Impact of E-Learning on High School Students' English Language Learning

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected all sectors, including education—schools were affected by widespread lockdowns, which necessitated the adoption of online learning platforms. Using a mixed-methods research methodology incorporating questionnaires and interviews, researchers in the current study examined the impact of e-learning on high school students' English language learning, particularly their spoken skills, in Kuwait. The researchers studied a sample of 60 participants for the quantitative analysis and 18 students for the qualitative analysis. All were high school students in Kuwait enrolled in English classes. The study's results revealed significant challenges associated with e-learning, including low acceptance rates among students. Most students disagreed that online learning is a perfect learning tool, suggesting that e-learning fails to promote critical thinking skills and facilitate learning. E-learning also affects learners' capabilities to express their feelings and ideas. The interviews showed that e-learning failed to improve the students' English language mastery. Some of the challenges we noted include technical hitches and the inability to deploy teaching strategies used successfully in physical classes. Overall, the results indicate that students disliked online learning in Kuwait. In conclusion, e-learning is a significant opportunity for students to improve their learning, but it must be effectively used to encourage students' uptake. It is necessary to assess schools' preparedness to implement it as well as to design complementary programs and strategies to ensure students gain mastery of the English language.

Keywords: e-learning, speaking, Kuwait, teaching

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a myriad of transformations in socioeconomic, political, and manpower domains. Several administrative jurisdictions implemented emergency policy measures to curb the spread of the virus. In the education sector, governments closed physical learning centers. Instead of advocating for increased utilization of information and communication technologies (ICTs; Zhang et al., 2020), government directives ensured that schools, colleges, and universities remained closed to minimize physical contact and prevent the spread of the virus. The closure of learning centers forced many institutions across the world to shift teaching and evaluation to online platforms.

Kuwait is one country that implemented widespread lockdowns to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the 2020/2021 academic year, all schools and other educational institutions in the country conducted teaching online (Al Mulla, 2021a). Although this shift was critical to minimizing the rate of infection, it raised fundamental concerns regarding its potential impact on students and teachers. As posited by Karata and Tuncer (2020), the global lockdown of schools, colleges, and universities is likely to have significant short- and long-term impacts for institutions and individuals insofar as teaching, learning, and assessment are concerned. Thus, understanding the impact of the pandemic on the learning process, as well as the viability of technology-based solutions, is vital for developing and adopting viable recommendations. However, not much is known about the extent to which online learning affects both students and teachers. In the case of Kuwait, scarce information is available concerning the impact of online learning on English speaking among students and teachers due to COVID-19.

Therefore, in this study, we aimed to fill this gap by exploring how the increased use of e-learning affected Kuwaiti high school students' English language learning with a focus on speaking skills. We formulated the following research question: What is the effect of online learning, introduced as part of COVID-19 management measures, on English speaking skills among Kuwaiti students in public high schools?

We aimed to provide fresh insights into the impact of e-learning on English students and teachers in Kuwait during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This data will contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Additionally, findings from the study will provide public policymakers and educational administrators with new ideas to improve the provision of educational services through online platforms during COVID-19.

2. Literature Review

In this section, we critically examine the existing literature to discuss the findings and contributions of other scholars on the influence of online learning on students. Additionally, we examine the available literature on COVID-19, the state of English education in Kuwait, as well as the country's high school education system.

2.1 COVID-19

COV1D-19 emerged as a global health crisis with far-reaching effects on almost every sector. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic (Karata & Tuncer, 2020). This pronouncement meant that the virus had gone from affecting only a specific region to become a global issue. By May 12, 2020, about 4.3 million people in 212 countries had contracted the virus, with more than 292,000 deaths and 1.6 million recoveries (Dong et al., 2020). Continently, Europe was the most affected; by May 13, 2020, it reported 1,675,742 infections and 1.6 million deaths (Worldmeter, 2020). North America was another hard-hit continent—within the same period as Europe, North America registered about 1,544,436 infections and, 93.19 deaths (Worldmeter, 2020). Asia and South America followed with about 701,532 infections and 22,852 deaths and 335,624 infections and 18,105 deaths, respectively (Worldmeter, 2020). Overall, these widespread global infections led the WHO to declare COVID-19 a pandemic.

