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CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS IN LEARNING SPEAKING SKILLS USING VIDEO CONFERENCING

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Abstract:

Students are still using online resources in order to assist them with their studies during the post-pandemic period. In online language classes, online platforms are utilised as a tool for language learning, particularly in the development of speaking abilities. This study attempts to look into the difficulties encountered by a group of bachelor degree students when learning speaking skills in the English language through the usage of video conferencing. The information was gathered by utilising a set of questionnaires distributed among 102 bachelor degree students at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perlis Branch, Malaysia, towards the end of the semester after they had completed the speaking exercises that had been assigned to them. The use of video conferencing in teaching speaking skills to the students was found to pose a number of difficulties, including unfavourable environment, lack of ideas and vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and technological difficulties. The findings of this study may assist language instructors to choose the best online tool for speaking lessons.

Keywords:

Online Distance Learning; Language Learning; Speaking Skills; Challenges; Higher Education

Introduction

In the name of globalization, the ability to master a language contributes greatly towards the unity and connections between people from various cultural backgrounds in all aspects of life. Therefore, language learning has become a lifetime responsibility that one has to carry in meeting social, professional, and educational needs, on top of his or her own personal necessities and desires (Kukulka-Hulme, Lee, & Norris, 2017). As the English language has been a widely accepted lingua franca and the most spoken language in the world (Yen & Mohamad, 2020), it is no surprise that learning this language has become one of the many requirements in one's life. For second language learners, learning the English language is not a bed of roses. It is a challenging task which requires hand in hand synergistic, massive and outstanding efforts by the learners and the educators alike (Khasbani, 2018). It is undeniable that all language abilities; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are equally significant, however, speaking skill is considered as one of the most important skills to be acquired due to the purpose that it serves; communication. The fact that speaking is the key to communication has made it a vital skill to be learnt (Ying, Siang, & Mohamad, 2021).

Numerous studies found varieties of factors which hamper the ESL learners' speaking abilities. Studies done by Savasci (2013) and Idrus and Salleh (2007) found that; 1) high levels of anxiety resulting from the fear of being evaluated, 2) educators' teaching techniques, and 3) learners' culture are among the factors which have caused the ESL learners to be reluctant to use the English language. Additionally, Yen and Mohamad (2020) found that among the main challenges faced by the ESL learners in regards to their speaking skills are; 1) lack of desire and self-confidence, 2) nervousness, 3) inhibition, and 4) lack of vocabulary.

Saragih and Listyani (2021) investigated the difficulties faced by students in the academic speaking class. They found that difficulties arise among the students in regards to dealing with anxiety and the competitive environment, overusing of their mother tongue, giving spontaneous responses, learning unfamiliar and strange accents, and expressing ideas. Additionally, they reported that students also face difficulties in finding the right vocabulary, and arranging the right grammatical structures. One of the contributing factors for these difficulties is found to be the lack of confidence. Similarly, Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) studied the speaking problems faced by the students of the English language education department. Their study revealed that the students are lacking in suitable vocabulary, grammar control, accurate pronunciation, information of English outside the class, confidence and English speaking curriculum development. However, in their study on the students' favoured applications and platforms in online distance learning, Amin and Sundari (2020) found that Cisco WebEx Meeting, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp gained highly positive agreement on all criteria.

Additionally, Sosas (2021) investigated the technology utilised in teaching speaking and its effects to students. The result of the study revealed that the technologies utilised can establish relationships, improve articulateness and precision, reduce anxiety, and develop the students' confidence. Sosas (2021) also found that the technologies used could be coordinated with the communicative teaching approaches which permit the students to express themselves proficiently and competently. Amidst finding the most ideal solutions to overcome these obstacles, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic which had forced an abrupt closure of the educational institutions throughout the world. This has posed more challenges to the ESL learners in learning the English language (Verawardina, Asnur, Lubis, Hendriyani, Ramadhani, Dewi, & Darni, 2020) especially with the application of ODL (Online Distance Learning) as a

new norm in learning. With this undesirable shift from face-to-face classroom to ODL, language learning faces an extremely significant transformation particularly speaking skills (Ying, Siang, & Mohamad, 2021). In this circumstance, video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, Google Meet and Voov are excessively utilised as e-learning applications in order to implement speaking lessons to university students. Therefore, this study was carried out to investigate the challenges faced by the university students in learning speaking skills in the English language using video conferencing as a learning tool in ODL.

