



The Secret Ingredient for Online Education: Human Interaction

Five strategies to increase student
engagement, retention, and success

Enhance outcomes for students—and your business—with human interaction

Student engagement is a crucial challenge for virtual education providers of all kinds. Whether you're a massive open online course (MOOC) company, an online tutoring or language learning business, or an EdTech developer, it's essential to keep participants focused and motivated throughout their experience. After all, students can only benefit from your course if they stay with it long enough to reach the end.

Disengagement and distraction aren't just a problem for students; they affect the business as well. Students who fail to benefit from their first course are unlikely to sign up for another, or to recommend your company to their friends. Low rates of conversion, course completion, and retention mean that most of your revenue comes from a small share of your customers—leaving your full revenue potential untapped.

That's why human interaction is so critical. No matter how rich your asynchronous resources are—recorded media, interactive student work, quizzes, and so on—**there's no substitute for the personalized guidance and support of real people**, both instructors and peer students, who are sharing the experience with you.

In this ebook, we'll discuss five strategies to improve online classroom engagement by using voice, video, and messaging to enable rich human interaction—cost-effectively and at scale.

Why **human interaction matters** for successful online education

Even as learning has evolved beyond traditional in-person classes to encompass cassette tapes, then computer-assisted learning, then adaptive learning and AI-powered tools, **human interaction has remained vital** to enhance learning outcomes for students while generating more value for providers. Students and teachers need to be able to hear each other's voices, see each other's faces, and exchange messages in real time to develop a personal connection, deepen the exchange of information, enable a more personalized experience, and truly build success together.

For students

Human interaction enhances learning outcomes for students by improving both engagement and retention. It lets you create a community where students are supported by teachers and peers, helping them feel safer asking questions and making mistakes. At the same time, friendly competition can help ignite a passion for learning. As the saying goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

For instructors

Instructors can play their own role more effectively by providing specific answers to specific student questions, providing feedback and guidance of each student's progress and mastery of the material, and offering positive reinforcement to help students stay motivated. And better teaching makes for better learning.

For providers

Human interaction can make a powerful difference on business outcomes for providers as well. By enhancing learning experiences and reducing your churn rate, you can increase lifetime customer value and drive new referrals and conversions. A human interaction capability can also let you complement your current asynchronous learning courses with additional services that unlock new business models and monetization opportunities.

What about bots and artificial intelligence-powered tutors?

Providers are sometimes tempted to try to achieve the benefits of human interaction without involving actual humans. But automated tools fall short in several respects. Offering only standardized and canned responses, they're not flexible or intelligent enough to address every question from a curious student, or engage in deeper discussion of nuanced content to foster student enthusiasm. Lacking empathy, they can't build student confidence or engage them in more social or emotional ways. While AI can be useful for empowering educators with data collection and analysis, they'll never replace human teachers.

There's no question that human interaction in the form of live, real-time voice, video, and messaging is essential for the success of students, instructors, and providers alike. But doing it cost-effectively, at scale, can be a challenge.

In the following pages, we'll look at the [strategies and tools used by providers around the world](#)—to guide and inform your own human interaction capability.

1.

Create a virtual community for social interactions

One Agora customer, **Hallo**, added a variety social features to its platform to enable interesting interactions among students and teachers.

Group lessons

Students can invite their friends to join them, making their lessons more fun and affordable. For Hallo, these new participants can also become new customers if their experience inspires them to sign up for their own account.

Hop-ons

Teachers can invite their subscribers to join a stream for free to discuss material and practice together, offering further support for learning and strengthening the teacher-student bond.

Tip your teacher

Students can donate coins to support their teachers and send premium messages on a live stream, just as students in a physical classroom might bring in an apple or coffee gift card for their favorite instructor.

By making the experience more engaging and fun, this kind of human element increases the likelihood that students will stay with it and complete the course.

2

Complement expert teachers with lower-cost assistants and tutors



Koolearn, the online learning subsidiary of New Oriental, uses a scalable dual teacher model to combine the benefits of cost-effective online learning with the engaging nature of human interaction. Each course is led by a single experienced instructor using an online learning platform to maximize their reach and coverage. This expert is coupled with a designated teaching assistant who manages and engages students in an in-person classroom, answering their questions and supporting their learning. This model makes it possible for Koolearn to scale quickly without the need to hire an expert instructor for each classroom, while still enabling highly engaging human interaction for each student.

Another provider uses a similar approach to support an online-only model. The company complements higher-paid online instructors with lower-cost professional tutors. Located in 185 countries outside the U.S., these tutors can be hired at a lower cost compared with a U.S.-based tutor, enabling more affordable prices for students. The rate of a tutoring session averages about \$15/hour, and can be even lower for a U.S.-based student learning with a foreign language tutor. At the same time, this model enables a more diversified learning experience; students can choose their tutors based on their individual specialty and teaching style.

