

Opportunities and Challenges of Teaching and Learning English in the COVID-19 Era

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Abstract

The global community has been affected by the Corona Virus pandemic causing havoc to all sectors of the economy, including education especially the teaching and learning of the English language. The pandemic has occasioned a new dimension of teaching and learning in all institutions of learning. The dimension is like a coin of two sides, while numerous teaching and learning opportunities are presented by the new normal, there are also challenges which the current trend presents. This paper examines the opportunities and challenges of teaching and learning of English language in the COVID-19 era. One of the major opportunities is the use of online platforms such as Zoom, Google classroom, Telegram, Microsoft Team, and Moodle for teaching and learning. On the other hand, among the major challenges associated with the new normal is network failure which most times thwart the teaching and learning process. Sequel to the challenges, suggestions were made to help maximize the opportunities of the new normal.

Keywords: Global Community, English language, new normal, online learning, COVID-19.

Introduction

The place of the English Language in the curriculum of Nigerian education system cannot be overemphasized. The National policy on Education (NPE, 2014) made English a compulsory subject for primary and post primary levels in the country. In all tertiary institutions, use of English which falls under General Studies is a mandatory course for all students irrespective of their department. English language has become one of the main requirements of gaining admission into tertiary institutions and

securing a prestigious job in Nigeria. A candidate is required to have at least a credit pass in English before seeking and gaining admission to a Nigerian University (Babatunde, 2001; Ogunmodimu, 2015).

English is a Language used to reach across the borders and bridge the gaps in communication. It is widely spoken language today; it is not only used for communicating with the outside world but also for inter-state and intra-state communication. All the prestigious schools and colleges use English as their medium of instruction. English in Nigeria today is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education. Bankole and Owolabi (2018,p.322) observes that “English language belongs to no one and belongs to everyone as more and more non-native speakers aspire to have knowledge of it”. Consequently, it is apt to review the trends that tend to affect the teaching and learning of the language with a view to improving how the language is taught and learnt.

The world recently witnessed the unexpected emergence of a virus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic and severely impacted all aspects of human life. The sudden lockdown, that came with the announcement of the pandemic affected health systems, the world economy and, inevitably, education systems across the globe. Due to the pandemic, schools and universities were closed, face-to-face education was suspended and a shift to emergency online teaching. The teaching and learning of English language took new dimension in form of using technological tools for instructions. The novel dimension is synonymous with the new normal and occasioned by Coronavirus disease 2019.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a disease due to SARS-CoV-2. It was first identified in December 2019 in China's city Wuhan. The first case may be traced back to 17 November 2019. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease (Mohite, 2020). COVID-19 was labelled on February 11, 2020, by World Health Organization (WHO), and by March 11, they had declared the outbreak a pandemic. In addition to widespread illness and loss of life, efforts to combat the spread of the virus dramatically impacted numerous sectors worldwide such as travel, business, and education. In order to protect individuals, many governments and institutions implemented physical distancing measures. While such measures safeguarded physical health, for some, they created feelings of

separation, isolation, and loneliness that impacted mental and emotional health.

COVID-19 presented numerous opportunities of improved teaching and learning of English language, pattern which aligns with the 21st century. Although, there are also challenges presented by this new normal. Hence, this paper examines the opportunities and challenges of teaching English language in the COVID-19 era. Suggestions are also made to help maximize the opportunities of teaching and learning English language in the COVID-19 era.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical perspective which reinforced the development of the new pedagogies is the activity theory (Mwanza & Engeström, 2005). This study is hinged on activity theoretical perspective. The framework was originally developed by the Russian psychologist Aleksei Leontiev in 1981. A version of activity theory, based on Leontiev's framework, was proposed in the 1980s by the Finnish educational researcher Engestrom (1987). Currently, both Leontiev's and Engestrom's variants of activity theory, as well as their combinations, are being widely used interdisciplinarily, not only in psychology, but also in a range of other fields, including education, organizational learning, and cultural studies. The focus of this theory is on the interaction between humans and computers. It played an essential role in learning expansion using instruments, tools, mediation, etc. The theory highlights the potential impact on teaching and learning using new tools as vehicles for modernizing, contextualizing, and transforming activity procedures (Engestrom, 1987).

