Impacts of Online Learning on EFL Learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bhutan

By

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.

2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

The thesis/project titled "Impacts of Online Learning on EFL Learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bhutan" submitted by Kuenzang Wangyel Dorji (20203025) of Fall 2020 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English.

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Ethics Statement

This research strictly adhered to ethical principles to protect the rights and confidentiality of all participants. Prior to conducting interviews, informed consent was obtained from every participant. The study's aim, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage were clearly explained to the participants in detailed information sheets. Purposive sampling was used in this research for recruiting EFL instructors and students who have experience with online learning in order to capture a range of perspectives. Semi-structured, asynchronous remote interviews were utilized for data collection allowing the respondents enough time for their responses. The study maintained confidentiality; sensitive information was treated with utmost care. Follow-ups were made as necessary to clarify responses while respecting participants' time and privacy.

Abstract

This study focuses on examining the effects of online learning on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Bhutan during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative research design was used to gather data from different EFL students and teachers coming from different schools around Bhutan. Specifically, it identifies and analyzes various challenges and opportunities that have been encountered by both EFL students and teachers while transitioning to an online mode of instruction during the outbreak period of COVID-19 here in Bhutan. The findings indicate a need for more interactive and real-time speaking and listening activities in online EFL education. The adaptability to online education in Bhutan showcased the resilience and resourcefulness of both students and teachers. The results from this study should be helpful for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to enhance the effectiveness of EFL education during and beyond the COVID-19 outbreak.

Keywords: Online learning and teaching; Bhutan EFL Learners; COVID-19 Impact on Education; Learning Outcomes; Educational Resilience

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

As Coronavirus began spreading around the world, the World Health Organization Association proclaimed a worldwide pandemic on 11 March 2020. Therefore, numerous nations, including Bhutan, a country with a region of 38,394 sq. km, imparting boundaries to India and China, forced lockdowns as a possible measure to contain the infection. Bhutan has 20 dzongkhag (regions) and 147 gewogs (sub-locale). The country's populace of around 775,700 individuals in January 2021 (Kemp, 2021) dwells in metropolitan communities (42.6%), basically the capital Thimphu, and 57.4% live in frequently very distant provincial regions. As per Whitecross (2021), the principal affirmed a positive Coronavirus case in Bhutan, of an exile, was distinguished on 6 March 2020. Following this, Bhutan quickly confined all approaching vacationer developments and shut its lines in consistency with the public location given on 22 March 2020 by His Highness, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (Wangdi et al., 2021).

The government of Bhutan then imposed two significant national lockdowns: one in August 2020 for nearly 31 days and another from December 2020 to February 2021 (Tamang & Dorji, 2021). Additionally, certain districts with a high risk of local transmission were affected by a number of lockdowns and curfews, particularly Samtse and Chukha districts in the India-southwest foothills. The number of cases in particular localities served as the basis for the lockdown protocol in Bhutan at the district level. Regions with at least one case or local area transmission were sorted as high-risk regions, on which the public authority forced at least 21 days of lockdown. All schools, offices, and other institutions were closed, as were

agricultural activities, entertainment, religious ceremonies and celebrations, construction work, and a variety of other activities. The residents of these areas were also required to adhere to specific government guidelines. In consequence, Bhutan's Ministry of Education ordered schools and other educational institutions to implement online education almost immediately so as to maintain the continuity of learning for students (Wangdi et al., 2021). This sudden shift from in-person to online classrooms undoubtedly caused significant disruption, particularly for students. The Bhutanese national newspaper Kuensel reported on November 7, 2020, that "nobody including government, education ministry, school teachers and students are ready to cope up to education during the pandemic" (Rinzin, 2020).