Literature Review

Online Distance Learning (ODL)

COVID-19's ramifications have forced practically every region and educational institution to adopt a new normal. Lockdowns have been enacted in many countries, with all educational institutions permanently closed. All face-to-face learning techniques in the classroom have been suspended to prevent COVID-19 from spreading and transmitting (Othman, Kadar, Umar, & Ahmad, 2020). A government programme that requires working from home, studying from home, or even practising your religion from home is a good place to start. This situation necessitates that educational institutions continue to use cutting-edge technologies in the process of teaching and learning. This circumstance strains the global education system, forcing educators to immediately convert to online teaching and learning (Astini, 2020).

“The learner is compelled by distance to assume a degree of autonomy that might be uncomfortable in other circumstances. In the same way the instructor in distance education is compelled to assume a more...supporting, helping role. When the teacher prepares instruction for a print-based, television or computer course, it is with the intention that the material will meet the goals established by learners and will be used as they go forward to achieve their goals, but whether the material is used remains outside the teacher’s control, and the decision depends almost entirely on the worth of the material in the programme.” (Moore, 1990).

In this case, the course and degree are not dependent on the location. Students can take the course from anywhere in the world. It is not, however, time-independent. Each term, a minimum number of courses must be attended, and each course is offered at specific periods throughout the year and must be completed within a specific time frame. Students who are far away from their peers or tutors have less opportunities to interact with them. They are eager to establish a sense of belonging in a peer group. As a result, the introduction of communication technology expands the range of possibilities for interaction.

One of the technologies deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was Online Distance Learning (ODL), an integrating medium for teaching and learning that uses a centralised structure to govern interaction during instructional activities (Sukendro, Habibi, Khaeruddin, Indrayana, Syahrudin, Makadada, & Hakim, 2020). Before COVID-19, the goal of integrating online learning into language classes was to make traditional learning more effective and successful. The use of ODL appears to have the potential to reduce COVID-19 virus transmission. Furthermore, the measure is being made to ensure that education continues during the outbreak (Rasmitadila, Aliyyah, Rachmadtullah, Samsudin, Syaodih, Nurtanto, & Tambunan, 2020). E-learning, according to Kisanjara (2020), is when educators and students use technology and the Internet to conduct teaching and learning sessions.

Challenges Faced by University Students in Learning Speaking Skills Through ODL

Language proficiency encourages cooperation and communication among people of many cultural origins in many aspects of life, education, and business in the globalised twenty-first century. As a result, language learning must be a lifelong commitment that can be fulfilled in a variety of ways to suit social, occupational, and educational objectives, as well as personal needs and preferences (Kukulka-Hulme, Lee, & Norris, 2017). The world's lingua franca and most spoken language is frequently referred to as English (Yen & Mohamad, 2020). English as a second language (ESL) students come from all over the world to acquire it because of its importance and demand in today's world. As a result, a significant amount of time and effort has been invested in developing effective English learning methods. It is difficult to learn English as a second language. It will need a concerted, huge, and remarkable effort on the part of both students and teachers (Khasbani, 2018). As a result of societal globalisation, the focus of English teaching in Malaysian higher education has evolved away from grammar translation and toward a communicative method (Zakaria & Shah, 2019). This method encourages students to participate actively in class and helps them improve their English, particularly their speaking and listening abilities. Because it is utilised as a medium of communication all over the world, speaking is one of the most vital skills to learn. Though hearing, speaking, reading, and writing skills are all vital, speaking ability usually takes precedence over the others since speaking, or communication, occurs frequently in one's life.

As a result of the unexpected shutdown of schools and institutions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, ESL learners have begun to face significant obstacles in learning and enhancing the English language (Verawardina, Asnur, Lubis, Hendriyani, Ramadhani, Dewi, & Darni, 2020). It has made a significant effect in terms of language acquisition, especially speaking abilities. According to Yen and Mohamad (2020), the decision to close all schools and eliminate face-to-face classrooms has resulted in a survival crisis and adaptation to the "new normal." Most English students, especially those learning English as a Second Language (ESL), want to improve their speaking abilities. However, when learning online, it becomes even more difficult.

The Use of Video Conferencing as a Learning Tool in Speaking Lessons in ODL

Second language learners can use video conferencing as a communication tool to improve their English-speaking skills. When learners utilise this method of communication, they have more opportunities to interact with other language learners and people from various parts of the world who speak the target language (Coverdale-Jones, 2017). This exposes language learners to a wide range of cultures, languages, and accents. As a result, individuals may be better able to understand and learn how words are used in a specific language (Ip, 2012). Video conferencing is another technology that could be utilised to practise English speaking. This technology is a terrific tool for learners since they can communicate with someone face-to-face through online means and receive a quick response (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996, cited in Beldarrain, 2006).