The closure of schools and other learning centers was one of the measures governments undertook to prevent further spread of the virus. This decision, together with other measures such as the quarantine of suspected cases and bans on public gatherings, was critical in preventing the spread of COVID-19 (Prem et al., 2020). The government made the decision to close schools in part because they believed that the virus spread faster among younger populations than older populations (Prem et al., 2020). School closures affected millions of students worldwide. By May 2020, they had affected about 1.2 billion students globally (UNESCO, 2020), a significant percentage of the world's total population. Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic became a major education issue.

COVID-19 was not only a burden to many students, but also a substantial challenge for learning institutions. Many educational institutions shifted to online learning platforms without in-depth or requisite planning due to COVID-19-related measures (Hodges et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020). It is worth noting that any change in the education sector, including a shift to online teaching, requires rigorous planning and modifications to curriculum design that fit the unique needs of the new learning environment. However, many schools, colleges, and universities could not afford the luxury of time to undertake these important activities due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections.

Subsequently, the United States Department of Education relaxed some of the education requirements for adopting online learning, including those concerning content adaptation, flexibility in evaluation criteria, and teaching methodology (Means et al., 2012). This move suggests that many learning institutions faced challenges because of the sudden shift to online teaching due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

2.2 The Kuwaiti Ministry of Education's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic did not spare any country, and the Kuwaiti government swiftly undertook appropriate measures to curb its spread. These included border lockdowns and the suspension of all international travel, closures of all learning institutions, and a ban on public meetings, among many others (Alhouti, 2020). Consequently, all public and private schools and higher institutions of learning suspended physical classes until further notice. Notably, the Ministry of Education suspended all physical learning activities only 2 days after the announcement of the first case (Alhouti, 2020). The ministry initially undertook this decision with the hope of resuming normal learning processes once appropriate protocols were developed. However, these hopes were dashed a few days later when the government officially suspended schools until further notice (Alhouti, 2020). Although the Kuwaiti government eventually allowed a list of industries to resume partial services, the education sector was missing from the list. Instead, the Ministry of Education encouraged educational institutions to start

offering online services. Therefore, e-learning became the only mode of learning in Kuwaiti schools and institutions of higher learning.

Kuwaiti schools later resumed their operations via online platforms. After a 7-month hiatus, all public learning institutions in the country recommenced the 2020/2021 academic year through online platforms (Al Mulla, 2021a). This trend was consistent with the approach adopted by private schools. Unlike public institutions, private schools continued their 2019/2020 academic year by shifting to e-learning after the government's directive to close all public spaces to contain the spread of COVID-19 (Al Mulla, 2021a). Therefore, like most other countries in the world, Kuwait adopted e-learning as the primary mode of learning and teaching in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19. However, the Ministry of Education had plans to resume in-person learning gradually from September 2021. Notably, the Ministry also sought approval to allow high school students to undertake their exams in person while continuing with online learning (Al Mulla, 2021b). Whether this shift affected students' learning and speaking skills is yet to be fully understood. Thus, further research is required to understand the extent to which e-learning affected students' English speaking skills as well as teachers' ability to deliver instruction.

2.3 The Kuwait's Education System and English Teaching

Kuwait is a small country but commonly known throughout the world because of its rich oil resources. Public education in the country comprises general education and higher education; the former entails 2 years of kindergarten, 5 years of primary education, 4 years of intermediate education, and 3 years of secondary education (Burney et al., 2013). Higher education entails college and university education (Burney et al., 2013). The two levels of education are critical in the population's knowledge gain. Education for locals is compulsory up to the intermediate level (Burney et al., 2013). Whereas the public system serves nationals, private educational institutions cater to the needs of the foreign population. Unlike public schools, private institutions follow different systems, including Arabic, British, French, and Pakistani systems, among others (Burney et al., 2013). Both public and private institutions are important education providers in Kuwait.

