposes.

Table 1. Summary of Research Methodology

Feature	Details
Research Population	All classroom groups in Nahbandan County are active on the Shad network.
Selected Groups	Four groups, including 150 student profiles.
Period	October 2023 to March 2024 (Mehr 1402 to Esfand 1402).
Sampling Method	Purposeful sampling.
Data Types	Recorded and observed group audio and text interactions.
Data Sources	Interviews with students and teachers of selected groups.
Data Analysis Method	Thematic coding, content analysis, followed by interpretation.

In this study, two analytical strategies were employed: quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis (Pryadi, 2020). These strategies were designed in response to the main research objective, which is to examine the internal functioning, participatory and emotional dynamics, and the use of Shad network capabilities by teachers and students. Thus, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses helped identify behavioral, participatory, and emotional patterns, providing comprehensive insights into teacher-student relationships within the Shad digital environment. This approach also facilitated identifying existing capacities or barriers in emotional communications within this online educational context.

The capacity of the Shad network to facilitate emotional and participatory interactions between

teachers and students was examined. A descriptive quantitative content analysis was conducted on discussion topics and thematic categories. Specifically, discussion topics were analyzed to understand the different interventions of participants within each topic. Qualitative textual data from Shad messages were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques to clarify participatory and emotional dynamics within this virtual community.

The resulting data were organized into frequency tables showing the number of interactions within each identified topic and category. Quantitative content analysis techniques were used alongside qualitative analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data (Krippendorff, 2004).

Table 2. Frequency of Messages by Identified Topics and Textual Categories

Feature	Count	Percentage
Number of selected groups	25	100%
Number of personal profiles	150	100%
Number of students	150	100%
Number of interviewed teachers	25	100%
Number of recorded text interactions	620	45%
Number of recorded audio interactions	750	55%

Data analysis was conducted using the software ATLAS. Ti 22.1.

Data entry into the software was carried out by two researchers who independently coded the textual, audio, visual data, chats, observations, and interviews to ensure reliability and validity in the process (Fernandez-Amaya, 2021; Kligler-Wilenchik & Tennenbaum, 2021). Following this, a content analysis of the messages was performed, and a list of common topics was identified based on the discussion subjects extracted from the initial message set during the months of Mehr and Aban (September–November).

The initial coding involved selecting relevant text segments and assigning short descriptive codes. Subsequently, these codes were grouped into themes; after coding a substantial portion of the data, the codes were categorized. The findings were discussed, and consensus was reached through triangulation on the initial thematic categories and their subcategories or related codes. The next step involved independently classifying discussion topics for selected months. Any disagreements were resolved through a collective agreement.

Using an inductive approach, the main themes, features, and categories emerging from the participants' data and statements were identified. After this initial phase, a preliminary codebook was developed containing 15 themes and subcodes. These codes formed the basis for achieving consensus in the subsequent coding and analysis stages.

To assess the content validity of the codes, both the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and the Content Validity Index (CVI) were employed. At this stage, the initial codes and themes were evaluated by a panel of 10 experts in educational sciences and curriculum planning, all experienced in qualitative research.

The Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated using Lawshe's formula (1975):

$$cvr = \frac{n_e - N/2}{N/2}$$

Where:

n_e = number of experts who rated the item as "essential"

$N/2$ = total number of experts

According to the Lawshe table, the minimum acceptable Content Validity Ratio (CVR) for 10 experts is 0.62. Only the codes with CVR values exceeding this threshold were retained and moved to the next stage.

To assess the Content Validity Index (CVI), a 4-point Likert scale was used to evaluate each code's clarity, simplicity, and relevance. The CVI for each code was calculated based on the proportion of experts who rated the code as 3 or 4 (relevant/very relevant). Codes with a CVI value equal to or greater than 0.79 were retained in the final version of the codebook.

Findings

The analysis of the data revealed various functions of the Shad groups within the educational environment. The formal function of these groups, which is the main purpose of their formation, includes educational activities and school-related information dissemination. However, there are other uses beyond this official function, defined by the users themselves. These include requesting information, providing services, and even creating a supportive and emotional space among students and teachers. These uses were categorized as "informal uses of the network," which, although not among the primary objectives of the groups, are nevertheless highly significant.

Formal Uses of the Shad Group: Information Dissemination Function

In the formal use, which is the primary reason for establishing the Shad groups, the role of the group administrator is very prominent. The group administrator is responsible for informing members about curricula, meetings, and extracurricular activities. They share information regarding sessions, workshops, exam schedules, and important announcements within the group.