According to Eguchi's research, when language learners used video conferencing technology to converse with partners from different cultures, they produced more English language output than when conversing with students from the same culture, because conversing with people from different cultures creates an information gap that makes language production easier (Eguchi, 2014). In addition, utterances are shown to be lengthier while using video conferencing than when speaking in a classroom.

Another benefit of using video conferencing technology is that it saves time. Through their body language, facial expressions, and nods, language learners may be able to deduce what their conversation partners are talking about when conversing or chatting through video conference (Wang, 2004). On the other hand, using video conferencing to learn English speaking may present some challenges, such as the amount of time required for preparation, which may be an issue for people with other obligations (Hampel & Hauck, 2004; Ip, 2012), and the complexity of the technology employed. As a result, conducting training for potential learners is crucial and necessary (Ip, 2012).

Methodology

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach which utilised a survey design. A set of structured questionnaires was designed based on the literature. Google form was used to construct the items of the questionnaire where the forms were later distributed using online means for easy access by the respondents. The distribution of the questionnaires spread across a number of 102 respondents.

Results and Discussion

Platforms Preferences for Video Conferencing Activity

Which platform do you prefer for video conferencing / speaking activity in your online classes (you may choose more than 1 answer)

102 responses

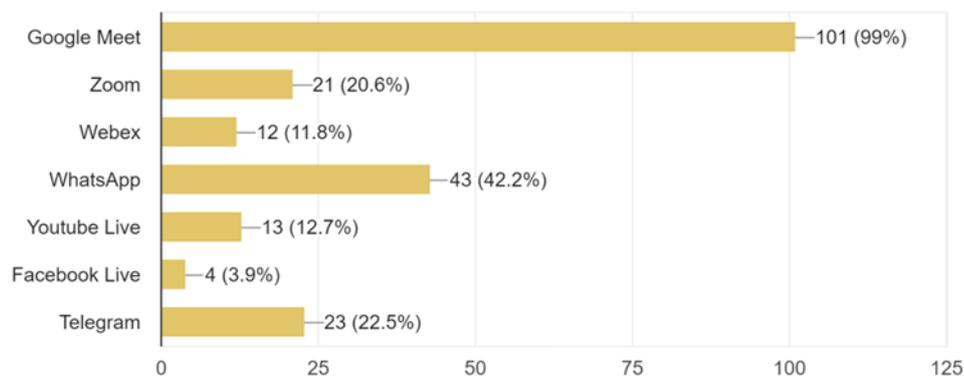


Figure 1. Platforms Preferences for Video Conferencing Activity

Based on the survey which was carried out on the students, this study discovered that 99% of students prefer using Google Meet (GM) as a learning approach over other video conferencing platforms. GM is the most preferred video conferencing platform because it is beneficial for qualitative interviewing in terms of rapport, convenience, simplicity, and user-friendliness. Al-Jarf (2021) found that Google Meet is interactive as the hand-raising tool is claimed to be useful as students can use this feature to ask questions to their instructors. Other contributing factors for its popularity are its cost effectiveness, data management tools, and security options. Moreover, it offers a recording feature for video conferencing so that the activities can be documented and generated and afterwards to be viewed or played back if necessary. In short, GM offers features that can well support the implementation of distance learning (Setyawati et

al., 2022). The second preferred application by the students is Whatsapp with 42.2%. This is due to its popularity among Malaysians as through the use of this application, users can easily send messages or information either privately or in a group using the user-friendly features offered by the application. This application is found to be so user-friendly that it can easily be used by all levels of people; from young to old. Additionally, its popularity can be due to the various features that it provides which include chatting (users are able to share text, photos, audios, videos, etc.), and making telephone and video calls. It was also found that the use of WhatsApp is lighter than other social media (Ramdhani & Nandiyanto, 2021) therefore, making it more suitable to be utilised in online learning. Other reasons for Whatsapp preference by users are due to its meaning focus, learner fit, positive impact, and practicality (Amin & Sundari, 2020). Meanwhile, the least preferred platform is Facebook Live with only 3.9%. The reason for this may be due to the less interactive nature of Facebook Live as the students can only write in the chat box if they wish to communicate with the lecturers who are presenting using Facebook Live. At times when there are too many questions being asked, the presenters/lecturers might miss the questions posted in the chat box. Although many lecturers choose social media platforms such as Facebook for online teaching and learning, the use of such platforms still needs some adjustments so that it could cater the needs of the syllabus which may be theoretical, practical, or field course (Nadeak, 2020). Nadeak (2020) also discovered that in the implementation of ODL, social media such as Facebook is only effective for theoretical courses, whereas for practical courses and field courses, Facebook is found to be not effective.