Over the years, the number of public secondary schools in Kuwait has grown significantly due the high demand for education. Notably, the population of female students in Kuwait increased to about 42,100, whereas that of their male counterparts grew to approximately 35,700 (Statista, 2021a). This massive number underlines the growing need for education among Kuwait's residents.

The provision of English lessons is one of the fundamental components in the Kuwaiti high school curriculum. Researchers have attempted to examine the objectives and aspirations of students learning English as a second language in their study. Algharabali and Taqi (2018) found that most students in Kuwait prefer using an American accent when speaking English. This is consistent with the findings of Carrie (2016) in Spain and Rindal (2010) in Norway. Researchers have posited two critical reasons for this trend. First, most students favor the American accent because it is easy to produce, socially attractive, and simple to acquire. Second, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) claimed that many English as a second language students prefer acquiring an American accent because they associate it with prestige.

Despite the increasing need for English education in Kuwait, Arabic remains the main mode of instruction in high schools. Only the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University and other scientific colleges implement English as a mode of instruction, using textbooks written in English to teach and set examinations (Al-Nouri, 2016). Students must attain strong competencies in English to enroll in these institutions (Al-Nouri, 2016). However, most of the English textbooks adopted by schools are specifically written for native English-speaking students. Kuwaiti students must double their efforts to comprehend the context of the lexical terms in the textbooks (Tsui & Tollefson, 2017). Academic eligibility in Kuwait is primarily assessed based on the performance of a student on English tests. As a result, bright students could be denied a chance to study science courses because they lack an English foundation or did not perform well on an English test (Habbash & Troudi, 2015). This policy by Kuwait's Ministry of Education can be frustrating to students and is a flaw of the Kuwaiti education system. Despite English being a benchmark for enrolling in science courses when applying for college education, students are taught all subjects in Arabic (Habbash & Troudi, 2015).

In Kuwaiti schools, English is normally taught from grades 1 to 12. The English curriculum's overall objective is to support learners to comprehend oral and written texts and produce both oral and written texts either as a group or as individuals in an array of communicative activities (State of Kuwait, 2014). However, learning expectations are different at various levels. At grades 1–2, students should be able to develop communication skills specific to an A1 standard in the Cambridge English First Recognition (CEFR) while actively mastering the Arabic language (State of Kuwait, 2014). In grades 3–5, students should develop English writing and reading

skills using the playing approach. At the end of grade 5, students should display communication skills at a level A2 standard in the CEFR. The curriculum envisages that students in grades 6–9 should be able to comprehend the main points of precise and simple spoken English on common topics. At the end of grade 9, students should be able to produce simple connected texts on familiar topics (State of Kuwait, 2014). These skill expectations increase significantly as students move to secondary levels, that is, grades 10–12. In these levels, students should be able to comprehend complex texts on abstract and concrete topics (State of Kuwait, 2014). At this level, students should be able to interact with a significant degree of fluency and spontaneity with native speakers.

By the end of secondary school, students should possess a range of critical oral and written skills, including using English fluently and correctly, expressing ideas and feelings in English, utilizing media in English to understand the immediate environment, presenting information systematically, and interacting efficiently in various scenarios (State of Kuwait, 2014). Additionally, learners should be able to develop further skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and organizational skills, all of which are foundational to pursuing higher education via online platforms (State of Kuwait, 2014). Therefore, the English curriculum has high expectations of secondary school students and their learning progress.

2.4 Impact of E-Learning on Students

As institutions of learning shift to e-learning, scholars have attempted to understand its impact on learning and teaching processes among students and teachers. Empirical data confirm that e-learning is associated with both benefits and disadvantages for students. Concerning students, Huber et al. (2020) found that online learning reduces the amount of time students spend on learning. The researchers studied students from Germany, Switzerland, and Australia aged between 10 and 19 years. The findings revealed that learning time during the COVID-19 lockdown fell by 4–8 hours a week compared to when learning institutions were open (Huber et al., 2020). The researchers attributed the condensed learning period to the shorter hours that schools spent in offering online lessons.