The COVID-19 Pandemic transformed the whole education process to online, especially English language education (ELE), which has been transited to e-learning in most institutions of learning worldwide. In the case of Nigeria, it is the first time for ESL learners to be engaged in e-learning officially. So, this study focuses on the opportunities and challenges of teaching and learning English language in the COVID-19 era. Challenges encountered during the pandemic and what needs to be done to support avoiding these problems.

English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria before and during the COVID-19 Era

Before the pandemic, the Nigerian education system adopted purely, face-to-face approach to teaching and learning of English language in primary and secondary schools. The Primary and secondary school learners were not allowed to own any digital gadget such as phone nor computer, neither were they allowed to be seen with such in the schools. The situation was not the same for higher institutions of learning as usage of gadgets of different kinds were acceptable. However, Nigerian higher education institutions also basically employed face-to face instructional delivery mode with very little online learning experiences especially in public institutions. A few higher institutions in Nigeria had made provisions for the use of online platforms for teaching and learning but not adequately employed.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools in Nigeria were closed from March 27, 2020, as one of the Federal Government measures to limit the spread of the disease. This translated to a contextualized state-wide school closure across the 36 states in the country. In response, different states' Ministries of Education released modalities for radio and TV schooling and internet-based learning for students in public primary and secondary schools. ICT tools come to help teachers and students. Online classes started and once again education system get booster. Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo (2020) observes that the adoption of the online learning in a situation of emergency represents a need, but it has also stimulated experts, policymakers, citizens, teachers and learners to search for new solutions.

Online learning is a learning system without directly face to face between teacher and students. The online learning requires an internet network. The teacher and students carry out learning together, at the same time, but in different places. According to Pearson (2020), online learning involves a learning environment that exists online, while blended learning is a mixture of both face-to-face learning and online learning. Various applications and platforms emerged during COVID-19 era of English teaching and learning, such as Whatsapp, Telegram, Zoom meeting, Google meet, Google classroom and others. To support this online learning, the main device needed is computer or android connected to the internet network. These platforms have presented opportunities for

teaching and learning of English language in COVID-19 era. Nuzhath (2020) observes that technology in teaching and learning initially started with the use of cassette recorders and television. Later, it got replaced with a more sophisticated variety of audio-visual aids being used in ELT classes such as, projectors, laptops, interactive smart boards, smart phones, etc.

Towards the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, use of technological tools became synonymous with English Language Teaching. Any English Language teacher would identify various tools he/she would have to use in her teaching depending on the level of the students, the learning outcomes and the course outline. Technology and its varied tools were used to supplement teaching and provide a rich and enhanced learning experience to the language learner. In the views of Onasanya (2009), information and communication technology offer several opportunities in education. It can be employed as a means of preparing the current generation of students for future work. E-learning though has been fairly popular for the past few decades yet its widespread use and an increased dependency on it was largely visible since the beginning of 2020 due to the unprecedented situation faced by the whole world due to COVID-19. From being a supplemental tool used occasionally and as per the demands of the learning outcomes, e-learning overnight became an essential entity of language teaching/ learning which not only brought forth its numerous benefits but also exposed the challenges faced by teachers and students alike while using it (Rahmtallah,2020).

Literature Review

English language teaching (ELT) together with the growth of English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) is a progressive field that often witnesses methodological innovations. Teachers, researchers, and practitioners are in continuous search for the best teaching tools and practices that can help learners succeed in their language learning and meet the employment criteria and market needs. According to Cook (2003,p.30), “different approaches to teaching English did not just occur by chance, but in response to changing geopolitical circumstances and social attitudes and values, as well as shifts of fashion in linguistics which, for all its apparent objectivity, was itself subject to social change”. Due to English being the lingua franca, it is taught in almost all segments of

education from kindergarten to higher education across the world (Baird & Baird, 2018; Deniz & Buyyurt 2016). Considering this long-established value of English among other world languages the teaching and learning of English proportionally shared the problems caused by the pandemic (Li, Xie, Ai & Li, 2020).

