



Adaptability And Challenges For English Teachers: A Compendium View Of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID 19 has locked down entire country and created a critical environment generally and crisis in education institutions specifically. It compelled all Educational Institutions to close down. To keep teaching learning process smooth and to save the time of students, massive shift is being observed from physical classrooms to online academics. It is a universal truth that Language plays a key role in teaching-learning process. Hence meaningful language learning is almost difficult in online classes. Creating a conducive learning environment to teach English language effectively online, necessitates the use of virtual classroom by Language Teachers. However, it may create various challenges, unless the mind-set of the teachers is positive and ready to adapt to new situations. The aim of the present study is to find out challenges faced by the language teachers and their adaptability towards online teaching during COVID pandemic. The researcher used descriptive survey method. The sample of the study included 30 language teachers teaching at Abdul Wali Khan University and University of Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The sampling technique used was snowballing through known contacts. The tool used was questionnaire. Data was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistical techniques such as percentage and graphical representation. The findings of the study revealed that there is significant difference between the challenges faced by English Language teachers. Though teachers tried to adapt the online teaching as instructed by authority. The research study recommends proper training for effective online teaching not only for the teachers but also for the students in the use of e-learning platforms, apt digital tools for language development to improve the new skills for effective teaching-learning process.

Key words: Online Teaching, Challenges, Language Teacher, Language learner, COVID-19

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Introduction

The outbreak of COVID 19 has locked down entire country and created crisis situations in different walks of life. Since the mid of March 2020 all educational institutions in Pakistan were shut down temporarily as a measure to contain the spread of novel corona virus. The pandemic has significantly disrupted the regular teaching-learning process in physical classroom which is already an established system in educational institutions. It has transformed the chalk-talk method to the online internet base teaching through different application. All educational institutions had to switch to online education so that there is no loss of learning for students and their education career. While learning any subject, students submitted assimilate new concepts when they listen, talk, read and write about what they are learning. Hence meaningful language learning is totally in the hands of software and internet. Pakistan is multilingual country which stresses the learning of English through different genres. Language plays a key at all levels of education. As Altam Saleh noted, "A language is a tool that we use to communicate with each other; it may be our mother tongue, a second, or a foreign language that we learn" (Saleh, 2020). Language is a base for all the subjects taught in Pakistani universities. Hence meaningful language learning is necessary for onward academic process. A massive paradigm shift to online teaching through virtual classroom is being observed at all levels of learning due to COVID-19.

Technology has always been an important part of teaching and learning environment. The pandemic situation has made it compulsory for language teachers to use online teaching mode to continue effective language teaching. A virtual classroom has become the reality of today's education scenario. "A virtual classroom is a place where people can teach and learn interactively, communicate, view and discuss presentations and engage with learning resources while working in groups, all in an online environment" (Chandravel, 2019). The virtual classroom crosses the boundaries of location, time and space providing a flexible leaning environment for all. However, migrating from traditional learning to fully virtual and online mode has posed many challenges for language teachers. Unless the mind-set of the teacher is positive and ready to adapt in new critical situation, a sudden shift towards online teaching is difficult. The unprecedented situation has posed many challenges with many questions at this stage remaining unanswered. Are the language teachers ready to face the challenges of online language teaching and adapt to virtual classrooms during COVID 19? With this research question in mind, the researcher aims to find out the adaptability of language teachers towards online teaching during COVID pandemic. The paper emphasises on the

challenges faced by the language teachers while implementing e-learning platforms and teaching language in virtual classrooms.

Methodology

The present study used descriptive survey method. An online survey was conducted during the lock down period of COVID 19 in both universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Statement of the Problem

Adaptability of language teachers for online classes during COVID 19.

Aim of the Study

To study the challenges and adaptability of language teachers in Pakistani Universities for online classes during COVID 19.

Objectives of the Study

The key objectives of the present study are to identify and highlight the challenges faced by language teachers and their adaptability towards online classes during COVID 19 irrespective of their geographical area, internet devices and software applications

Sample of the study

The sample selected was language teachers, teaching in Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and University of Peshawar. The sampling technique used was snowballing through known contacts. The sample size was 30 language teachers with a division of 15 from each university.

Tool of the study

A Questionnaire was used as a tool to collect the data through Google form. The tool consists of 10 items out of which 05 were closed ended questions and 05 items were designed according to five-point Likert Scale to know the opinion of participants towards challenges faced by them and adaptability towards online classes. The tool was administered through social media platforms to get the responses from the target group.

Data Analysis Techniques

The present research used the statistical techniques such as Percentage and Graphical presentation for analysis of the collected data.

