

Teaching the Challenging Content of Phonology during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aims to find the impact of the abrupt transition from traditional teaching to remote teaching of the phonology courses and how stakeholders dealt with such a shift. To this end, a descriptive approach was used, and data were collected using a questionnaire. The sample included students at English language programs (ELP) in some Saudi universities at levels 5 and 6 since they took the phonetics and phonology course at the beginning of the pandemic. There was an educational challenge during the coronavirus that compelled the conventional system of education to accept the status quo where educators found themselves obliged to shift abruptly from a traditional, face-to-face educational environment to fully online instruction. However, most of our Saudi academic institutions were not prepared for such a sudden and quick change. During the COVID-19 lockdown, language teachers in English Departments at Saudi Universities (ELP) resorted to the different type of teaching which depended mostly on technology where internet-wired personal computers or tablets played a significant role, and which expanded the scope of the teaching process and practically increased orientation on the teachers' part. Moreover, students' independence and self-teaching seemed to have increased, which could have influenced their cognition and skills. This study discussed the way language teachers in ELP dealt with the challenging content of the phonology course during Covid-19. The findings show that there were some problems at the beginning moving from traditional to virtual classes, where the students depended upon themselves and adapted to the change. The findings also showed that the teaching aids were not satisfactory enough to suit the purpose of the course.

Keywords: challenging content, COVID-19, ELP, learning strategies, online instruction, phonology, teaching strategies

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Introduction

The emergence of COVID-19 has impacted all people around the world, including the Saudi people and the academic community at Saudi universities. The pandemic was stipulated as a world epidemic. Earlier reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that the Covid-19 cases spread beyond Wuhan city to the rest of the world and was found in 24 countries outside China (Khatri, et al., 2020). In March 2020, the Saudi government took immediate action in response to the WHO decisions. The application of some precautionary measures was gradual and ended up with complete lockdown at certain times. This change necessitated a change in the educational policy, particularly the use of online media and distance lectures instead of traditional and real classes. Accordingly, the university president decided that all the teaching and learning processes and activities must be carried out online for the rest of the second semester of 2020. However, this shift in teaching and learning was extended to include the year 2021 due to the spread of the virus worldwide. Attendance was limited to specific cases with strict measures for some practical and core courses that needed laboratories or hands-on experience. However, in the English courses given at ELP, physical attendance was not allowed, and there was no urgent need for language labs, but still, the shift in teaching and learning method was of important concern to all parties involved. The traditional classroom had to be held online, which had must have an impact on all teaching and learning activities. Taking this into consideration, this work endeavored to examine the process of teaching one course at ELP with a focus on the transition process, challenges and teaching aids.

The worldwide pandemic, Covid-19, spread all over the world, making the year 2020 a year of total and unprecedented online learning style and a year of electronic mass communication. The name of the virus spread almost as fast as the virus itself, which required the imposition of certain laws and taking certain actions to reduce the virus transmission rate to a minimum. These measures must have impacted the teaching and learning process as they affected people's lifestyles in general. The teaching of phonetics and phonology would take place in a traditional classroom where there is direct contact between the teacher and the learner, using the book as the main source for lecturing. Teaching aids would include the traditional board, smartboard, if any, and a projector. These should usually be ready and available beforehand since the teacher should have gone through this experience before. The sudden emergence of the pandemic and the abrupt change raises a significant question: How did the pandemic impact the teaching and learning of phonetics and phonology at ELPs? This main question can branch into the following questions of the study.

The sudden shift from the traditional classroom to online teaching and learning caused by the lockdown was the primary impetus for this study. The lockdown was enacted by the authorities of all countries to prevent the airborne virus from potential dispersal and transmission between people. In that case, teachers and learners had to adopt certain teaching and learning strategies that were integrated with certain techniques to achieve the very specific aims of the taught course. The significance of this study is embodied in the successful adaptation of the teaching strategies to the course content in order to achieve its objectives and its learning outcomes.