The administrator's activity is noticeably higher at the beginning of the academic year (for example, in Mehr and Aban months), as more coordination and communication are required.

The administrator also manages the group by restricting discussion topics that are inconsistent with the group's educational objectives. They remind members that unrelated topics (such as political discussions or advertisements) should be taken outside the group and addressed privately.

Table 3. Formal Uses of the Shad Group

Teaching Activity Category	Sub-codes	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Q&A	C01/1	45	45.5%
Sharing Educational Resources (files and links)	C01/2, C01/3, C01/4	30	27%
Online explanations and teaching	C01/5, C01/6	20	18%
Conducting Online Exams	C01/7, C01/8	8	7.2%
Educational Grouping and Projects	C01/9, C01/10	5	4.5%
Educational Discussions	C01/11	3	2.7%
Notices and Reminders	C01/12	3	2.7%
Total		114	100%

Interaction Analysis

The analysis of interactions within the Shad groups revealed that between 70% to 90% of discussion topics were accompanied by one to a maximum of two or three interactions from different participants. These interactions mostly consisted of questions and answers related to

educational matters or information sharing. The analysis of topics related to these interactions showed that the Shad groups play a fundamental role in disseminating information about educational programs, class schedules, and extracurricular activities.

Table 4. Analysis of Interaction-Related Topics

Type of Interaction	Frequency	Percentage
Educational interactions (questions and answers)	450	45%
Social interactions (everyday conversations)	300	30%
Advisory interactions	200	20%
Other interactions (file sharing, news)	50	5%
Total	1000	100%

Informal Use: Emotional Support and Facilitating Communication

Beyond formal use, the Shad groups have also

become a space for emotional support and informal interactions. These groups provide a platform for expressing problems, exchanging

opinions, and even receiving psychological support among teachers and students.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that Shad groups have not only been successful in fulfilling their educational and informational roles but have also evolved into effective social and emotional spaces for interactions between teachers and students. This demonstrates the network's capacity to foster positive and meaningful connections in the educational environment.

Student and Teacher Perspectives

One student stated:

"The Shad group is more than just an online class for me. Here, I can talk about my problems with the teachers, and I feel that I am cared for. Whenever I had a question or faced a problem, I always received quick and supportive responses."

Another student said:

"Sometimes, when I am home alone or feeling lonely, I connect with my friends and teachers through the Shad group. This group helps me feel like I am part of a community and that I can face all school and life challenges."

One teacher expressed:

"The Shad group allows me to address not only teaching but also the personal and emotional issues of students. Many students feel more comfortable sharing their problems in this group, and I can provide them with advice or necessary support."

Another teacher remarked:

"Happiness and a sense of belonging among students increase through the use of the Shad group. I not only teach lessons but also feel that this group plays an important role in creating a supportive and warm environment when I see students supporting each other and openly discussing various issues."

Informal Use of the Shad Group in Education: Alternative Applications

As mentioned, the main purpose of using Shad groups by teachers and students is to convey educational information and facilitate learning strategies and communication within the educational community. This social network is preferred as a two-way communication tool that provides quick access to information among a community of users, especially when immediate support may be needed.

The analysis of conversations in Shad groups showed that users' primary interest in this network is mainly based on educational and learning needs, particularly for exchanging educational resources, academic counseling, and guidance related to exams. Another informal use of Shad groups is the exchange of experiences and educational materials between teachers and students. Many students have used these groups to request and share educational resources such as books, lesson files, and useful links to strengthen their learning.

In this alternative use, users also shared teaching and learning experiences and resources. For example, some teachers and students shared tips for learning specific subjects, practice tests, and resources for exam preparation in the group. This indicates that the groups serve as a supportive and educational space to help each other achieve learning goals.

One student stated:

"In the Shad group, I can always ask my questions, and teachers respond very quickly. When I prepare for exams, it is very helpful that teachers share additional resources and important tips with us. This group is not just an online class for me, but a great resource for further learning."

Another student said:

"I use the Shad group to find educational

resources like books or useful links. When I don't understand a lesson, I can connect with teachers or even classmates to get help. This group is an excellent tool for my learning."

One teacher expressed:

"For me, the Shad group is not just a communication tool, but acts as an educational space. I share educational resources such as books and instructional videos with students. This group allows me to interact informally with

students and help them prepare for exams."

Another teacher said:

"One of the main uses of the Shad group for me and the students is exchanging educational experiences. When students have difficulties in lessons, they can easily ask questions and I or their classmates can answer. This group has become a supportive and educational environment for everyone."