Due to this, the government of Bhutan implemented two national lockdowns, the first which lasted for almost 31 days which took place in August 2020, and the second one from 23 December 2020 to 1 February 2021 (Tamang & Dorji, 2021). Further, various lockdowns and curfew measures were enforced in high-risk districts at the district level (Samtse and Chukha districts in the southwestern foothills bordering India). In Bhutan, the lockdown model at the district level was determined depending upon the number of cases in the localities. High-risk areas with one or more transmission of sporadic cases or community transmission: In these areas, the government initiated at least 21 days of lockdown. The individuals residing in the affected regions had no choice but to comply with rigid regulations, such as remaining indoors at all times, shutting down all educational institutions, workplaces, and other establishments, stopping any agricultural activities, entertainment, religious functions, parties, or festivities including construction work among dozens of other directions. For example, in order to keep students learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Bhutan instructed schools to shift completely to online mode instantaneously (Wangdi et al., 2021). Most notable of all, this swift transformation of

physical classrooms to online classes led to enormous chaos, especially for those who were studying.

During the pandemic period, schools had to employ adapted curriculum and assessments along with other stakeholders in order to continue educating students according to the Royal Education Council, Ministry of Education, and Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment (2020). As regular teaching was not possible due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the participants underwent an adapted curriculum and received a recommendation from REC. REC, MoE, and BCSEA (2020), developed suggested guidelines, and strategized within key stages, and because of this, distinct subject areas to be taught and recommended teaching aids have come into existence for teachers to use in dealing with diverse content. (Tshomo, T., & Sherab, K. 2022).) For instance, numerous channels including broadcast services like TV and radio, Google Classroom, YouTube, social media, and other print media were rolled out to offer the curriculum. One teacher from every school was given deep-dive Google Classroom training. Then, they train other teachers in the first week of May as well as begin supporting students on Google Classroom. As far as e-learning is concerned, it was very new to so many young people across Bhutan, particularly at the primary level. However, teachers nationwide adopted every suggested e-learning platform by the Ministry of Education to sustain the academic engagement and learning of their children (MoE, 2020). (Kinley, K. D. T. (2022). Some researchers have explored the effects of online teaching on the grammatical output of EFL learners amidst the covid pandemic. (Elbashir, R. M., & Abbas Hamza, S. M. (2022). Following the announcement made by the nation, schools nationwide are all resolved to commit themselves to online teaching. Google Classroom, We Chat, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc., were all used to facilitate online education in Bhutan during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wangdi, N., Dema, Y., & Chogyel, N. (2021). But it was as easy as changing one from a traditional physical

class, to a digital medium within a short span of time, so the Bhutanese education system had to go through several challenges during that situation. For example, limited technological infrastructure and connectivity, digital literacy gaps among educators, challenges in keeping students motivated, learning loss from prolonged school closures, and the necessity for curriculum modifications (UNICEF). It also underlined the importance of ensuring equity and inclusion, giving teacher training and support, addressing psychosocial well-being, and involving parents in the learning process (UNICEF). The pandemic thus brought to the fore the significance for these obstacles to be collectively addressed in order to facilitate uninterrupted education for Bhutanese students.

Almost none of the existing literature however focuses directly on the online learning experiences of EFL learners in Bhutan during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. This thesis attempts to address this gap by investigating the impact of online learning on EFL learners during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also focuses on the experiences of online learning that the teacher and students faced during the situation of covid 19. Moreover, the study has policy and practice significance. The results from this study should be helpful for policymakers to make evidence-based educational policies on EFL learners in digital environments, with respect to providing technological infrastructures, and specifically relevant teacher training programs that prepare teachers for teaching in a digital-oriented classroom. Such initiatives can result in improving access to quality education while ensuring equity across the board, notably in rural and under-resourced pockets. The research is intended to increase the effectiveness of EFL education in Bhutan by mitigating digital literacy challenges and promoting a more relevant form of online learning.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How did EFL learners and teachers in Bhutan adapt to online learning during COVID-19 pandemic, and which methods were more useful in ensuring a successful adaptation?

2. What were the challenges encountered students and teachers faced during the shift to e-learning? In what way did these challenges impact motivation, engagement and technology assimilation?