Questions and Hypotheses of the Study

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- What was the impact of the abrupt transition from traditional teaching to remote teaching of the phonology courses in ELP?
- 2- What are the challenges teachers and students encountered in the phonology course in ELP?
- 3- How did the teachers and students meet these challenges caused by the transition in the educational process?

Study Objectives

- 1- Explain the abrupt transition process from traditional teaching to remote teaching of phonology.
- 2- Identify the challenges teachers and students encountered in the phonology course in ELP.
- 3- Find out about the ways teachers and students met these challenges.
- 4- Write recommendations based on the results of the study to be submitted to stakeholders to improve the educational process.

Determinants of the study

- 1-Scope and Delimitation: The topic of the study was limited to Phonology, as one of the courses taught in ELP in Saudi Arabic.
- 2-Time-Limit: The period under consideration is from March-May 2020, where the government enacted the lockdown law, and teachers and students were obliged to meet online.

Literature Review

The previous outbreak of SARS in 2003 had some influence on people's lives despite the measures taken by the WHO (World Health Organization, 2003). However, the challenges encountered at the time were not addressed as opposed to the latest version of COVID-19, which impacted all people around the world. One of the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis for daily life was that students around the world had been negatively influenced. Starting from early childhood, up to 40 million students around the world missed out on early education opportunities in the critical year prior to schooling and thus lost their presence in a stimulating and rich environment and missed opportunities for learning. Social interaction and even getting adequate nutrition in some cases (Gromada, Richardson, & Rees, 2020). Similarly, higher education was also influenced in many countries around the world. While online learning has been made available in the higher education sub-sector generally through recorded lectures and online platforms, some universities had to postpone learning and teaching until further notice due to the lack of the necessary IT infrastructure for both students and teachers. There were also some issues related to the alignment of classes and academic schedules, as some programs successfully implemented online classes while others could not ("Policy Briefing: Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond," 2020). This implementation of online courses required a concurrent change in teaching strategies in light of theories of learning and teaching to make this transition effective and efficient.

In their book, Wilson and Peterson (2006) argued that "*there is no one right way to teach well*" (p. 13). They added that this does not mean that any teaching method can be blindly accepted since it is a must for every teacher to have a repertoire of teaching strategies that "*range*

from methods of direct instruction to cooperative and small group work to one-on-one work" (p. 13). Some strategies will suit certain teachers but not suit other ones, may suit certain students but not suit other ones. The same applied to lessons. Some strategies may go well with certain lessons but not with other lessons. The authors insist that teachers have to have robust content knowledge to make challenging content comprehensible, which would allow concepts to be developed adequately and coherently. Therefore, teachers should be able to weigh their choices thoughtfully and make appropriate decisions as to what strategy and content best meet their aims and what their students need in each lesson.

Among the effective teaching strategies that accommodate diverse learners were mentioned by Kameenui and Carnine (1998). In terms of the curriculum and instruction, they offered some guidelines for determining priorities for teaching dissimilar learners, especially those who might be relatively slow in academic performance compared to their school-age peers. Their book gives concrete examples of potential strategies for reading, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing. They suggested that these should be taught in a way whereby the learning materials is scaffolded and integrated and adequately supported. For example, their strategies included cooperative learning to provide students with the opportunities to use language in meaningful, purposeful, and interesting ways to improve other associated life skills.

In these circumstances, to confront this worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, governments had to take appropriate measures to cope with the policies and rules of physical and social distancing. Teaching and learning had to be reformulated to suit the new and different patterns of instruction and to guarantee some collaborative interaction in the online environment. Previous and recent studies on teaching and learning during the pandemic investigated the challenges encountered and the ways suggested to overcome such a crisis in the educational setting in particular.

Previous Studies

There was a recent study called Mediated Arabic Language Learning for Higher Education in COVID-19 Situation conducted by Wargadinata, Maimunah, Febriani, and Humaira (2020). The study aimed at examining the media used for Arabic learning at the university during the COVID-19 period. Their research was qualitative descriptive, and the instruments they used were observation, questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. The result showed that most of the students used WhatsApp and depended on autonomous learning using online platforms. The study also revealed that the prevalent learning media was videos. The students were involved in peer-discussion activities to improve their language skills. The researchers noticed that was a shift from a personal-cultural approach to an instrumental-functional approach. They also noticed that there was more dependence on technology on the part of the teachers than ever before.