However, one advantage that most language teachers and learners gained during this period of uncertainty is that online teaching of English was already being practiced prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and some English language teachers and learners have become accustomed to online lessons in English courses (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). In fact, Bailey and Lee (2020) opined that Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been used for language teaching and learning purposes for more than 40 years. With the advances in technology, the English language teaching and learning evolved considerably, this paved the way for online language learning. Thus, the teaching of English through online may not be seen as an absolute new phenomenon, yet the urgent transition to emergency online language teaching may exhibit certain challenges for teachers and students.

The transition to remote teaching worldwide created a need to differentiate the terms used for the modes of instructional delivery. Generally, online learning and emergency remote teaching are used interchangeably to refer to the case of teachers and students' practices during the pandemic period, which started in March 2020 and has continued since then. However, Hodges et al., (2020a) explained that online teaching, like face-to-face teaching, was a planned activity from the very beginning. Nevertheless, they highlighted that emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a solution provided as an alternative to customary education modes due to the crisis circumstances. English language teaching and learning through emergency online teaching, prompted several research studies dealing with various aspects involving teachers, students, teaching practices, technological resources, teaching platforms, and the teaching of language skills from primary to university education (Andriivna, Vasylyivna, Pvlina & Mykhaylivna,2020; Jones, 2020; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021; Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020; Russell, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Nunan 2003). In fact, not only for the existing situation of English language teaching during emergency online teaching but also for the occurrence of a crisis in the

future necessitating a sudden shift to emergency teaching, the evidence and experience gathered from research studies may provide valuable insights into the nature of English language teaching in such periods.

Reasoning from research findings based on the challenges faced, solutions to problems, the advantages or disadvantages of emergency online teaching, and platforms, technological resources and student and teacher-related issues, the general picture of English language teaching requires a comprehensive study based on an integrative literature review. The two-year experience of the COVID-19 pandemic taking language teaching and learning within emergency online education is significant for some reasons. Initially, it is critical for researchers, academics, English language teachers, students and the related stakeholders to understand the global impact of the pandemic specifically on language education. Next, learning from the weaknesses and strengths of the emergency online teaching and learning from a global perspective may guide programme designers, teachers, students, families and school administrators in increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of language teaching and learning during such critical periods.

The Importance of Teaching English Language

Teaching is an activity aimed at bringing about meaningful learning through a method that is morally and pedagogically acceptable (Iorhemen, 2020). Therefore, for any meaningful teaching/learning of English Language to take place; commitment, competence and creativity as well as adoption of dynamic pedagogy in changing circumstances are central to the success. One tends to agree with Mishra and Koehler (2006) who holds that technology knowledge has to complement pedagogical content knowledge. Hence, teachers should master three domains, namely technological knowledge (TK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and content knowledge (CK). TK is knowledge of the technology used to enhance educational practices. PK refers to the knowledge of the pedagogical theories, approaches, strategies and methods, psychology of learning, classroom management, and assessment. CK refers to knowledge about the content of the lessons taught. The integration of technology with pedagogy and content knowledge makes teachers' teaching processes more relevant to the demands of the 21st Century and more appealing to the learners. Language is a complex whole, the mastery of which requires

the learner's total commitment for life. The person's prior knowledge, attitudes, personality, learning styles, skills and motivation are all factors related to eventual outcome of the language study (Brown, 2004). Language, so far as we know, is something specific to humans, that is to say it is the basic capacity that distinguishes humans from all other living beings. Language therefore remains potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing ideas and concepts as well as moods, feelings and attitudes.