Students' Perceptions on Speaking Activity During Online Classes

What do you think about speaking activity during online classes?

102 responses

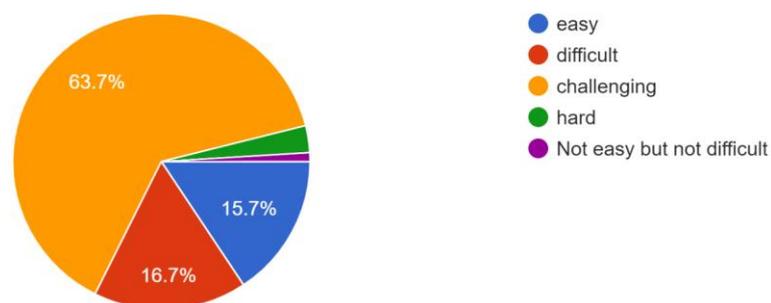


Figure 2. Students' Perceptions on Speaking Activity During Online Classes

When asked about their perceptions on the speaking activity done during online class, a majority of 63.7% of the students thought of the activity as challenging. This is followed by 16.7% of the students who were of the opinion that the speaking activity is difficult. The students claimed the online speaking activities to be challenging and difficult as they were still getting themselves familiar with the platforms that they had to use to carry out the activities assigned to them. Additionally, for students who prefer a face-to-face environment, they found online speaking activities to be less interactive and engaging, thus making the activities challenging and difficult for them. However, 15.7% of the students claimed that the speaking activity is easy. Al-Jarf (2021) investigated students' views on online speaking activities and

found that students thought online speaking activities as beneficial, helpful, and enjoyable. The students claimed that online speaking activities can reduce their stress as they were allowed to turn off their videos and only focused on listening and speaking.

In relation to these responses, we asked the students to identify the challenges that they faced when doing speaking activity during online classes which further explain why the majority of them thought of the activity as being challenging.

Challenges that Students Face When Doing Speaking Activity During Online Classes

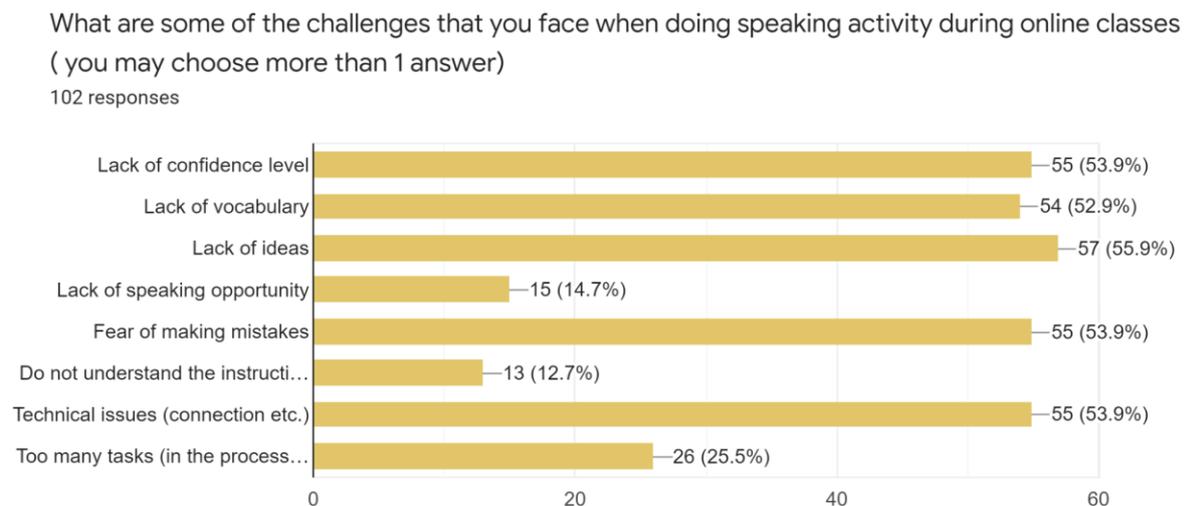


Figure 3. Challenges that Students Face When Doing Speaking Activity During Online Classes