Result Oriented Discussion

An analysis of the results, gives us the understanding of the various challenges encountered by the language teachers to shift towards online virtual classes during lockdown period without any training and mental preparation, and the efforts taken by

them to adapt to this new situation created by pandemic crisis. The subtitles that follow pertain to the questions that were asked to participants and it discusses the results in detail.

Online Classes and lack of Technical skills

Teaching in a virtual classroom during lock-down period was considered as a challenge by 53%, an opportunity by 40% and a burden by 8% teachers. All the teachers in rural area considered it as a challenge, whereas urban teachers considered it a challenge and took it as an opportunity. Majority of the teachers were of the opinion that shifting from physical classroom to virtual classroom is essential to continue the teaching-learning process during lock-down, 15% were not sure of it and only 4% believed that it is not essential. But while checking on preparedness for technical skills required for online teaching it was found that majority of them were not prepared at all or prepared to some extent and only 4% were well prepared to conduct online teaching. This clearly shows that majority teachers were willing to shift to online teaching, they were unprepared and lacked the technical skills required for it which was the major hurdle in smooth conduct of virtual classroom. As published in 'The Tribune', "according to new research revealed by UNESCO's teacher task force, an estimated 2.7 million teachers in India who have been impacted by the coronavirus lockdown are untrained to deal with the altered situation". This highlights the need of training the teachers to cope up with the challenge of online teaching. Majority of the teachers were asked by their institution to teach online during lock down period. Technical constraints such as internet connectivity, power cuts, availability of gadgets for uninterrupted online teaching were faced. It is noticeable that technical constraint disrupts the online teaching in both rural and urban area causing frustration and pressure among language teachers. As Susan Sun has stated in her study "Time zones, Internet connectivity and bandwidth, technical breakdowns, individual students' schedules (work vs. study), etc. are all real issues facing online teachers and learners" (Sun, 2011).

Awareness of e-learning platforms and digital tools

The orientation of teachers and students on the use of e-learning platforms prior to actually conducting online class was considered essential by many teachers. Though use of technology in language learning is not new, but sudden shift from physical classroom to virtual classroom without any proper training or orientation towards the use of e-learning platform, unpreparedness towards technical skills was a challenge for the language teachers. The result of De Paepe et al. agrees that "acquiring technical skills prior to switching to virtual classroom is a must" (Paepe, 2018).

In a traditional language classroom, teachers facilitate the learning experiences which prompts the peers to interact spontaneously. For successful language learning, participation of learners and interaction with them is of crucial importance. For interactive virtual language classroom knowledge of various e-platforms, digital tools

and its apt use at proper time for developing various language skills is as necessary as other things. The results of awareness of using e-learning platforms prior to lockdown shows that the most known e-learning platforms were Zoom app, Google classroom, Google Meet, WhatsApp. Most of the students were not aware of any of the e-learning platforms which poses a big challenge for conducting a virtual language classroom. It was also observed in a survey that very few teachers were aware of the digital tool and hardly use them in their virtual classroom for making the language learning more interactive and student centric. You Tube videos and Interactive were the most used digital tools in the classrooms, which may not be sufficient to engage the students. Surely, teachers need proper orientation to online teaching and knowledge of various digital tools, specifically for online language class and its effective use to make language learning more interactive. De Paepe et al. also stated that professional development is perceived necessary to acquire the indispensable technical and pedagogical skills.

Face to face interaction and Student engagement

It is evident that the teachers found it difficult to keep students engage continuously in a virtual language classroom. This verifies with the results, “Student engagement and the facilitation of collaboration among students is perceived difficult and that online teachers need to make a shift towards an individualized, learner-centred teaching model” (Paepe, 2018). In a normal physical classroom, body language, facial expressions, and teachers' voice are all important teaching tools. At the same time, emotional engagement, bonding and verbal communication with students, makes language learning more effective. In a virtual classroom it may be missing. “Once a course is switched to online teaching, body language and facial expressions are under restrictions as it is difficult to use these tools through screens, and only “voice” could be fully functioned” (Wei, 2020). The most missed things in virtual language classes are face to face interaction the most, followed by Emotional Engagement, and Facial Expression. As stated by Sun in her study “Even if a teacher manages to have students all coming to the virtual classroom at the same time, simple things such as the loss of lip synchronization and verbal clues, time lags, poor sound and images, turn-taking, etc. become huge challenges” (Sun, 2011) The results in the present study shows that few language teachers also miss the interaction, human bonding with the students and their state of mind during virtual classroom sessions.

Language Skills

Sun (2011) highlighted “Language learning is a skill-based process rather than a content-based one. Skill developments, such as the acquisition of speaking and listening skills, required constant synchronous interaction in the target language” (Sun, 2011). The development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are equally important for any language learning. The results in the present study show that the use of digital tools in an online classes improves the listening skills, and reading skill while the

speaking skills and writing skills are not developed in online system. It is emphasized for recommendation to develop the digital tools which can be used by all the language teachers catering to development of all the language skills equally.