Therefore, English language comes to our aid in our commercial transactions throughout the globe. English is the language of the latest business management in the world. English is a means not only for international commerce; it has become increasingly essential for inter-state commerce and communication. English has today become one of the major languages of the world; it will be very difficult to neglect English language because of rich literature, scientific and technical nature of language. English is accepted as the second language in Nigeria. In the words of Fatai and Iorhemen (2019,p.7) "In Nigeria, English is a second language-it is learned and used extensively in addition to the mother tongues. But if placed in a diglossic relationship with the indigenous languages, English stands as the 'High' (H) language while the indigenous languages have 'Low' (L) status". This picture is a result of the functions which the language performs in the country. For example, it is the language of government and administration; the language of commerce and industry; the language of intra-national and international communications; the language of education, right from the upper primary school.

According to Awonusi (2009), apart from English being the language of instruction in Nigerian schools, the English language has been institutionalized in the country as the language of educational evaluation. Above all, English is the language of national integration. Therefore, English occupies an important place in the school curriculum and works as a powerful language of communication to provide a strong binding force to keep all the diverse groups united.

The Place of English in School Curriculum in Nigeria

The place of English in school curriculum in Nigeria is an important issue in modern utilitarian principles. English in Nigeria in the 21st century is no

more a colonial burden, but a real wing of hope and prosperity. You can see the place of English in the school curriculum under the following sub-headings, *viz.*:

- A bridge to higher studies: English has continued to occupy an important place in the curriculum of secondary schools so that at the end of secondary stage the pupils will attain good working knowledge of English. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) also provided that English is a compulsory subject for all levels beginning from primary to tertiary levels.
- English as a career: English helps to build up career. Many take higher studies of English, build their career as English teachers or lecturers, or other numerous jobs where knowledge of English will be required at every step. Awonusi (2009, p.7) opines that “tender for jobs or contracts depends on the use of English for discussion and subsequent documentation”. Many students discontinue studies after the secondary level and avail the job as means of livelihood if they learn English efficiently at school level; they will be able to find secure jobs in future. Hence, the value school curriculum place on English measures with the important role the subject plays.
- A tool for acquiring broad knowledge: at the secondary stage, there are so many subjects in which there is enrichment by English. So, for exploring extensive knowledge, English is helpful. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) provides that English is the medium of instruction. It is even stated in the English Language curriculum for senior secondary School 3 that no student can precede to the tertiary level without a credit pass in English language. Again, the language is the medium of instruction at all level of education as well as the language of government and wider communication. Although, the use of the mother tongue is inevitable, especially at the elementary school level.
- Visiting foreign universities: Many students have been going abroad and more will continue to go in future, for higher studies. So their foundation of English language has to be sound for effective communication in the foreign countries. English is widely spoken and recognized by many all around the world and English Language is the primary or the first language in many of the countries. Staley

(2005) states that the children and the adults move from one country to another country to learn the English Language due to its need and importance in the global era of today.

- A tool of national integration: English among the students should be learned to serve the purpose of national integration and unity. Awonusi (2009) observes that English is a lingua franca which gives everyone a sense of belonging to one nation. It remains the major asset that makes communication among most groups in Nigeria in most situations possible.
- A vehicle of modernity: The English Language acquaints us with fundamental ideas of modern civilization or modern science and even growing knowledge of all the advanced countries of the world.

Tools and Techniques Used in Teaching and Learning English Language in COVID-19 Era

The various online modes of teaching tools and techniques are identified by Gowda and Ayush (2020) below:

1. Google Meet: Google Meet is a video communication service developed by Google. It is used for conducting online live video classes. Google meet is available for free for everyone at meet.google.com and iOS or Android and it supports maximum of 250 participants for interactive session and 100,000 participants for live streaming.
2. Google Classroom: Google Classroom is a free web service developed by Google for education institutions that aims to simplify creating, distributing, and grading assignments. The primary purpose of Google Classroom is to streamline the process of sharing files between faculties and students. Google classroom is available for free at iOS and android versions with a maximum of 250 members (teachers and students) and join limit is 100 and create limit is 30 per day for personal account.
3. Zoom: Zoom application is used for video conferencing and it is developed by American communication Technology Company. It provides video-telephony and online chat services through a cloud-based peer-to-peer software platform. Zoom is available for

free in IOS and android versions with 40-minute time limit for basic plan.