Another study was conducted by Syahrin and Salih (2020) on ESL online classroom experience in Oman during Covid-19. The study investigated the online practice of ESL students in higher education in Oman during the Covid-19, with a focus on the interaction between the learning style the students preferred and the technologies they actually experienced on the e-learning platform designed for the particular ESL courses. The results showed that most of the students' preferred a learning style that was reflected in the technologies they actually experienced in the online classroom, and the two appeared to complement each other. The study also revealed that there was more emphasis on the receptive skills (listening and reading), while

there was some inadequacy in dealing with the productive skills (speaking and writing), which the ESL course instructors and policymakers should reconsider.

Another study was conducted on Saudi university students by Al-Nofaie (2020) to identify the advantages and challenges of online instruction during the pandemic period and to suggest possible solutions for online language learning via Blackboard. The number of participants in Haifa's study was 25 BA students majoring in the English language and taking classes on morphology. The analysis of the students' learning logs showed that they preferred the asynchronous type of learning due to its flexibility, while virtual education was not always appealing to students. This was the opposite of what some relevant studies revealed on virtual education for language learning.

Lie et al. (2020) conducted a study on 18 teachers and their students from different parts of Indonesia using a questionnaire followed by reflections and interviews. As triangulation, the researchers conducted group interviews with five students for each of the 18 teachers. This study revealed that there were five interrelated elements of online learning instruction that impacted the level of engagement. Those elements included learners, teachers' previous exposure to the online environment, technological awareness, familiarity with pedagogy, and the type of support system. The study also revealed that the teachers were still struggling with online learning, but they had a renewed sense of commitment to improve their technological professionalism.

Oksana Andriivna, Olena Vasylivna, Oksana Pavlivna, and Valeriia Mykhaylivna (2020) wrote an article on using educational technology for remote language teaching during the lockdown period in Ukraine. They defined the types of modern educational technology implemented fully for E-learning, and they also attempted to find ways of refining students' learning at higher educational establishments, explaining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. They provided some examples of educational technology used in the Ukrainian setting at higher education institutions. So, their study was a descriptive-prescriptive type of work that mainly relied on content analysis.

Most of the previous studies above followed a descriptive design and were conducted on higher education institutions. Some of them investigated the use of technology in teaching and learning in general, and some of them focused on language learning. They used different tools such as observation, questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. The current study followed a similar descriptive design, and the sample was in higher education, too. However, it placed more emphasis on the course of phonetics and phonology and looked at the problem from three dimensions: how the transition took place, what challenges were found, and what teaching aids were selected to meet the challenges.

As noticed so far, there have been no previous studies that investigated the teaching of phonology during the pandemic, which can be attributed to the recentness of the matter.

Methods

This research was designed to be qualitative and descriptive. The paper examines the impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning strategies in the context of phonetics and phonology, what challenges teachers and students encountered and how they responded to those challenges. The

pandemic forced educators to change their conventional and face-to-face teaching methods to a type of teaching that utilised an online system. The same applies to students' learning strategies.

Participants

The sample included in this study were students of English at ELP in different Saudi universities who had taken the course during the pandemic. The intended number of students was no less than 350, representing males and females. The participants came from Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (Riyadh), Taibah University (Madinah), and King Khalid University (Abha) and all of them responded in March 2021.

Research Instruments

The main instrument used in this work is an online questionnaire on Google Forms. The questionnaire items sought to find out (1) information about the online teaching and learning process and models, (2) any issues, problems, or challenges that impacted the online teaching and learning strategies, (3) how those challenges were met.

