The Impact of COVID-19 Crisis on Teaching and Learning English

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Abstract: **The whole world is becoming increasingly interconnected by all means. The COVID Pandemic has affected all people all over the whole world regardless of race, gender, nationality, income, and levels of education. Education was strongly affected by this health crisis, schools and universities were closed; thus teachers and students had to abandon their physical classrooms and move to online education. Sustaining the quality of education has become a challenge during this transitional time, and supportive environment was needed to focus on learning and teaching.**

Keywords: (**Pandemic / E-Learning / Outbreak / Lockdown / Challenges / Impact**).

1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the coronavirus outbreak, labeling it a global pandemic.[1] The devastating impacts were felt worldwide, with many countries temporarily shutting down most sectors to help curb its spread. Accordingly, this presented significant challenges to the education sector as teachers and students adapted to the new changes. For this research paper, I will focus on the impacts of COVID-19 on the learning and teaching of English. The research will also aim to establish the challenges and difficulties teachers and learners face as they move to online teaching and learning and show how the teaching of English has changed before and after the pandemic, primarily focusing on the four skills of English language – speaking, writing, listening and reading.

Literature Review

The teaching of English is considered a mandatory practice for many school curriculums worldwide, considering the importance placed on knowing the language. Moreover, according to research, knowledge of English, especially in Arab countries like Kuwait, guarantees the availability of employment opportunities, higher education, traveling, and even increases the chances of a better life.[2] However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, many schools were forced to halt their services. Though the teaching of other subjects was affected, the teaching and learning of English experienced significant impact considering the specific skills – listening, reading, writing, and speaking - that certify that one is actually literate in English.[3]

The distance education concept is not new in contemporary society. Over the years, many governments have sort appropriate alternatives to the typical face-to-face teaching. These concerns initiated plans of introducing online learning and developing infrastructure to support its dispensation. For instance, the idea of online learning was introduced in

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[1] Thumvichit A. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN TIMES OF CRISIS: TEACHER AGENCY IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC-FORCED ONLINE EDUCATION. Teaching English with Technology. 2021;21(2):14-37.

[2] Akbari Z. Current challenges in teaching/learning English for EFL learners: The case of junior high school and high school. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences. 2015 Aug 3; 199:394-401.

[3] Wallace T, Stariha WE, Walberg HJ. Teaching speaking, listening, and writing. International Academy of Education; 2004.

Kuwait when the Ministry of Education (MOE) established the Strategic Plan (2005-2025) in 2004[4]. However, due to the lack of a quality education system (education context, quality of schools and leadership, and quality of teachers and their teaching skills), the country has failed to successfully implement these strategies, significantly impacting the administering of instruction during the pandemic.[5].

Research shows that English teachers face numerous challenges in ensuring effective language learning occurs. These challenges, culminated with existing problems such as different literacy levels, have been extended to the students. As a result, many of them are likely to experience less development in their speaking and writing skills.[6]. Therefore, many teachers have raised questions on whether online learning is the best way to create a learned society. However, not everybody is against the practice. Some instructors believe that the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how effective online learning can be in ensuring the continuity of education, especially during a crisis[7]. English teachers in different countries have instituted strategies to ensure that students fully develop all four language skills. However, the loss of in-person learning has introduced numerous challenges on teaching and learning English as many countries lack the appropriate infrastructure to ensure its propagation.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study will utilize a qualitative research design employing the narrative inquiry approach, which helps reveal unique perspectives and ensure a deeper understanding of a given situation.[8]. According to definition, narrative inquiry entails establishing the experiences of an individual by revealing their lived experiences from their perspectives through interviews which are then arranged to form a chronological narrative.[9]. As the challenges presented by the pandemic are unique, the narrative inquiry approach will be most suitable to understand the challenges teachers and students of the English language face during this period.

Apart from narrative inquiry, the research will also rely on online sources, conducting an internet search to establish the impacts of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning of English worldwide. In addition, the approach will establish the challenges English teachers and learners face and demonstrate how learning and teaching of English have changed before and after the pandemic. Such will help explain why learners show differences in the development of the four essential skills of the English language.