4. Cisco Webex: Cisco Webex is an American company that develops and sells web conferencing and videoconferencing applications. *Cisco Webex* is the leading enterprise solution for video conferencing, online meetings, screen share, and webinars. Web conferencing, cloud calling. It is available in android and iOS with a limit of 100 participants.
5. Microsoft teams: Microsoft Teams, also referred to as simply Teams, is a unified communication and collaboration platform that combines persistent workplace chat, video meetings, file storage, and application integration. It is only free for Microsoft office 365 subscribers and other application can use as a guest.
6. Whatsapp and Telegram: Social media application also used for communication and groups distributing the study materials for free Check grammar. These two applications are available for free in android and iOS versions.

Opportunities of Teaching and Learning English Language in the COVID-19 Era

The emergence of COVID-19 forced a drastic change in the pattern of instruction employed by teachers in teaching and learning processes. Schools at all levels adopted online learning; the online learning provided different opportunities which are presented below.

Learners at different levels of education got trained on how to use and cope with various available online teaching and learning platforms which are linked to the internet. The internet has facilitated E-learning. Typically, online e-learning or electronic learning, training, learning, or education through a computer or some other digital device, such as smartphones, tablets, and even cell phones, are linked to the Internet (Lawless, 2018). In the 21st century, computer literacy is essential for teaching and learning. Although the knowledge of computer is an invaluable skill to cope with the use of the apps that have been available for teaching and learning during COVID-19, the training on how to effectively navigate on the apps is one of the gains in the COVID-19 era, which teachers and students of English both acquired. Before the COVID-19, many students and teachers could operate computers without sufficient

knowledge of the digital platforms of teaching learning processes.

Online platforms help teachers of English language to handle large classrooms with ease. In Nigeria for instance, due to the growing population which is not usually commensurate with the available resources, the teacher to student ratio becomes a problem in the physical classroom. However, with virtual classrooms, the management of large classroom is relatively better. A single teacher could handle a class of over two hundred students. Different participant could join from different locations. This is a great opportunity that teachers of English enjoyed recently as a result of COVID-19. In fact, times when the lockdown gets eased, most teachers still prefer virtual classes. E-learning is the answer to improving education and providing greater access to information opportunities in many countries with a large population, limited resources, and remote geographical areas, such as Nigeria (Kuntoro & Al-Hawamdeh, 2003).

Online classes get both teachers and students relieved of the stress of moving to far distance to attend classes. Teachers and students save a lot of time spent on commuting and are able to complete other planned or unplanned tasks. Online learning also results in cost reduction as huge amount of budget is spent on transportation. Online classes can be carried out at any time and place provided facilities such as devices, network and electricity are available. The stress and cost of transportation has been unprecedented mostly in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning. It is common to see students staying in long queues to access different means of transportation. With COVID-19 however, virtual classes serve a great opportunity. Teachers and students may choose to stay indoors to have their classes.

Another important aspect of online learning during the lockdown was that the teachers and students relied mostly on the independent learning. Carrier (2017) supports that online learning brings many benefits to learners by expanding their learning opportunities and helping them develop their sense of autonomy over their own learning. On the other hand, teachers had to work on certain assumptions that students will attend an online session pre-prepared with the lesson or the language item to be taught. And after the lesson they will depend on themselves to practice and perfect that particular lesson or the language item. Consequently, it facilitates independent learning among those students who already were

relying on themselves and also forced others to try to develop a habit themselves dependently to find solutions to their queries. Nuzhath (2020) opines that online learning developed a sense of conscientiousness among a selected group of students who maintained a sense of integrity related to their work and submission deadlines. Not only online learning promoted independence among the learners to take a certain measure of learning authority in their hands, but also it developed in them study skills such as the skill of note-taking based on reading and listening, time management skill, reading a variety of material provided, and also test preparation. The students became more self-motivated to learn and do their work but also developed a measure of self-discipline towards their studies.