Testing the Study Tool

The stability of the questionnaire was verified by the method of calculating the internal consistency of the scale using the Cronbach's Alpha equation, where the stability of the questionnaire dimensions ranged between (0.74) and (0.94), while the value of the total stability of the questionnaire was (0.83), and these ratios are appropriate for the tool's uses to collect the study data. And to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire items, first, the questionnaire was piloted on an experimental sample of students. Second, the questionnaire was refereed by a third party (mostly would include associate and full professors).

Data Collection

Data collection took place using Google Forms for setting and distributing the questionnaires where the students could choose to reject responding to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was disseminated using email and social media, with the intended sample in mind: students taking a course in phonetics and phonology in ELPs during the lockdown period. So, distribution was not random, and it focused on students at levels five to six where the course was presumably given.

Data Analysis

First, the data analysis was done using SPSS to find the mean, standard deviation, dimensions values, rank and degree. Second, those dimensions were analysed and described according to internal themes, ranks and their relation to other themes. Third, those emerging patterns were discussed, interpreted and finally verified to reach a comprehensive understanding of how the challenging content of phonology was taught and learned during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Research Outlines

The first section introduces the study and sets the rationale and significance of the study. It also explains the problem of the study, its objectives, and the questions and hypotheses of the study. It also includes definitions of the terminology used in this study, in addition to the illustration of the scope, delimitation and time limit of the study. Section two includes the literature review and what the previous studies said about the topic of this study and how they are linked. Section three explains the methodology used in this study, including its design, data

collection, instruments and analysis procedures. Section four shows the results and analysis. The last section includes a discussion and analysis.

Results and Analysis

The data collected was divided into three main topics. The first topic focused on the transition from traditional classes to online ones, the second on the challenges encountered, and the third tackled the ways that transition was dealt with. The study sample consisted of 460 participants from different English programs in universities in Saudi Arabia. All of the participants studied a course dealing with English phonetics and phonology during Covid 19 pandemic.

In order to facilitate the analysis of the questionnaire and to benefit from the data it contains, the response to its items has been determined in five levels, according to the five-level Likert scale. Therefore, the score (5) was given for strongly agree, the score (4) for agree, the score (3) for neutral, the score (2) for disagree, and the score (1) for strongly disagree. Then, and in order to identify the challenges that students faced in the course during Covid 19 pandemic, the data contained in their responses were evaluated and developed into degrees or cut-off scores based on the following equation: $(5-1) \div 3 = 1.33$, and $1.33 + 1 = 2.33$. Based on this, the degree of their appreciation for the challenges was low if the score was between 1–2.33, medium if between 2.34-3.67, and high if between 3.68-5.

Statistical Treatment

In order to analyze the primary data for the research, it was coded and entered into the SPSS computer system, and the necessary statistical treatments were performed so as to reach the results that would answer the study questions, following these procedures:

- Using the Cronbach's alpha equation to check the stability of the instrument.
- Using means and standard deviations to answer the three questions of the study.

Results

The arithmetic averages, standard deviations and rank were extracted for the three dimensions of the study tool, as in Table One:

Table 1. Arithmetic means and standard deviations of the three dimensions of the study

N	Dimension	Total Score	Std	Dimension Value	Degree
1	First	59%	9.16	2.95	M
2	Second	63%	7.89	3.16	M
3	Third	64%	18.40	3.19	M
	Overall mean			3.10	M

The dimensions include the abrupt transition from real to virtual classes, the challenges met, and finally, the teaching aids used during the pandemic.

First Question. To answer the first question, “What was the impact of the abrupt transition from traditional teaching to remote teaching of the phonology courses in ELP?”, the arithmetic averages, standard deviation and rank were calculated for each item of the first dimension of the questionnaire. The results showed an average degree of agreement among students on the items, as shown in Table Two.