Consequently, reduced learning time has concrete adverse outcomes among students. Specifically, students learning languages may lose critical skills. Shinwell and Defeyter (2017) found that most students, especially children, experience significant challenges with word spelling after returning from a long break. Similarly, Paechter et al. (2015) found that students experience losses in problem-solving and spelling skills after a 9-week summer break. Collectively, these findings confirm that any break from school results in adverse learning outcomes for students.

Studies have also provided evidence linking home confinement to the development of stress-like symptoms. According to Sprang and Silman (2013), students confined at home during a pandemic experience stress and anxiety. Such an adverse psychological outcome may have a detrimental impact on learning. Additionally, Di Pietro (2018) found that students who spend more time at home than in school due to major environmental phenomena experience posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, including poor concentration, insomnia, anxiety, and depression. Students who are confined at home due to COVID-19 may similarly develop stress symptoms. Dhull and Sakshi (2013) demonstrated that e-learning can make students lose focus, become distracted, or miss deadlines. This underlines some of the possible drawbacks of switching to online learning.

Other researchers have linked online learning to effective learning among students. Navarro and Shoemaker (2000) found that e-learning was effective in enabling students to assimilate information better than those learning in traditional classroom-based environments. This suggests that online learning may benefit students who find it difficult to understand specific concepts while studying in classroom contexts. E-learning has proved effective especially for students who are easily intimidated or slower students who lack sufficient courage to speak up and express themselves in a physical classroom (Stern, 2004). Such students may find that online learning helps them assimilate information better.

The evidence also links online education to enhanced motivation toward learning. According to Woodrow (2017), e-learning environments may positively influence students' level of motivation and lead them to achieve better outcomes. Similarly, Huang et al. (2016) noted the impact of technology on students, especially in allowing them to spend more quality time learning highly captivating topics. However, e-learning can also be frustrating due to technical errors and failures (Huang et al., 2016). E-learning has also provided students with opportunities to personalize their learning processes (Herold, 2017), enabling students to take control of their learning, decide what they wish to learn, and determine the kind of support they require.

3. Methodology

Research methodology is the heartbeat of any research study because it outlines the road map used in gathering

and analyzing data. In this section, we detail the steps, procedures, and techniques used to collect and analyze data concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Kuwaiti high school students' English language learning. We provide detailed information about the adopted research design, sample size, data collection methods and instruments, sampling, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

Given the dynamic nature of the data needed to address the study's objective, we selected a mixed-method design as the most appropriate method to examine the effect of online learning on students in Kuwaiti public high schools. This design entails combining two or more qualitative or quantitative approaches to examine a specific phenomenon (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The overall objective of a mixed-methods design is to expand the scope of the study and its associated conclusions, yield more in-depth knowledge, and achieve a higher degree of validity (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). In the current study, we preferred this design because of its large scope.

Additionally, the mixed-methods design allowed us to strengthen our conclusions about the effect of online learning during the COVlD-19 outbreak on English speaking skills. We performed qualitative analyses to understand the opinions of students concerning the impact of e-learning on their English speaking skills. Conversely, we performed quantitative analyses to determine the extent to which the shift to e-learning has affected students. To minimize the likelihood of obtaining misleading data, we designed and developed the data collection tools in a manner that ensured they captured the study's scope and objectives.

3.2 Study Population and Sampling Procedure

The current study's sample comprised students in Kuwaiti public high schools. Because we aimed to understand how the shift to online learning as a result of COVID-19 affected how students spoke English, we narrowed the sample to students enrolled in English classes in the country's high schools.

A sample population should be a group representative of the entire population relevant to the specific issue examined in a study (Yin, 2014). To select a representative sample, we selected participants from government schools and a public high school situated in Kuwait. We chose the public school because it is one of the institutions that shifted to online learning during the 2020/2021 academic year following the strict enforcement of COVID-19 regulations and because government schools offer English lessons to students as required in the curriculum to prepare them for college admission.