Table 5. Alternative Uses

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code
Communication through tools	Expressing emotions in various ways	- Using stickers, voice messages, and text messages to express feelings (e.g., sending text messages to show happiness or sadness).
	Use of affectionate phrases	- Using affectionate expressions such as "dear students," "my dear daughter," "my hardworking girl," and stickers of flowers, butterflies, and encouragement to create a positive feeling.
	Showing empathy toward students	- Expressing sympathy and wishing health for students facing problems like illness.
Motivation reinforcement	Use of encouraging and motivational phrases	- Sending messages like "I am proud of you," "You will succeed," and motivational stickers.
	Thanking students for their efforts	- Thanking and appreciating on-time or correct completion of assignments, along with stickers and encouraging messages.

Informal Use of the Shad Group: Emotional and Social Support

One of the informal functions of using the Shad group is providing emotional and social support. This category emerges from requests related to activities beyond the educational and informational objectives of the group. Some group members seek assistance for specific tasks or help each other in administrative and academic processes. For example, certain members request companionship during administrative procedures or help with completing school assignments.

These types of support, which can be seen as social support among group members, are commonly observed alongside sharing educational information and resources. One example of this support is expressing sympathy and empathy in

response to a member's personal difficulties. For instance, if a member faces issues with administrative or academic processes or encounters problems such as illness or family matters, other members typically offer suggestions to help. This kind of support reflects the human and social dimensions of using the Shad group.

Moreover, in some cases where a student or teacher encounters problems (such as illness or family issues), other members provide emotional support and offer help, such as preparing meals, taking care of children, or accompanying them through educational stages. These types of support are considered one of the informal and social functions of the Shad group, highlighting the human and emotional aspects of this platform.

One student stated:

"When I had a problem or felt lonely, friends and teachers in the Shad group were always ready to help. Even when I was sick, many asked if I needed assistance. One of the students even offered to send me hot meals. These emotional supports were very important to me and made me feel that there is always someone behind me."

Another student expressed:

"In the Shad group, we don't just focus on lessons. When a member encounters a problem or something bad happens, others send messages or propose solutions. When I had an administrative issue, one of the teachers offered to accompany me through the school registration process. These kinds of support are very valuable."

One teacher said:

"In the Shad group, we always try to support each other. If anyone has a problem, whether

academic or personal, we all try to find solutions. For example, when one student had a family issue, other students offered their help. These behaviors show that the Shad group is more than just an educational space and has become a supportive network."

Another teacher mentioned:

"Many times, we receive requests for help with personal and family matters in the Shad group. If a student is in a difficult situation, other members quickly offer assistance. For example, a few days ago, one student could not attend school due to illness, and we posted a message in the group; everyone volunteered to send food and medicine. This demonstrates that Shad is not just an educational tool, but a place where people can receive emotional and social support when needed."

Table 6. Emotional and Social Support

Selective Code	Core Code	Open Code
Use of text messages	Expressing emotions and connection	Using text messages and stickers to convey emotional feelings (e.g., S145, S2, S967).
Use of voice messages	Expressing emotions and connection	Sending voice messages and stickers to create an emotional connection and express feelings (e.g., S3, S8).
Use of stickers	Expressing emotions and connection	Using stickers along with text messages to express affection and strengthen bonds (e.g., S2).

Barriers and Challenges to Emotional Communication in the Shad Platform

Although the "Shad" virtual platform serves as a medium for educational interaction and, to some extent, emotional engagement between teachers and students, several challenges hinder the development of effective emotional connections. Participants in this study pointed to various structural, technical, and time-related limitations that reduce the quality of emotional interaction in this context.

One of the most significant challenges is the

lack of face-to-face interaction. In online environments, non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, which are essential for conveying emotions, are often lost. Teachers and students stated that this impairs mutual understanding and empathy, creating a sense of psychological distance. One student remarked that "the virtual space feels like a wall between us and our teachers."

Another commonly mentioned issue is the perceived insecurity of the Shad platform. Some teachers expressed reluctance to share personal

or emotionally sensitive messages due to the public nature of group communications, as these messages could be viewed by others. This lack of privacy discourages open emotional expression.

Time constraints during virtual classes also emerged as a key challenge. With a strong focus on covering academic content in a limited time frame, little opportunity remains for informal conversations or emotional exchange. Both teachers and students noted that there is rarely

time to build meaningful interpersonal connections.

