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RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges Faced by Primary English Language Teachers in Online Teaching during the Pandemic

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	The study aimed at exploring the challenges faced by English Language Teachers at primary level with regard to online teaching practices. It was a qualitative study. The study was conducted in the localities of Multan, Pakistan. The population of the study was the teachers who taught at primary level. A representative sample of twenty (20) school teachers was selected through purposive sampling technique. Moreover, the tool used to collect the data was a semi-structured interview. The interview was recorded using a recorder. It was, later on, transcribed and the relevant themes were generated that helped to get the results, that is to say, the method employed for data analysis was 'thematic analysis'. Finally, the results were presented in descriptive form. It was found that the teachers faced challenges in using devices, online assessment and feedback, classroom management etc. Finally, it was recommended that the teachers must be equipped with the skills through which they become able to deal effectively with all the aforementioned challenges.

Introduction

Teaching in general and language teaching in particular has gone through an immense change since the pandemic: COVID 19. Owing to pandemic the education system totally shifted from the physical to online classes. And, there lied the challenges that the teachers had to tackle vis-à-vis online learning and teaching. According to Lapada et. al. (2020) the pandemic has caused problems in many spheres and education is not an exception in this case. Owing to that the teachers had to face a number of barriers related to the use of technology, class management, feedback, task based learning, providing feedback and in making the classes interactive.

Online learning is not a good substitute of physical/on site or face to face classes but the things have been quite effectively arranged and managed by the stakeholders to make teaching and learning work effectively during the pandemic. In this connection, various resources were used. The resources include: audio, video, pictorial presentation of the concepts and documents. The students in this case are learning by going through the documents and by watching the videos. But, there have been number of issues that the students and the teachers are facing during the online sessions. This is something that needs to be explored. But, this study mainly focuses the problems faced by the teachers in case of online learning.

Literature Review

These resources are a great example of Clark and Mayer's (2016) definition of online learning. They defined it to be the learning or guidance that is provided to the students through the help of gadgets. Online learning and teaching mainly relies on internet which is very significant undoubtedly. Watson et. al. (2012), in this regard, defines online learning as the one that is web-based deliverance of education in which the process of education is led by teachers through internet. In this system the learners and the teachers are far away from each other and separate in terms of physical presence and geography. In order to facilitate them and to join them virtually internet based software is used.

Interestingly, online learning is divided in to two types of structures. The first, in this case, is synchronously structured system of online learning. In this type of system students are involved in communication within the session which are conducted using Google meet, zoom, Microsoft teams etc. This helps the learners to communicate at the given time with their peers and with their teachers as well, hence, the communication is similar to the one that takes place in face to face communication. Secondly, there is a system of asynchronous system of online learning. This system is marked as the one where there is no real time communication. This may involve using chat box of several social media platforms.

McBrien et. al. (2009) provides that distance education has been made easy through quick developments in science and technology. It has become possible to teach a learners sitting in the other corner of the world through a cell-phone (android phone) having internet connection. Cojocariu et. al. (2014) discusses a number of terms that refer to online learning and teaching. Those numerous terms are: open learning, computer-mediated learning, web-based learning, m-learning, blended learning etc. The most common characteristic of all these is that they all use computer and internet to teach the distant learners in the areas which are far away. As per the observation provided by Singh and Thurman (2019) online learning is more students centered, flexible and full of innovation.

The pandemic has made online learning a need rather than an option to be availed. The world has been quarantined: people have been limited to their homes. The pedagogical practices have gone from offline to online. Owing to such a critical

situation even the institutions that were reluctant to change have started accepting the change and started adapting to it. Undoubtedly, this has shown that online learning- it has limitations- has really a positive and effective side, as it has been the only mode through which learning has been taking palace since the outbreak of the pandemic in twenty nineteen (2019). Through this the limit or the concept of large class- being burdensome and challenging to teach- has been challenged as well. Through this the institutions became able to use the various forms of technology, that is to say, the online teaching related technologies more efficiently.

The institutions all over the world have digitalized their operations. Online learning in Pakistani universities has also increased immensely after the outbreak. The institutions had to find a solution to carry on the learning and teaching process for the students who were bound to their homes and could not go out to attend their classes physically. Through the change in the mode of communication everything under that changed. The things ranging from pedagogical practices to the level of assessment and classroom material completely changed, which was definitely challenging for the both learners and teachers. In Pakistan, most of the institutions started conducting classes through 'Google meet' and 'zoom' like apps. Moreover, there were also the institutes that took to the apps like 'Microsoft teams' which seems the most efficient of the three mentioned earlier. Carey (2020) adds that during the outbreak the stakeholders were not concerned with the methods through which the learners would be taught rather they were mainly concerned with the capability of the institutions to adept to the change and to adopt online leaning as the new normal.

Had there been any kind of resistance by the stakeholders vis-à-vis online mode of learning the world would have faced devastating consequences. But, within a short span of time the educationist and the stakeholders took the challenge seriously and tried to fill the widening gap created by the pandemic. The way they behaved to maintain the quality education in such crisis depicts their adapting capabilities. It was quite clear that the only solution was transition from offline classes to online ones. For sure, the transformation of the whole education system is quite difficult- even if one takes the challenge it would take a lot of time- but, at least, the teaching and learning was normalized as per the new normal and was given a push so that the students may not waste their time. But, there is, surely, need to renovate the things. According to Liguori and Winkler (2020) innovative solutions by the institutions and its related stakeholders can add to online learning and teaching and make it more effective.