3.3 Questionnaires

For the quantitative part of the study, we asked 60 participants to complete a questionnaire. We used a simple random sampling technique to choose 60 English students, 20 each from grades 10, 11, and 12. This sample comprised 33 girls and 27 boys, proportionate to the ratio of female and male students in Kuwaiti high schools. For instance, in the 2018/2019 academic year, there were 35,692 boys and 42,080 girls in the country's secondary schools, representing a ratio of 5:6 (Statista, 2021b). In addition, we used purposive sampling to select English teachers.

3.4 Interviews

For the qualitative aspect of the research, we recruited 18 participants to take part in a semi-structured interview. We held interviews with 18 students (9 females and 9 males) enrolled for English classes. We used a convenience sampling technique to choose students who were easily reachable and available for the interviews. Jager et al. (2017) posited that nonprobabilistic, homogenous convenience samples are representative and generalizable, resulting in a higher likelihood of yielding valid outcomes. Hence, we considered the insights from the 18 interviewees sufficient to produce an in-depth understanding of the topic under investigation. Additionally, this relatively large sample of interviewees ensured we had sufficient responses to facilitate meaningful qualitative analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Summary of Questionnaire Results

In this study, the questionnaire had two crucial segments: questions asking for background information and questions focusing on students' experiences of online learning. A significant percentage of students (22.4%) disclosed that online learning was not interesting, with only 18.8% of learners indicating that online learning was exciting. Additionally, only 11.8% of learners indicated that they enjoyed online lessons, with more than 32.9% strongly disagreeing and 25.9% showing less enthusiasm.

Additionally, the e-learning model failed to help learners develop critical thinking skills. The questionnaire

results revealed that only 16.9% of students affirmed that e-learning had helped them in this area. In contrast, 25.3% (strongly disagree) and 16.9% (disagree) of students disagreed that online learning fostered critical skill development. Additionally, 57.6% of respondents argued that online learning did not encourage active participation, whereas only 20% found online classes engaging. Also, 34.1% of respondents strongly disagreed that online classes had encouraged engagement, and only 14% reported using the words they had learned in daily conversations. More students disagreed (24.7%) that online learning could help them acquire an American accent compared to those who agreed (17.5%). Overall, 21.2% of students disagreed that online learning equipped them with the relevant knowledge and skills to engage with native English speakers fluently.

The questionnaire results also revealed that online learning could affect learners' ability to express their ideas and feelings. For example, 21.2% of the students strongly disagreed and 27.1% disagreed that online learning offered a platform for students to express their feelings effectively. Only 17.6% of learners indicated that online learning allowed them to share their opinions and emotions regarding diverse topics.

4.2 Summary of Interview Results

The interviews also provided in-depth information regarding learners' experiences in online learning activities. For example, 10 out of 18 learners disclosed that online classes discouraged participation due to technical hitches and a failure to deploy teaching strategies available in physical classes, such as roleplaying. Some learners also suggested that online learning encourages them to collaborate with third parties to complete their assignments. Additionally, 11 out of 18 learners suggested that they disliked online learning, given that it had fewer group work activities, involved more listening, and was less entertaining. Learners expressed their disappointment that online learning did not improve their English mastery. Unlike in physical classrooms, learners had to focus on reading individually and could not engage with fellow students to assess their accents and language proficiency. The interviews affirmed that most learners were dissatisfied with online learning.

4.3 Improvement in English

The results show that most students disagreed that e-learning is a perfect way of learning. When asked whether they found the e-learning process and materials interesting, 29.4% of the students strongly disagreed, 22.4% disagreed, 22.4% were neutral, 7.8% agreed, and 18.8% strongly agreed (see Table 1). From the numbers, it suffices to argue that most students found the e-learning model uninteresting. Similarly, when asked if they enjoyed e-learning lessons, 32.9% of the students strongly disagreed, 25.9% disagreed, 22.4% remained neutral, 7.0% agreed, and only a paltry 11.8% agreed. Invariably, when students are disinterested in a learning model, they are wont to achieve poor learning outcomes or results. It is important that students are interested and enjoy learning, and a happy and joyful learning environment is a surefire wellspring of good results (see Table 2). When we asked participants to share their overall assessment of e-learning in Kuwait, 10 out of 18 participants expressed a dislike for e-learning because it does not target the four skills of language equally, has less teaching monitoring, involves fewer group activities, reduces participation, and is less entertaining.