Online learning is flexible such that teachers and students alternate their teaching and learning schedules in relation to other possible activities they had planned. Pope (2020) opines that online teaching also allows flexibility in teaching students/learners when the teachers are away from school and the classroom. Teachers and Students could plan their work around their schedules easily because the lessons did not require them to travel. Flexibility also includes the learning environment that a student chooses in the comfort of his home, be it their bedroom, or the living room, their study area. It can also be done on the recreation ground while walking and listening to the teacher's podcast. According to Buheji and Buheji (2020a), many students found in attending online courses gain the flexibility to learn in non-classroom environment that may be more suitable for some students who are not succeeding in face to face learning system.

For instructors, online tutoring can be done anytime, anywhere, online materials can be updated, and learners can see the changes immediately; when learners can access materials on the internet, it is easier for instructors to direct them to the appropriate information based on their needs, online learning systems can be used to determine learners' needs and to assign suitable materials for learners to select from, to achieve their learning goal. (Anderson, 2008).

Online classes foster interaction. Some people might assume that traditional learning in a physical setting is the most natural and best way to interact. But that's not necessarily true. In an online class, no student sits in the back row. Everyone sits basically front and centre! Those too shy to ask a question in front of their entire class now have the option of initiating

a live, private chat with their instructor. A student uncomfortable with broadcasting to the entire class may even opt to mute their microphone or disable their camera while continuing to participate in the lesson. A student with the ability to hide may seem like a disadvantage of online courses. But now, teachers have the option of administering [online quizzes](#) to ensure every student is engaged. They edit and can enrich videos to create a better learning experience online. In a physical classroom, the teacher may write notes on a blackboard, in hopes that students are jotting the information down themselves. With online learning, an instructor can write down notes on a digital whiteboard or even assign a student to write real-time notes that students can easily download after the class.

Challenges of Teaching and Learning English Language in the COVID-19 Era

Despite the teaching and learning opportunities provided by COVID-19, challenges also abound. A study conducted by Ahmad (2016) found a phenomenon that EFL learning which requires a lot of practice for its application also experiences obstacles when the learning system is applied. In listening session, for instance, the ICT equipment used by teachers to train students who are in separate and distant places is often ineffective. Teachers also cannot maximally supervise students when giving listening exams. In speaking course with the distance or online learning, students also find problems in imitating the way of speaking exemplified by their teacher, and the teacher also cannot optimally train the students to speak.

Inadequate preparation by teachers for online learning is a key factor. The transition from conventional learning systems to online systems occurred suddenly because the COVID-19 pandemic was not preceded by mature preparation. However, Cooperman (2017) insists that it is important to online teachers to know about technology or the ability of technical background to use new technology which can be delivered in teaching online both effectively and efficiently. Again, Raja and Nagasubramani (2018) also emphasize that teacher's responses toward computers are the main factor in the successful implementation of ICT in learning and teaching. Unfortunately, a number of teachers do not have ICT skills so they are unable to adapt the change, namely technology and information-based learning. Even though, it is inevitable for teachers to

use technology to support their teaching. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, like or not, ready or not, ICT-based learning must be implemented so that the learning process can keep running.