There are also certain problems related to online learning and teaching. Firstly, the technologies, associated to online learning and teaching, are the major problem in this case. Both the learners and the teachers are not used to these technologies and cannot utilize them as per the provided guidelines. Therefore, they face problems in learning the provided concepts and are not able to achieve the set goals. Other problems related to these technologies are in terms of their installation, audio-visual output, problems in logging in, errors in downloading the class material etc. Secondly, Engaging students in the given tasks is also one of the major

problems in terms of online learning and teaching. It is sometimes quite difficult for the teachers to make the students work as per the task and to make learning productive. Thirdly, because being away, at a place that is at a long distance form the students, a teacher is not able to give personal attention to her or him. Finally, there are numerous issues like lack of proper assessment, lack of practice material as most of the classes are theoretical when it comes to online classes.

Material and Methods

Qualitative design of research was selected to study this problem. The population of the study was the primary English language teachers who were teaching English language to their students. In order to get a data a sample of twenty (20) English language teachers was selected through convenience sampling techniques. The tool to get the data was a semi-structured interview. Each participant was interviewed and the data was tape-recorded.

In order to get the data, the researcher had to visit a total of ten (10) schools and selected a sample representative sample of 20 English language teachers who were involved in teaching students online. The researcher collected the required data from the school management about the sample.

After the selection of sample, the participants were personally contacted as their consent was required in order to collect data from them. As a research ethic they were informed to withdraw at any stage. Moreover, they were informed regarding confidentiality of their identity and data. But, they were informed that the collected data would only be used in terms of this research and no in any way other than that.

The participants showed their consent. They were interviewed online through phone call as it was quite difficult to meet due to pandemic. The participants were asked the set questions and as they responded the researcher tried to further probe in to it.

Finally, the recorded interviews were transcribed and relevant themes were generated. This helped in finding out the required threads from the massive data. The relevant instances were quoted under the themes to study the problem in detail. The results were descriptively presented.

Findings

The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. This helped to divide the data into meaningful units. After the division of themes the related threads of data were extracted from its transcribed version. The results have been categorically discussed in the below given sections. The sections represent the challenges that the primary English Language teachers face in online classes.

Handling Applications

One of the major challenges with respect to online teaching was the lack of knowledge and proper use of applications related to online teaching. According to participants, it was quite difficult for them to choose from the limited number ofapplications. They had no idea, like how they could use zoom or Google meet. Therefore, the authorities at first asked them to record their lectures and upload them to the given Whatsapp groups where the students and their parents were added.This clearly depicts that the teachers were not used to such applications and that had definitely affected the swift flow of the classes.

Another participant, in this case added that they had to teach English language to the learners and just putting the relevant videos to the groups was not enough as it did not involve the learners in the process of language learning. The participant maintained that a language can only be mastered when practiced in a proper way and when the students get into contact with their mentors. The use of Whatsapp in this case was merely to keep them updated rather than teaching them in a proper and effective way. Therefore, the objective, making students skillful in English language, has greatly been affected and according to teachers effective learning is not taking place because of such lack of their skills in terms of technology.

Managing Online Classes

In addition to the above given challenge, the teachers have also been facing issues in managing their online classes. According to the participants there have been a number of issues related to classroom management. Undoubtedly, physical classes are full of challenges in terms of management; similarly, online ones are not an exception. The teachers added that they, at first, have to create the classes and have to wait for each and every student to join the class accordingly. In additions, there are issues like unmuted microphone, sudden camera opening issues, distortion of voice, turn taking, time management etc. Such challenges according to the teachers really hinder teaching and learning process.

Provision of Feedback

When it comes to feedback, the online classes lack it. Participants, in this connection, were of the view that the teachers are not able to provide proper feedback to their students. In online classes the system of feedback is quick and their face to face interaction helps the learners to review a great number of linguistic issues like pronunciation, accuracy, fluency etc. But, in online sessions it becomes a time taking process to asses every individual and provide feedback. They were of the view that the students, though they send their assignments, get their feedback almost after a week. And, that mark a major gap in terms of their learning as they could not redress their issue in a given time frame.

Issue in Supervision during Tasks

Most importantly, it is well known that the modern methods of language teaching involve tasks that help the students in polishing their linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. During, physical classes it is quite easy to supervise the way students work on the provided work sheets and to facilitate them in situations where they are stuck. The participants were of the view that during online classes the teachers face it quite difficult to supervise the students. Sometimes, they even have to ask their pupils to keep their cameras open so that they can view the way they work. In case of primary level students, as mentioned by the participants, they had to get help of parents in order to keep the students in surveillance so that they complete the assigned task by the given time. But, engaging parents in this connection is quite difficult as they are not available most of the times due to their busy schedules and workplace related assignments.

Lack of Interaction

Language classes have to be interactive. This interaction is not just limited between a teacher and his learner but as observed peer to peer interaction has a great many advantages. But, when it comes to online classes, the teachers added that there was lack of interaction. The sessions according to them were teacher centered. The teachers were there to read out for the students. They were just teaching students vocabulary items, which was really challenging for them. They mentioned that they keep on calling their students to respond to their questions and encourage them to ask questions from their teachers. But, the students, in case of online learning, are not that much interactive and the reasons behind that are unknown.

Access to Internet

Last but not least, the students belonging to rustic areas have internet aces related issues. According to the participants, there were students who could not afford cellphones, tablets of such gadgets through which they could register to online sessions. And, in case someone could afford, he or she had no access to such high speed internet connection which could help in effective learning in the classroom.

Conclusion

The researcher conducted the study in order to explore the challenges that the teachers faced in online English language teaching at primary level. The study was carried out qualitatively by collecting the data through semi-structured interviews. Finally, the results showed that the teachers faced challenges in managing their classes, providing feedback, difficulty in handling online teaching applications. Moreover, there was lack of interaction in the classes and no access to fast internet connection. All these challenges really hinder the smooth flow of

teaching and learning process. Therefore, learning can be made effective and improvements can be brought by working on the aforementioned issues.

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