Finally, technical issues and delayed feedback were seen as negatively affecting emotional communication. Unstable internet connections or delayed responses from teachers often interrupt the immediacy required for effective emotional support, something that is easily achievable in face-to-face classrooms.

Table 7. Barriers to Emotional Communication in Shad

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code
Lack of face-to-face interaction	Limitations of virtual communication	The absence of physical presence limits emotional expression through facial cues, tone, and body language.
Insecurity of the Shad space	Lack of privacy in messaging	Messages can be seen by others, reducing the willingness to express personal or emotional feelings.
Time limitations	Insufficient time for emotional bonding	Short class durations focused on content delivery leave little room for emotional interaction.
Delayed feedback	Technical and communication issues	Internet problems and delayed responses hinder immediate emotional support.

Conclusion

This study, utilizing a virtual ethnographic approach, explored the emotional and educational interactions between teachers and students on the *Shad* platform. The findings indicate that *Shad* not only serves as an educational tool but also provides a rich environment for fostering emotional and social connections among its users. These dual functions make *Shad* an effective platform for both virtual learning and cultivating human relationships in digital spaces.

One of the most significant findings is *Shad*'s role in creating a positive and supportive emotional atmosphere. Teachers have used this platform to offer psychological and social support to students. For example, the data analysis revealed that messages expressing empathy, gratitude, and encouragement have played a key role in enhancing students' mental well-being and motivation. These findings are in

line with the work of Poepma and Van der Poel (2023), which highlights the positive impact of social networks on mental health.

In support of these results, several studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of social media on educational and emotional interactions. For instance, Abbas, Aman, Nurunnabi, and colleagues (2019) argued that digital environments are capable of fostering deep emotional connections among users and improving learning quality. Similarly, Nasushen (2022) found that virtual human interactions—especially those facilitated by tools such as messaging apps or educational groups—can strengthen a sense of solidarity and participation.

Moreover, Swinkels, Hoeve, and colleagues (2023) emphasized that online communication tools, such as messengers and educational networks, can help users overcome communication barriers and maintain more sustainable and effective interactions. Their

research also showed that social networks in education, by enabling the sharing of information and resources, enhance emotional engagement between students and instructors.

The findings of this study revealed that the *Shad* platform, as an educational environment, fulfills three main functions:

1. Educational Function: Teachers use *Shad* for planning and conducting classes, sharing educational resources, and managing online assessments. Results show that over 70% of interactions between teachers and students on the platform are educational. These include exchanging lesson notes, providing instructional explanations, and answering questions related to the curriculum.

2. Informal Communication and Resource Sharing: *Shad* has also evolved into a space for experience-sharing, informal exchange of resources, and daily communication among users. This type of interaction, especially among students, has served as a means of sharing non-academic information and even seeking advice from teachers. These findings highlight the platform's flexibility in meeting diverse user needs.

3. Emotional and Social Connection: Using a virtual ethnographic approach, the study showed that beyond its formal educational role, *Shad* serves as a platform that strengthens human relationships in a digital environment. The results suggest that the platform provides a supportive and adaptable space that enables both teachers and students to benefit from its educational and emotional capacities.

In the elucidation of this study's findings, it is argued that emotional and participatory dynamics play a vital role in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the *Shad* educational platform. Using virtual ethnography, the study shows that patterns of social

interaction, instructional methods, and digital infrastructures can significantly influence learner motivation, group cohesion, and satisfaction. Furthermore, adopting personalized, flexible, and multimedia-based learning approaches responds to learners' diverse needs and fosters a sense of belonging and engagement.

Related research has shown that identifying students' learning styles and preferences—including the use of e-content and self-directed projects—improves the quality of education and can serve as a foundation for developing more joyful and active learning approaches. In today's digital age, where online education is rapidly expanding, learning is no longer confined to content delivery and rote memorization. Based on the results of this study, the quality of human relationships, interaction, emotional atmosphere, and students' active participation in online learning environments significantly affect the depth and effectiveness of learning.

Emotional dynamics and academic participation in the *Shad* platform are often neglected in the design of virtual education, yet these components strengthen motivation, interaction, and a sense of belonging among both students and teachers. This study created an opportunity for learners to express and share emotions during the learning process. In parallel, the creatively designed and engaging environment of *Shad* increased students' enjoyment and intrinsic desire to learn. Accordingly, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education provide an accessible and user-friendly infrastructure for both teachers and students to utilize *Shad*. Additionally, given the importance of emotional communication in enhancing participation, future researchers are encouraged to analyze emotional dynamics within learner–teacher interactions in both interactive virtual classrooms and gamified learning settings.

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