Table 1. Rate of approval of e-learning among participants

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
18.8%	7.8%	22.4%	22.4%	29.4%

Table 2. Enjoyment of e-learning lessons

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
11.8%	7.0%	22.4%	25.9%	32.9%

4.4 Critical Thinking and Learning

Apart from the pursuit of qualifications and knowledge, the learning process should engender critical thinking. Critical thinkers are able to understand important situations and discussions, and this skill raises their stature and importance in society. However, the results indicate that most of the learners did not see an improvement in their critical thinking skills. Whereas only 16.9% of the students strongly agreed that they registered an improvement in their critical thinking skills, 25.3% strongly disagreed, 16.9% disagreed, 28.9% remained neutral, and only 12% agreed (see Table 3). These numbers paint a grim picture of the efficacy of e-learning in developing the critical abilities of the learners. A possible explanation for this is that schools rolled out e-learning without a clear implementation framework, and this affected teaching effectiveness.

Table 3. Improvement in *Critical Thinking*

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
16.9%	12%	28.9%	16.9%	25.3%

4.5 Impact of Class Engagement

Another way to assess the efficacy of a learning model is to evaluate the level of class engagement and its subsequent impacts: 14% of the students strongly agreed to using the words learned in class in conversations outside class; 6% agreed, 22.4% remained neutral; 23.5% disagreed, and 34.1% strongly disagreed. We inferred that class engagement has a negligible impact on students' conversations outside the class (see Table 4). The results in Table 4 support the participants' interview answers: 11 out of 18 participants mentioned that online learning lacks proper engagement, and class time is wasted on fixing internet connections. Furthermore, homework is done by others. One participant shared, "The reality of teaching online is that there are numerous drawbacks, it has limited teaching methods, it doesn't have like physical games or roleplays, it only relies mainly on audio and visual methods."

Table 4. Level of engagement in online learning

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
14%	6%	22.4%	23.5%	34.1%

However, it is interesting to note that when asked if e-learning helped them acquire an American accent, 24.7% strongly agreed, a further 9.4% agreed, 27.1% remained neutral, 21.2% disagreed, and 17.5% strongly disagreed (see Table 5). These results point to a key finding: although the e-learning sessions did not engender a higher off-class applicability of words learned in classes, the sessions no doubt had a rub-off effect on learners.

Table 5. Effectiveness in acquiring *the* American accent through online learning

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
24.7%	9.4%	27.1%	21.2%	17.5%

4.6 Impact on Speaking

The primary objective of language sessions and classes is to improve the ability of students holistically. Therefore, learners must be able not only to grasp words but also to communicate proficiently with others. From the results, 14.1% of students strongly agreed that e-learning improved their English fluency and aptitude; 7.1% agreed, 29.4% remained neutral, 28.2% disagreed, and 21.2% strongly disagreed (see Table 6). Further, Table 7 shows that 15.3% of students strongly disagreed that e-learning improved their ability to speak with native English speakers; 17.6% of the cohort agreed, 18.8% remained neutral, 27.1% disagreed, and 21.2% strongly disagreed. In the same context, 17.6% of the respondents strongly agreed that e-learning allowed them to express their feelings and ideas; 9.4% agreed, 24.7% remained neutral, 27.1% disagreed, and 21.2% strongly disagreed (see Table 8).