3

Maximize learning efficiency with a flipped classroom

Another way to enable student engagement at scale is to blend cost-efficient learning in large classes with smaller live groups for further discussion.

One education provider takes this approach for a hybrid learning model, combining in-person group lessons at onsite centers with one-on-one online sessions with their choice of skilled teachers. In this way, students enjoy the lively and collaborative nature of in-person learning while also benefiting from the personalization and flexibility of a one-on-one live class.

Another major language learning provider applies a similar model in an online-only context. In this flipped classroom, students learn static content such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure using a self-paced asynchronous platform, then practice speaking in live online classes. Requiring less overhead than onsite learning, this approach can be highly cost-efficient for providers while allowing greater scheduling flexibility for students.

4.

Supercharge human interactions with engagement analysis

As providers incorporate human interaction into their courses, AI tools can help them make the most of the human element for more effective instruction and a better student experience.

One provider uses AI-powered engagement analysis to maximize attentiveness. An emotion recognition technology is used to analyze students' level of focus and happiness, then provides feedback to teachers on which content and teaching techniques are working best in their sessions. This helps increase the effectiveness of both teaching and learning.

Another provider uses natural language processing (NLP) and voice recognition technologies to analyze engagement between language teachers and students. The system can determine how much teachers are speaking, how long they are pausing, how often they encourage students to speak, and how well students are using the target language. This information can offer teachers valuable guidance to enhance their lesson design and classroom management, and to ensure that all students are gaining equal opportunities to participate.

5

Monetize a large user base

The experience of another leading online language learning company demonstrates the potential of live human interaction to drive revenue. The company's business originally centered on a free translation software tool. Building on its popularity, the company then began offering live interactive language learning and tutoring services to help students understand how to use the vocabulary being translated.

As it introduced its human interaction element, the company adopted a dual-teacher model to improve teacher-student engagement and enhance overall learning outcomes in a large class setting. In this approach, one experienced teacher delivers content remotely, while a teaching assistant facilitates students in a smaller group by answering questions via real-time messaging or live video chatting.

In this way, the company has enabled rapid revenue growth through a student-friendly model that adds value to the learning experience, rather than an ad-based model that distracts from the experience. Putting student value and outcomes at the center of their model makes it possible for the company to build a more sustainable and successful business for the long run.

Delivering the **human element** with Agora

As a leading online learning technology provider, Agora helps virtual education businesses of all kinds incorporate human engagement into their students' experience.

The Agora Education Solution puts the full range of real-time engagement tools at your fingertips, including:



Audio — High-fidelity, HD-quality sound enables clear communication with ultra-low latency for classrooms of any size.



Video — HD-quality video and smooth, uninterrupted 48kHz sampling up to 192 kbps bitrate brings teachers and students face-to-face from anywhere, on any device.



Chat — Chat and signaling with ultra-low latency and high concurrency provide additional opportunities for classroom interaction. Messages sent while the recipient is offline are cached for delivery on reconnection so teachers and students don't miss a thing.



Whiteboard — Teachers can upload files in PPT, HTML5, and other compatible formats, and engage students through real-time communication and collaboration tools such as visual tracking, multiple brushes, erasers, undo/redo, selections, text formatting, laser pointer, annotation labels, and more.



Classroom management — Polling, breakout room, hand-raising features enable instructors to offer a rich virtual classroom experience with ample opportunities for student participation. Class roster, user accounts, and access control help teachers maintain an effective learning environment.

To prevent lags and disconnects from interfering with learning, guaranteed 99.99% availability is complemented by ultra-low transmission latency via the fully dedicated Agora Software Defined Real-Time Network (SD-RTN). More than 200 Agora points of presence (POP) around the world ensure consistent coverage wherever students and instructors connect.

Designed to go live in a short timeframe, the Agora SDK lets you quickly integrate real-time engagement into your MOOC, online tutoring or language learning experience, or EdTech solution to capture fast-moving virtual education opportunities. Low-code development enables even companies with limited technology resources to tailor the solution to their needs. Support for Web, iOS, Android, Windows, and Mac platforms ensures broad reach and coverage for students using all types of devices.



Schedule a demo today to see how Agora can **deliver the power of human interaction** for your students and instructors.

Schedule a demo today.

Agora, Inc. US Headquarters
Santa Clara, California | +1-408-879-5885

Agora is a leading video, voice and live interactive streaming platform, helping developers deliver rich in-app experiences—including embedded voice and video chat, real-time recording, interactive live streaming, and real-time messaging. Agora makes real-time engagement ubiquitous, allowing everyone to interact with anyone, in any app, anytime and anywhere.

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