Based on Figure 3, which illustrates the students' responses, it was found that 57 out of 102 students expressed that they lack ideas when expressing themselves in speaking activities. One contributing factor to this problem is the students' inability to structure their choice of words when constructing what they wish to say. Similar findings were obtained from studies conducted by Saragih and Listyani (2021) and Mazdayasna (2012). Further, an equal number of students, which is 55 respectively, responded that they face three different challenges when doing online speaking activity which are lack of confidence level, fear of making mistakes, and technical difficulties. One of the reasons for the lack of confidence when doing online speaking activity is the use of their mother tongue in their daily communication. Even when interacting with their lecturers, most students are reluctant to use the English language, but opt for using their mother tongue instead. This has proven that the English language environment in class has not been created, thus not contributing to the boost in the students' confidence level. It is important to create an English language environment in order to develop language mastery. The absence of such a language environment has become a central issue which has stalled students' mastery of the language (Hanifah & Rakhmawati, 2020). Looking back at behaviourism theory, the behaviourists believe that babies are born with no capacity to acquire a language, therefore, language environment is crucial for language acquisition. According to behaviourism theory, language environment provides imitation stimulus, reinforcement and positive or negative response. Another challenge identified by the students is fear of making mistakes. This is also known as language anxiety which Tsai (2018) defined as anxiety that is

related to the learning of foreign languages. In the case of these students, speaking activities in their online English language classroom have become a source of language anxiety. One type of language anxiety which is possibly related to fear of making mistakes is the fear of negative evaluation (fear of how other people listen) (Horwitz & Code, 1986 as cited in Tsai, 2018). Technology difficulty is another challenge faced by students. Among the issues which they had experienced in regards to technology difficulties are unstable internet connection (weak/bad Wi-Fi connection), devices with insufficient storage, electricity, and insufficient mobile data. Similarly, Ferri et al. (2020) found that technological challenges involved issues related to Internet connectivity and electronic devices. The inequalities created by such problems have led to uneven access to the technology. The fact that not all students possess the required technologies, such as high-speed Internet connection and advanced devices, is undeniable. In a research done by Yates et al. (2021), the students claimed that technology issues have demotivated them. Among the issues highlighted are bad Wi-Fi connection and applications which could not be accessed. They felt demotivated when they have to wait for the instructors to respond to their questions due to the delay caused by the connection of the Internet.



Figure 4. Other Challenges that Students Face When Doing Speaking Activity During Online Classes

The students were also asked to state other challenges that they faced when doing speaking activity during online classes (Figure 4). It was found that 59% of the students admitted to the absence of a study environment which they claimed to have affected their focus. They stated that the unfavourable housing situation where they have to share a space with other family members within their household can be a source of distraction.

S50 stated that, *“noise problems at home make it difficult in ODL”*.

Similar findings were also found by Haythornthwaite and Kazmer (2002) and Selwyn (2011, as cited by Ng, 2021). Hebebcı et al. (2020) highlighted one disadvantage of ODL which is the non-existence of a classroom environment. The students involved in their studies stated that

they long for school and classroom environments as the environment that they are in during ODL is not suitable for studying. Having to adapt to the different learning environment has caused problems to these students during the learning process. They believed that the classroom environment is crucial more than anything else.

Another challenge that students face when doing speaking activity during online classes is time management. 22% of students claimed to have issues with time management. One student stated that:

S101 - “Do not have time to focus on speaking activities because too many assignments for other subjects”.

As instructors, it was evident to us that students have issues with time management. We often come across instances where they are not able to keep up with the course assignments when they repeatedly ask for extended submission time. This has shown that they cannot complete the work assigned to them within the duration given. Martin et al. (2020) discovered a similar finding and concluded that time management is a challenge for the students as they do not have self-discipline. Good time management skill is vital as according to Ng (2021), academic performance or satisfaction with the course have a significant association with students' ability to manage their time (Osborn, 2001; Holder, 2007).

Conclusions

The goal of this study is to find out what students think about the effectiveness of online learning, as well as its impact on autonomous learning, student academic progress, and speaking skills. Based on this information, it can be concluded that online learning is beneficial to both teachers and students in terms of teaching and learning. Because video conferencing method is used for learning activities, most students believe they are vital for present and future activities. The technology offered by mobile phones can assist students in managing the learning process more effectively. They also improve communication between teachers and students by allowing video conferencing to take place anywhere and at any time. Despite the numerous challenges faced by students in learning speaking skills, they still choose ODL.

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