Another problem is that some students' parents and students do not have computer or android device, as found in a research conducted by Wahab and Iskandar (2020). Such condition makes them difficult in facing the reality. Andriivna et al., (2020) reveals that access to the internet and computers or smart phones was one of the biggest challenges in delivering effective English courses online. On the one hand, there is a demand for the fulfillment of educational services for students, as mandated in the constitution. On the other hand, they are faced with a lack of supporting facilities. The problem is not only in the lack of learning equipment or facilities, but also in the absence of the internet quota. Providing internet quota requires a high cost. This difficulty is felt by students and parents from middle to lower class economies. They do not have adequate budget to provide the internet network. It doesn't stop there. Even though the internet is in their hands, students still face difficulty accessing the internet network because of the places they live. A research carried out by Nashruddin, Alam, and Tanasy (2020) confirms that some students live in remote rural areas that are not covered by the internet. In addition, their cellular network is sometimes unstable, due to the geographical location which is quite far from the signal coverage.

According to Atsua, Iorhemen and Aberah (2021, p.3) "The COVID-19 pandemic revolutionised digital and online education globally but majority of students in rural and underserved communities in Nigeria are left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transit to the new digital methods of learning". Learners in schools that lack the resources or capacity to transition to online delivery are cut out of the e-learning (Leung & Sharma, 2020). This is a problem that occurs in many students who take online learning, so the implementation is less effective. Some students are less enthusiastic to participate in online learning even though they are supported by adequate facilities, such as computers, androids, and the availability of an internet network. They are less concerned about the importance of EFL literacy and task submission. As a result, assignments that should have been submitted within one-week were often stretched to two weeks.

One of the problems is the limitation in the learning control.

Teachers are limited in conducting the control during online learning. Teachers' lack of control over online teaching platforms, and making use of less varied and engaging teaching activities or lack of direct interaction during the courses were among the most reported weaknesses of online teaching during the pandemic (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Shaaban, 2020). This is caused by the absence of a discussion forum menu in the application used. Even if the menu exists, many students do not use it well. Some students fill the attendance list at the beginning, but after that, they are no longer active until the end of the learning, and some students even leave the online class to do other activities without being controlled by the teacher. This means that some students are not fully active from the beginning to the end of the lesson. However, it should not also be ignored at all; many students really keep active until the end of learning.

Effective teaching of language skills is also an aspect affected negatively by the COVID-19. The language skills which comprise reading, writing, speaking and listening are essential in language learning. According to Lawal (2020), listening is (an oracy skill) and reading (a literacy skill) are receptive or decoding skills while speaking (another oracy skill) and writing (the second literacy skill) are both productive skills of encoding messages in the communicative process. However, Rahmtallah (2020) maintains that the writing is known to be the important skills and through the virtual classes, not just the learners even the teachers faced major difficulties in teaching the learners on how to write in English language. Similarly, on speaking skills, Sayuti et- al., (2020) observes that, the learners have lack of confidence and with the speaking that is done through the virtual classes brought in even more comfortless for the learners to speak or utter the words accordingly. The listening skill was reported to be the most difficult skill for the students to develop during e-learning in the COVID-19 era (Rifiyanti, 2020). In another research conducted on e-learning during the COVID-19, Şendoğan (2020) found that listening and writing skills developed less in online teaching.

The worse disadvantages of online learning centre on technical problems. Nothing disrupts an online lesson more than audio, video, or internet connection issues. According to the Digital 2020 Global Overview Report published in January 2020, about 60 percent of Nigerians are not connected to the internet. The statistics for mobile

phones, which could also be used as a learning medium, are more hopeful. According to the report, around 169.2 million people - 83 percent of Nigerians have access to mobile phone connections; however, of these, 50 percent - around 84.5 million people, reside in urban areas. For the population with access, the proportion majority of who are private school students who already have a learning advantage over their public school peers (Kemps, 2020). In a corroborative view, Zhong (2020) states that poorly resourced institutions and socially disadvantaged learners where limited access to technology and the internet, as well as students' inability to engage in an online environment, undermine e-learning in the COVID-19 era. For children from poorer backgrounds who tend to have less access to internet connectivity, computers, and other devices, and reside in rural areas where local languages take dominance over English, ICT-learning uptake is a nightmare!