Table 6. Ability to communicate proficiently

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
14.1%	7.1%	29.4%	28.2%	21.2%

Table 7. Ability to speak with Native English Speakers

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
15.3%	17.6%	18.8%	27.1%	21.2%

Table 8. Ability to express feelings and ideas

Strongly agree	Agree	*Neutral*	Disagree	Strongly disagree
17.6%	9.4%	24.7%	27.1%	21.2%

During the interviews, most participants indicated that the shift to online learning did not improve their speaking skills or their ability to converse with native speakers. One participant shared, "The focus is more on reading and grammar lessons, [in physical classes], we had weekly in-class group discussions lessons, but now we do more individual reading and struggling with pronunciation." Other participants made similar observations about the lack of speaking exercises in online lessons and the fewer conversations, which affected their confidence. In addition, there were fewer group activities in online classes and a greater focus on listening exercises through the use of resources such YouTube or audio lessons. The questionnaire and interview results confirm that participants did not believe online learning was effective in improving their speaking skills.

From the data, it is evident that the outcomes of e-learning are lukewarm. Most of the students did not agree that e-learning improved their communication, and this suggests e-learning's lack of teaching efficiency. The low number of students affirming e-learning as an effective model for learning indicates the deep underlying problems of the model. The effectiveness of language learning models is contingent on their ability to produce holistic results, that is, speaking, listening, and critical engagement.

5. Discussion

Online learning is becoming increasingly crucial in both the education and business sectors. Analysts have argued that this learning approach has made educational opportunities more accessible to many (Wong et al., 2019). Despite this, it also presents unique challenges to students, teachers, and other stakeholders. In Kuwait, for example, researchers found that most individuals preferred a hybrid model because online learning alone could affect students' academic performance (Al-Enzi et al., 2023). However, the learning model became more popular during the COVID-19 pandemic because it allowed learners to continue learning amid significant disruptions in the education sector (Alhouti, 2020). Teachers' failure to adjust their teaching strategies could affect how learners perceive and participate in online learning activities (Terzi et al., 2021). In this study, students expressed their dissatisfaction with online learning, confirming that teachers and educational establishments must change their approaches to make E-learning more entertaining and effective.

In the implementation of any teaching model or curriculum, it is important to consider the sustainability of the frameworks so that they can deliver predicable results that can be reliably assessed. As the world responded to the pervasive effects of COVID-19 and the hybridization of the education industry, e-learning emerged as an indispensable linchpin. Globalization and its precepts have caused the demands of most industries to increase and become more complex. The education industry has been similarly freighted with increasing demands for improved learning outcomes and assessments, both formative and summative. Education providers must therefore tune the predominant teaching model to the needs of learners and the dynamic world.

Although the online learning model might appear to meet the contemporary demands of the education industry, the results from the interview and questionnaire suggests that it is not sustainable, at least with regard to teaching languages. Dovetailing the different metrics we used in the research, the students expressed consistent dissatisfaction with and disapproval of the e-learning model for their learning. Most students disagreed that the model was conducive to their progress or made learning enjoyable or interesting. This perception is inimical to the sustainability of the model and warrants robust adjustments in the future. When students consistently reject a learning model, the learning outcomes it produces are bound to be underwhelming.

Students who approved of the model mostly valued the efficiency of e-learning and its possibilities. Most of these students averred that e-learning was instrumental in developing their speaking proficiency. They highlighted that when using online platforms, it is easy to practice and communicate because they are not confined within specific environments (i.e., the classroom); rather, they may attend classes and sessions from the comfort of their chosen locations. In the same vein, most of these students shared that the model enhanced their self-esteem and confidence. As opposed to classroom settings where it is easy to feel inferior to or intimidated by others, e-learning gives learners the latitude to curate their environments to be as comfortable as possible so that they can ace the learning sessions.

E-learning also improved the speaking ability of learners in two ways. First, during e-learning classes, learners could take cues on how certain words are used and then replicate their use outside of classes. Second, outside of classes, learners could take note of particular words or aspects of communication before trying them out in class, where they could be guided. Most importantly, the questionnaire responses provide further evidence that online learning improves learners' self-learning attitudes. With the benefit of the internet, learners could quickly research words online and learn their meaning(s), usage context, and pronunciation. Students found that online learning pushed them to learn independently because they could access web-based learning sites and learn concepts on their own before sharing them in class. With the immediacy of online learning, learners argued that

there was a smaller need for frequent class sessions with teachers because they could still make substantial progress on their own. This suggests that e-learning reduces the need and demand for in-person learning.