Table 2. Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the first dimension: Abrupt transition

	Phrase	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Degree
1	The transition process from traditional teaching to remote teaching of phonology was smooth.	3.02	1.33	4	Medium
2	The transition process from traditional teaching to remote teaching of phonology was easy.	2.92	1.30	7	Medium
3	The transition process from traditional teaching to remote teaching of phonology was easy but took a long time.	2.72	1.27	8	Medium
4	In the beginning, I had big problems with preparing for online lessons.	3.33	1.51	1	Medium
5	I received training on attending online courses.	2.56	1.41	10	Medium
6	I received training on participating in online courses.	2.77	1.45	9	Medium
7	I received training on submitting work through online courses.	2.96	1.49	5	Medium
8	I received training on downloading course resources.	2.93	1.54	6	Medium
9	I received training on taking exams in online courses.	3.13	1.52	3	Medium
10	I had to increase my Internet data package.	3.19	1.52	2	Medium
	Total mean		2.95		Medium

It becomes clear from Table Two that the overall arithmetic means of the items of the first dimension was average (2.95), which shows that the degree of impact of the abrupt transition from traditional teaching to remote teaching of the phonology courses in ELP was moderate from the students' point of view with a variation in between these items as shown by their ranks in the table. Here, the fourth item came in the first place, whereas the fifth and six items came last. The fourth item received the highest agreement, and it shows that at the beginning of this transition, most of the students had had big problems with preparing for online lessons. What can be elicited from this is that the integration of technology in pre-Covid-19 classes was not satisfactory, and the transition was a kind of a surprise to most students and most teachers. However, these problems were 'at the beginning' and did not last long, as can be deduced from the responses.

On the other hand, the item that received the least agreement was item six, the one concerned with receiving training on participating in online courses. The students did not receive enough training on using online forums and resources, which can justify the problems the students had at the beginning of this transition. However, since the problem did not last long, it can be deduced that the student might have resorted to self-training using whatever resources were available, whether YouTube, classmates or friends.

As for the other items related to the first dimension, the transition process from traditional teaching to remote teaching of phonology, more than half of the respondents thought that it was smooth and easy, but it took them relatively a long time to adapt themselves to online learning. Moreover, more than half of the students asserted that they had received some type of instruction on how to submit work through online courses, how to download course resources, and how to

deal with exams in such a new environment. More than half of them had to increase their Internet package to make the transition go as smoothly as possible.

Second Question

To answer the second question, “What are the challenges teachers and students encountered in the phonology course in ELP?” the arithmetic averages, standard deviation, and rank were calculated for each item of the second dimension of the study. The results also showed an average degree of agreement among students with the items of this dimension, as shown in Table Three.

Table 3. *Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the second dimension: Challenges encountered*

	Phrase	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Degree
11	Course timing was suitable	3.34	1.42	4	Medium
12	Course timing was adequate	3.44	1.32	2	Medium
13	Course material was converted properly to suit online presentation	3.28	1.38	5	Medium
14	Virtual classes were more difficult than real classes	3.07	1.45	7	Medium
15	There was limited participation in virtual classes	2.97	1.51	9	Medium
16	I had to do more preparation for virtual classes than for real classes.	3.05	1.57	8	Medium
17	Sound quality was good	3.39	1.36	3	Medium
18	Visual presentation was clear	3.55	1.42	1	Medium
19	There were no disturbing interruptions	3.21	1.40	6	Medium
20	I did not have my own computer	2.33	1.61	10	Low
	Total mean		3.16		Medium

Table Three clearly shows that the overall arithmetic means of the second dimension was average (3.16), which shows that the degree of appreciation of the study sample for the challenges teachers and students encountered in the phonology course in ELP was moderate, with a difference in these estimates between the items as shown by the rank of each, where item 18 was in the first rank, while items 15, 16 and 20 came last. Item 18 was concerned with the clarity of visual presentation, which most of the students were satisfied with.

Item 20, on the other hand, had the least agreement. The majority of the participants did not have their own personal computers. The logical justification for this issue would be that there was a sudden transition where the students had to use computers for attending virtual classes while each family would possibly have a limited number of personal computers. And since the average Saudi household size (number of family members) consisted of 5.25 persons according to the latest statistics, the transition was not easy, taking into account that working parents, as well as the children, would need to use computers especially during the lockdown period. They would need to buy extra computers, which was not always easy since that would be a big burden for low-income families. Another problem was that the market witnessed a serious shortage of computers when sales of computers increased significantly to their highest level during the pandemic.