3. RESULTS

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Teaching and Learning of English

The COVID-19 outbreak has significantly impacted the teaching and learning of the English language on various fronts. Such is because many teachers and students were not adequately prepared for a crisis of this magnitude. In this regard, stakeholders have demonstrated reluctance when it comes to shifting from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning[10]. However, the pandemic's impacts vary depending on whether they act on teachers or students. For instance, COVID-19 has resulted in a transition in instructors' teaching and assessment practices.[11]As aforementioned, many countries were not ready for the devastating results of the pandemic. Teachers were caught unaware as governments

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[4] Alhouti I. Education during the pandemic: the case of Kuwait. Journal of Professional Capital and Community. 2020 Oct 27.

[5] Alhouti "Education during the pandemic: the case of Kuwait," p 215.

[6] Wallace et al. "Teaching speaking, listening and writing," p 7.

[7] Thumvichit A. "ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN TIMES OF CRISIS: TEACHER AGENCY IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC-FORCED ONLINE EDUCATION."

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[10] Zou C, Li P, Jin L. Online college English education in Wuhan against the COVID-19 pandemic: Student and teacher readiness, challenges and implications. PloS one. 2021 Oct 1;16(10): e0258137.

[11] Zou et al. "Online college English education in Wuhan against the COVID-19 pandemic: Student and teacher readiness, challenges and implications" p 16.

initiated the closing down of all learning institutions impacting more than 1.6 billion children and youths in 161 countries[12]. The transition to online teaching required teachers to adopt new teaching and assessment practices, especially in learning the English language. For instance, practical teaching of the English language requires teachers to institute extensive amounts of time in language learning and a variety of experiences in writing, speaking, listening, and reading[13]. However, the eradication of face-to-face teaching impairs teachers' ability to institute these practices as part of their teaching process. Therefore, they are forced to create alternative teaching and assessment techniques to ensure effective learning.

Secondly, the pandemic has fostered the adoption of technology in the teaching and learning of English, warranting significant changes in practices used to ensure instructor preparedness. According to a study of Kuwait conducted by Alhouti, many teachers in the country are technologically illiterate[14]. Many countries, especially the developing nations, face a similar predicament primarily because instructor training programs do not concentrate on technological savviness. In addition, the programs do not equip teachers with the knowledge of various remote teaching and learning strategies[15]. However, COVID-19 has warranted remote learning needing teachers to rely on technology to ensure education. Similarly, students are required to embrace technology as part of learning. English teachers have been forced to adopt these changes and seek mechanisms to ensure effective learning of the four English language skills. Consequently, learners experience less language development for speaking and writing. According to Susan Holden, a renowned teacher and teacher trainer, teachers are likely to talk more in online teaching compared to traditional teaching[16]. The reduction of learner involvement, mainly through speaking, impairs students' chances of developing speaking as a skill impacting the effective teaching and learning of the English language.

Challenges Associated with Moving to Online Learning and Teaching of English

Based on the illustrated impacts, one notes that teachers and students face tremendous challenges in teaching and learning through online platforms, especially of the English language. A narrative inquiry approach was utilized, which entailed watching videos of teachers explaining their challenges when dispensing English lessons today. Susan Holden established the inability to acquire learning materials as a significant challenge for teachers as they transition to online teaching[17]. According to Holden, many English teachers are used to using print media as their primary source of information. Though a considerable number of online sources are considered credible, English teachers are still skeptical, opting for traditional print material[18]. The fondness of print media is further exacerbated by the fact that pedagogical training does not incorporate learning the various technological tools in their curriculum. Therefore, many teachers are challenged when it comes to consolidating learning material from online sources[19].

English teachers also argue that online teaching promotes disengagement with the students presenting a challenge in tracking how effectively the students have learned[20]. A study conducted by Zou and his colleagues sort to establish the unique problems English teachers face when teaching online classes. The study incorporated a narrative inquiry approach asking English teachers to narrate their individual experiences. One of the teachers said;

"How to engage students in online classes is a big headache because it's challenging to carry out class activities. Some students are too shy to turn on their microphones, especially in speaking tasks[21]."

The experience sums up how online classes promote student disengagement, precisely because of teacher absence. Such challenges impact how students develop the various skills of the English language. For instance, when the students shy from speaking on the microphone and airing their questions, their ability to develop speaking skills dwindles. In addition, as the dispensation of online classes does not entail extensive writing like traditional face-to-face teaching, students are

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[12] Saavedra J. Educational challenges and opportunities of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic [Internet]. World Bank Blogs. 2020 [cited 11 January 2022]. Available from: https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/educational-challenges-and-opportunities-covid-19-pandemic.

[13] Wallace et al. "Teaching speaking, listening and writing," p 8.