Despite the notable advantages of online English learning, it also has some disadvantages. The most notable disadvantage is the lack of face-to-face communication with the teacher. Instructors do not have the chance to interact with students personally, unlike when using the conventional method of teaching. In fact, respondents shared that they were unable to offer firsthand instructions to the learners.

Another notable challenge that the study participants mentioned is the minimal social contact of e-learning. Dhull and Sakshi (2013) found that students are more active and productive when they socialize with their classmates. The teachers admitted that there is limited interaction between tutors and students in online classes, and students unfamiliar with email, web browsers, and newsgroups may fail to engage actively during online classes. Further, unreliable internet connections and computer problems can lead to students missing classes, deadlines, and tests. Education providers should consider the benefits and drawbacks of implementing e-learning.

5.1 Teachers' and Students' Reception

Increasingly, both students and teachers are becoming more receptive and adapting to online learning because it helps in reaching out to students, even those in different geographical locations, promptly. Online learning enhances sustained research before, during, and after learning. It improves teachers' and learners' attitudinal prospects regarding learning. Further, online learning is instrumental in generating feedback after and during learning; students can seamlessly provide feedback regarding the learning process and how, if necessary, teaching should be improved. Customized interfaces have, for instance, a frequently asked questions segment that provides responses for salient and urgent queries. Using online learning models also reduces the labelling of teachers as evaluators. Rather, the model redefines and presents teachers as facilitators who primarily provide direction and advice to students.

Prior to the disruptions caused by COVID-19, e-learning had already gained massive prominence in educational institutions and, notably, in language teaching. As technology continues to progress in virtually all spheres of life, as the learning needs and preferences of students evolve, and as education providers refine teaching and assessment techniques in line with global trends, e-learning will become a mainstay of learning. This behooves Kuwaiti schools to conduct an audit of its systems and subsequently align them with the emergent e-learning system. The world has actively morphed into a small village, and education is certainly headed in the same direction with a substantial number of institutions having already transitioned to e-learning.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research, we conclude that online learning has been profoundly important in sustaining learning. Increasingly, students are becoming more receptive and adapting to the online learning framework. Importantly, online learning accords students the opportunity to use their technological skills, and contemporary learners are tech savvy and predisposed to frameworks that improve their learning abilities. Teachers welcomed the use of online learning because it employs social media platforms and other online-based channels, which help in reaching out to students, even those in different geographical locations, promptly. Online learning enhances sustained engagement before, during, and after learning. It improves learners' attitudes toward learning.

Although e-learning has filled the learning gaps created by COVID-19, the model also has several disadvantages. First, e-learning is difficult to adopt in elementary learning, where students have no prior foundations in the language taught. Second, due to its absolute reliance on technological devices, e-learning has been impossible to adopt in situations where students lack reliable access to online platforms. Moreover, the emergence and spread of COVID-19 was sporadic and unprecedented, and some schools did not have the opportunity to shift to the online model. Further, like physical learning, online learning is a broad and almost standalone curriculum defined by specific ideologies, principles, and precepts. When Kuwaiti schools adopted the e-learning model, they did so without extensive preparations or well-designed plans for its implementation. Thus, learning under the model was unstructured and nonuniversal.

Recommendations

The transition to online-based operations in virtually all sectors behooves public schools and the education system to roll out several strategies. First, it is important for Kuwaiti public schools, alongside the relevant educational stakeholders, to assess schools' level of preparedness regarding e-learning and design a reliable and standardized learning framework. In so doing, the country will be able to sustainably meet future demand for e-learning education. Second, schools should continuously review their learning programs and ensure that they

have contingency plans for unprecedented events.

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