COVID-19 era of learning the English language is also complicated by isolation learning unlike the physical collaborative learning that was in existence and allowed learners to engage in collective physical activities like debates, quizzes, spelling bee and drama. Students were provided with appropriate learning skills during physical collaborative learning, these sometimes take place during extra curricula activities in group learning schedules. Students could use these skills and habits to construct their own knowledge. According to Afolabi (2008), group activities provide concrete learning experiences and relevant information beyond classroom lesson. However, in the COVID-19 era, all these possibilities got thwarted as learning is strictly isolation based.

Conclusion

The year 2020 brought revolutionary changes in teaching and learning as a consequence of the spread of corona virus in the form of COVID-19 which compelled the academicians, educators, teachers, and students to adapt themselves to a very new and highly innovative method of teaching and learning in the form of e-learning or online learning. Online teaching holds the key for future education system in Nigeria. In future, online teaching will play a major role in advancement of changing learning system, especially with English language which is a key subject to all discipline. Though initially, both educators and students face problems in conducting and undergoing online teaching and learning, but it has become the new

normal today. There are a few drawbacks to the system for now but the prospect is still high. Teachers must develop transformative reflection, adjust their teaching strategies and decisions, and set the suitable learning setting for meaningful practices.

Recommendations

To minimize the barriers or obstacles faced in teaching and learning English Language in the COVID-19 Era, the following measures can be applied:

Careful selection of appropriate online tools can minimize most challenges associated with ineffective teaching and learning language skills during COVID-19. For instance, in teaching listening skills, students can be presented with audio materials which may be downloaded and played repeatedly for adequate comprehension. To improve speaking skills, online tutorial on speaking skills, preferably by the native speakers can be selected. The selection may consider the curriculum, appropriateness, usability, learner's interest and accessibility to the target learners. Similarly, instructional resources like television can be employed to complement the online apps in teaching of reading and writing. For feedback purpose, evaluation can be carried out to help the teacher ascertain the level of assimilation.

Regarding the limitations on ICT mastery which position teachers as not been prepared, teachers can use platforms with simpler operations, for example: Whatsapp and Telegram application. However, teachers have to gradually improve their ICT competencies, for example by following related workshops, learning from other teachers who have more abilities in ICT field. Following the video tutorial on YouTube that presents many learning application uses, the steps for using them, and how to produce instructional videos, can also improve the ICT skill.

Realizing the fact that learners of the 21st century cannot do without learning gadgets like computers and smartphones, parents, caregivers, guidance and government should provide these gadgets to learners at all levels. The possibility that younger learners may misuse the gadget is another thing to be considered. However, their activities can be monitored by their parents to ensure that the aspiration of online learning is not compromised. Educational institutions also need to invest in developing and improving existing online learning platforms as well as expanding the

provision of internet access and online library resources. Training and orientation programmes about online learning, including lessons on online teaching and learning tools and strategies, need to be offered on a regular basis so that students, teachers, and staff could have the opportunity to advance their knowledge and understanding of the different aspects and nuances of online and blended learning. When learners are provided with free computers and smartphones, they will be motivated by this kind gesture to participate actively in online learning.

The teachers can also proactively contact students who are less active in participating in online learning, and personally contact the parents of those students. If the condition allows, the teachers can conduct a home visit to those students. The teachers should find information on what obstacles are causing the students to be inactive, by contacting the student's parents. If it is known that students are basically lazy, so the guidance and counseling teacher asks the student's parents to accompany him in online learning.

Humans are social creatures who generally love company; the solitary experience of online learning can be a major hurdle for some students. It can be lonely unless you have a friend who is taking the course with you. Discussion can be encouraged in course forums where students can introduce themselves, as well as focused discussions on particular aspects of the course. Posting your comments and thoughts to the forums can be helpful to overcome these feelings of isolation, particularly in courses that use community mentors or teaching assistants to respond to student posts.

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