Third Question

To answer the third question, “How did the teachers and students meet these challenges caused by the transition in the educational process” arithmetic averages, standard deviation, and rank were calculated for each item of the third dimension of the study. The results showed an average degree of agreement among students with the items of this dimension, as shown in Table Four.

Table 4. Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the third dimension: How the transition was dealt with

	Phrase	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Degree
21	The teacher introduced International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) using a virtual board	3.27	1.55	9	Medium
22	The teacher introduced IPA using PowerPoint	3.61	1.51	3	Medium
23	The teacher taught IPA using videos	3.06	1.54	10	Medium
24	The teacher taught IPA using specialized apps	2.80	1.52	12	Medium
25	The teacher taught places of articulation using PowerPoint	3.56	1.49	8	Medium
26	The teacher taught places of articulation using specialized apps	2.73	1.56	13	Medium
27	The teacher taught sounds types using PowerPoint	3.61	1.51	3	Medium
28	The teacher taught sounds types using specialized apps	2.72	1.55	14	Medium
29	The teacher introduced and taught stress patterns using PowerPoint	3.66	1.47	2	Medium
30	The teacher introduced and taught stress patterns using specialized apps	2.69	1.46	15	Medium
31	The teacher introduced and taught intonation using PowerPoint	3.59	1.48	5	Medium
32	The teacher introduced and taught intonation using specialized apps	2.66	1.47	16	Medium
33	The teacher introduced and taught syllables using PowerPoint	3.67	1.46	1	High
34	The teacher introduced and taught syllables using specialized apps	2.63	1.45	17	Medium
35	The teacher taught consonants, vowels and diphthongs using PowerPoint	3.59	1.53	5	Medium
36	The teacher taught phonological processes using PowerPoint	3.59	1.49	5	Medium
37	The teacher taught phonological processes using specialized apps	2.82	1.55	11	Medium
	Total mean		3.19		Medium

As shown in Table Four above, it becomes clear that the overall arithmetic mean of the items of the third dimension was average, which shows that the degree of agreement by the participants as to how the teachers and students met these challenges caused by the transition in the educational process, with a difference in the evaluations of the items as shown by the rank of each of them. Item 33 came in first place with a high rating, too, while item 34 had the last rank with a medium rank. Item 33 was concerned with what helping aid the teacher used most to introduce and teach the course. PowerPoint seemed to be a trend-hitting software used by the teachers during the pandemic.

And quite the reverse, item 34 was in the lowest rank with a medium rating. The item was about using specialized apps to introduce and teach the course. In a phonetics and phonology course, the main focus is on sounds and sound production, where there are many useful apps that can help teachers and students. Among those Apps are *Sounds*, *iPA Phonetics*, and *Otterwave*, just to name a few.

Other items in this dimension included the introduction of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), places of articulation using, sounds types, stress patterns, intonation, syllables, consonants, vowels and diphthongs, and phonological processes using virtual board, using PowerPoint, videos, and or specialized apps. The rating for these practices was medium, with PowerPoint having the highest rank and specialized apps having the lowest.

Discussion

In answer to the first question as to the impact of the abrupt transition from traditional teaching to remote teaching of the phonology courses in ELPs, it can be elicited that the transition was not easy at the beginning and it might have caused some disturbance to the teachers, students, families, and probably to the institutions. The students managed to pull through with little facilities and training at the beginning but were able in the end to cope with such transition. So, the impact was hard at first but was somewhat alleviated with the students depending on themselves. Young people are known to know more about technology and can easily adapt themselves to technological changes. In support of this view, Narasuman et al. (2011) say that the “*present generation of young people is often touted as tech-savvy*” (p. 1). They have proven to be inclined to deal with whatever emerges in the field of technology.