[14] Alhouti "Education during the pandemic: the case of Kuwait," p 217.

[15] Saavedra J. "Educational challenges and opportunities of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic."

[16] Holden S. Teaching English today - Before, during, and after Covid-19. SBS Livraria International; 2020.

[17] Holden S. "Teaching English today - Before, during and after Covid-19."

[18] Holden, "Teaching English today - Before, during and after Covid-19."

[19] Ibid Holden

[20] Ibid Zou et al. p 16.

[21] Ibid Zou et al. p 16.

likely to face difficulties when developing their writing skills. As effective learning of the English language entails the mastery of the four skills of language[22], teachers find it challenging to monitor student learning hence impairing their ability to achieve the learning objectives.

Many English teachers also encounter technical challenges associated with a poor internet connection making it difficult to effectively guide students in developing the English language skills of speaking, writing, reading, and listening[23]. According to a study conducted by McNamee and his colleagues, approximately 14.5 million Americans lack broadband connectivity[24]. The situation is only exacerbated in developing countries that lack the appropriate infrastructure to support the effective dispensation of online classes[25]. When it comes to promoting and ensuring effective learning of English skills, teachers are supposed to provide extensive amounts of time for learning[26]. However, this is not possible when they continually face poor internet connection. A college student narrates an instance where professors had to cancel classes because of technical difficulties and broadband problems[27]. These challenges impair English teachers' ability to successfully ensure students develop the mandatory skills of the English language, specifically speaking, writing, and listening.

However, these challenges are viewed from the teachers' and the students' perspectives. a study conducted by Zou and his colleagues incorporated over 2310 answers from students concerning the challenges they encountered in their online learning of English[28]. One of the significant challenges included poor internet connection, especially for students in rural areas and developing countries. Other students reported that they found learning without print textbooks quite challenging, while others argued that acquiring the electronic devices required for online learning was a significant challenge. Such is because of the impoverished conditions of many families, with research showing that 35% of households in the United States earn less than $30000 annually[29]. The condition is only exacerbated in developing countries meaning that the challenges are even more adverse in these countries. Other challenges include uneven communication as students' concentration is frequently affected by different factors in the home environment, unlike in the class setting[30]. Besides, many respondents in the study attributed online learning with inconvenience in note-taking and limitations in developing speaking and listening skills[31]. These challenges affect a broader population and present more adverse complications in countries like Kuwait that lack a quality education system and basic infrastructure to support the dispensation of online classes[32].

One notes the differences in teaching and learning the English language before and after the pandemic from the provided explanation. For instance, before the pandemic, English teachers significantly relied on print media to consolidate teaching and learning materials. However, the pandemic instituted technology as an essential component of modern teaching and learning. Such has forced teachers to adapt and become flexible, experimenting on new teaching and assessment techniques[33]. In addition, teachers, particularly those of the English language, have been forced to seek new mechanisms of ensuring student motivation, a critical component of ensuring effective learning of language[34].

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[22] Ibid Wallace et al., p 8.

[23] Ibid Zou et al. p 16.

[24] McNamee T, Willis J, Ganss KM, Ardoin S, Sansone VA. Don't Forget About Rural Higher Education Students: Addressing Digital Inequities During COVID-19. Diverse Issues in Higher Education. 2020 May;37(7):12-3.

[25] Ibid Alhouti, p 217.

[26] Wallace et al. "Teaching speaking, listening and writing," p 8.

[27] Iwai Y. Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic what do we gain and what do we lose when classrooms go virtual. Scientific American. 2020 Mar;13.

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[34] Wallace et al. "Teaching speaking, listening and writing," p 14.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the education sector, warranting changes in traditional face-to-face teaching. English language teachers have felt the impacts, considering that effective learning of these skills requires extensive student engagement, participation, interaction, and regular communication. The absence of these requirements results in numerous challenges unique from the teachers' and students' perspectives. However, the future looks brighter, with multiple studies suggesting several changes that can be instituted to boost the teaching and learning of language skills. For instance, teachers can incorporate real-time synchronous interaction and learning activities to increase student collaboration hence fostering the development of speaking and listening skills. In addition, teachers are encouraged to utilize teaching platforms and tools that support interactive and collaborative learning, ensuring a communicative environment in the multilingual online community. Therefore, though the pandemic impairs the effective teaching and knowledge of the English language, it provides a unique opportunity for teacher development by preparing them to embrace technology as the next front of education dispensation.

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