Online assessment

It was observed that conducting examination and doing assessment were the most difficult part of online language classes than teaching and learning. Online lectures in a virtual classroom is not sufficient, it also requires sufficient e-content, online study material, spreadsheets, practice sheets etc. so that students can access them easily. It is very essential that along with online teaching-learning process, the student's progress is also being tracked with timely conduct of examination and proper evaluation through online modes in COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers need to be conversant with procedure of content development and proper use of various digital tools for assessment. It can be seen that teachers taught the same content which was developed for physical and face to face classes, a tedious work. It is also observed that 70% of the teachers agree that monitoring of online assessment is the roadblock to effective online language teaching. Very few teachers use any digital assessment tools which are recommended by institutions. Some teachers do not use these assessment tools which shows their ignorance and lack in digital competence. In Sun's study she quoted Compton (2009, p.82) that a learner online language teacher must learn and possess the knowledge of strategies to facilitate communicative competence and online interaction, curriculum design frameworks and strategies for online language assessment.

Recommendation for Online Classes

As there was no other option but to conduct online language classes during pandemic, teachers must take various efforts to adapt themselves to new normal i.e., virtual learning by attending Faculty development programs, Webinars, Practice and implementing e-learnings, Self-learning etc. They agree that pandemic situation has given them an opportunity to develop themselves and their skills, by shifting to online teaching, such as Technical skills, Professional Development, Adaptation of new teaching techniques and Pedagogy skills. Teachers would continue the trend of online teaching even after lock-down period is over to make language learning more interactive. Overall, it can be said that traditional professional expertise i.e., competence in language, pedagogical knowledge, experience in teaching language is not suffice to survive in new normal. "Synchronous online teaching requires a new and extended skills set" (Moorhouse, 2020). Online teaching requires technological knowledge and awareness of web-based tools along with pedagogical and content knowledge. It needs a distinct set of skills to be used in online classes. Teachers need proper training and exposure to digital tools to adapt the same system for teaching successfully.

The findings of the above reveal that language teachers working in rural areas face many challenges as compared to urban language teachers. Inadequate infrastructure

facilities, technical constraints such as internet connectivity, bandwidth, availability of devices during lock-down, unawareness of e-learning platforms and digital tools for language teaching and development of e-content, could be the challenges that language teachers face in rural areas. In Susan Sun's study she mentioned, "It seems that online teachers are, by and large, left to do their own experiments and perhaps learn from their own mistakes" (Sun, 2011). This emphasises proper guidance and training to language teachers prior shifting to online classes.

Though the lock-down period has forced the teachers to shift from traditional teaching to online teaching and virtual classroom without any proper training, it has also provided an opportunity for many teachers to improve their technical and pedagogical skills by attending various workshops, seminars, conferences etc. To continue teaching-learning process without any hindrance, teachers from both urban and rural area have taken various efforts to adapt themselves to new normal by self-learning. It shows that geographical area does not influence the adaptability towards online teaching system.

Conclusion

Due to sudden emergence of COVID-19, new areas emerged, a virtual classroom. This study conducted the survey of 30 language teachers in Abdul Wali Khan University and University of Peshawar and found insightful information regarding the challenges faced and adaptations made by the language teachers while conducting online classes. Unpreparedness, Lack of proper training, Technical constraints were found as common challenges, both in urban and rural area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Unawareness of e-learning platforms and digital tools for language teaching, developing e-content, engaging students in virtual classroom, development of language skills specially writing skill, monitoring online assessment were seen as major challenges in present study. Language teachers in rural areas had to face these challenges more as digital tools and content are readily available in English language. Hence adapting to online teaching is easier for teachers teaching English language. Teachers teaching other regional languages had to work hard and put efforts in overcoming the challenges. Proper infrastructure facilities and technical support in rural areas, training in the use of e-learning platforms, apt digital tools for language development and development of new skill set are recommended to adapt to the new system of teaching. Infusing creative ideas and innovation while creating new online language material and facilitating online transaction is the need of the hour. A competent teacher is the one who transforms challenges into opportunities and is ready to learn, unlearn and relearn. Developing positive mind set among language teachers and a fresh new approach towards online teaching will help survive this storm of COVID-19 in education. The findings of this study will make teachers aware the practical problems of online language teaching and help all other language teachers to prepare in advance and adapt successfully to virtual classrooms. It will also give insight to Educational Institutions for conducting the apt

and necessary orientations, workshops, webinars, faculty development programs required by the language teachers to develop new set of skills.

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