Among the challenges that the students encountered was that virtual classes were more difficult than real classes since they had to do more preparation than in real classes and that participation time was limited in virtual classes compared to real classes. Some of the challenges included the conversion of learning material to suit online classes. Thus, in answer to the second question as to the challenges teachers and students encountered in the phonology course in ELP, it can be construed that there were some challenges. First was the unavailability of personal computers for students who had to share with other family members. The second was the effort students had to make to prepare for their online lessons. The third was the limited participation students could have in an online lesson.

In answer to the third question as to how the transition from real to virtual classes was dealt with in light of the course itself, the responses showed moderate satisfaction as to the procedures and aids used for teaching the core items of the course. Using the official platforms such as Blackboard, WebEx or Zoom, most of the teachers employed PowerPoint, which was the trend in teaching during the pandemic. However, in the phonetics and phonology course, such software could better have been accompanied with other applications such as *Sounds*, *iPA Phonetics*, and *Otterwave*, which could have facilitated teaching and learning sounds patterns, their production and the processes involved.

Conclusion

The measures taken by governments to thwart the spread of Corona have impacted the teaching and learning process, which also affected people's lifestyles in general. Among the

courses impacted by this shift was phonetics and phonology, which usually took place in a traditional classroom where there was direct contact between the teacher and the learner, using the book as the main source for lecturing. To address this issue, the researcher attempted to answer three questions. The first question was about the impact of the abrupt transition from traditional teaching to remote teaching of the phonology courses in ELP. The second question was to pinpoint the challenges teachers and students encountered in the phonology course in ELP. The final question was to describe how the teachers and students met these challenges caused by the transition in the educational process. The study conducted by Wargadinata et al. (2020) mentioned above did not talk about how the abrupt transition impacted the students. The current study, however, has mentioned that the students found some difficulties at the beginning to adapt to virtual classes and that might well have produced some annoyance and discomfort to the teachers, students, families, and other people involved in such transition. However, the circumstances might have instigated the students to innovate their ways out of these difficulties even though they had inadequate facilities and training and that was what enabled them to cope with the transition. The transition had some bearing on the learning process at first, but the process became streamlined and quite well-organized thanks to the students' own efforts to adapt. Regarding the challenges encountered, Syahrin and Salih (2020) and Wargadinata et al. (2020) did not give a description of the challenges and how they were overcome. Oksana Andriivna et al. (2020), however, mentioned some difficulties related to the absence of technical aids, quality of education, and digital illiteracy. However, in the current study, the results revealed there were some issues construed as challenges the students might have confronted. The first issue was that not all the students had their own personal computers, and they had to share with other family members, which could have resulted in learning instability due to time limit and probably loss of files. The second was that the students and teacher had to exert more effort preparing for online lessons. The third was that most students believed that there was only limited time for participation in an online lesson. In Wargadinata et al. (2020), it was mentioned that most of the students resorted to WhatsApp as the main source of knowledge. However, the current study focused more on the teaching aids used for teaching the principal items of the course, and the finding showed that it received moderate satisfaction since they seemed to be confined to PowerPoint when on teaching platforms such as Blackboard, WebEx or Zoom as the major platforms utilised during the pandemic.

Executive Recommendations Summary

Several recommendations emerge from this study. Since the abrupt transition from traditional to virtual environment resulted in a temporary disturbance of the educational system and probably other institutional systems, the first recommendation would be that institutions should work to develop their Risk Management Systems (RMS). Such a system would find quick, logical and ready-made solutions to various problems expected to happen. The second is that teachers and students should be trained to used different modes of teaching and learning, respectively. The third is that whenever there is some discomfort and instability in the system due to any mishap, there should be collaborative efforts that include the main stakeholders involved to meet any challenges encountered. Such efforts should continue until satisfactory results are achieved. Another thing to be considered is that there should be professional development for teachers and workers with a focus on a variety of working skills that can help them adjust to any unexpected circumstances. For example, in this study, the course in question was phonetics and phonology, where the teachers resorted to PowerPoint as the only and main

application to use, while there are other applications that can facilitate the course items such as *Sounds*, *iPA Phonetics*, *Otterwave*, and many others. These recommendations are directed mainly to (1) the ministry of education and decision-makers and (2) the Departments of English at Saudi Universities.

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