3. How did the use of different online engagement tools affect the levels of student and teacher participation, and what factors contributed to variations in engagement across digital platforms?

4. What were the long-time impacts of online learning on the language proficiency of EFL learners, especially in terms of their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills?

1.3. Objectives

1. To evaluate the impact of online learning on the EFL proficiency levels of learners in Bhutan during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. To identify and analyze the specific challenges and opportunities experienced by EFL learners in Bhutan during the transition to online learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There have been several researches done on this subject internationally in different countries with respect to educational institutions' evaluation of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on them. For example, Hasan and Khan (2020) studied students' attitudes regarding online teaching and learning. The research results indicated that learners preferred taking lessons through Internet technologies as long as they had proper equipment at their disposal. Nevertheless, unstable connections and lousy network conditions have been reported as major impediments preventing most students from accessing digital classes. Respondents in the study comprised of four hundred eighty scholars from various Indian universities. In a similar vein, Coman et al. (2020) assert that the absence of technical know-how among instructors and inflexibility towards the initiation of online-based learning settings adversely affects students' learning. For instance, Spanemberg et al. (2020) noted that in Brazil, the low-income segment did not have access to electronic devices and found some staying far away from cities experienced poor internet connection which affected the adaptability of online learning.

2.1. Global Viewpoints Towards Online Learning And Teaching

The closure of educational institutions in China started in February 2020 when the rate of Coronavirus infections rose in Wuhan City. Very soon, 120 countries closed their schools, affecting billions of pupils globally. Thus, it may be said that the COVID-19 pandemic has driven schools to move over to the online method in order to keep teaching and learning alive even during the school holidays (Guo et al., 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020). According to Wyse et al. (2020), in the United States, many lives were lost and various

entities such as hospitals, businesses, universities, and colleges had to change in their operation methods due to pandemics. Similarly, India was also affected when schools and colleges were closed down as a result of covid-19 pandemic which impacted about 320 million learners throughout that country. The closure of these institutions for several months seriously hampered educational development for learners (Jena, 2020; Petronzi & Petronzi, 2020). In Brazil, the Education sector was among the early sectors to be affected after the social distancing declarations to limit the coronavirus proliferation (Spanemberg et al., 2020).

Globally, many researchers have studied the effects of COVID-19 on education. For instance, Hasan and Khan (2020) studied students' perceptions about online teaching and learning. The conclusions drawn from the research indicated that when there were suitable resources, the learners preferred online classes. However, poor connectivity and low network remain significant obstacles preventing pupils from adjusting to virtual training. The inquiry included a total of 480 students from various Indian colleges. Similarly, it has been suggested that the lack of technical knowledge among teachers and their rigidity in accepting online learning environments have an important effect on students' education (Coman et al., 2020). The low-income group people's unavailability of electronic equipment as well as poor networks in remote areas of the country, were major contributors to an online learning platform's acceptance in Brazil (Spanemberg et al., 2020). Nevertheless, scholars such as Alqahtani and Rajkhan (2020) have found that the administration of online learning has significantly contributed to enhancing the educational system throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. The data were collected through interviews with 69 e-learning managers from various institutions.

In a study conducted by Hung Lau and Lee (2020), it was found that some of the challenges faced by kindergarten school parents in Hong Kong with online learning were; a

lack of concentration and interest in the children, interruptions from other family members as well as inadequate resources and equipment. Students' interest towards e-learning was also affected by the teacher's inability to develop interesting digital lessons. Additionally, in the context of Indonesian education during the COVID-19 pandemic, Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2020) examined difficulties faced by students in online learning. The research revealed that poor educational performance and decreased devotion to studies were caused by unpredictable internet connection and decreased social interaction. With reference to Surkhali and Garbuja (2012), it has been a blessing as well as a curse for Nepal when it comes to online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Temporarily, there has been an increased interaction between teachers and students through the use of some platforms that have enabled them to continue with their studies. Nevertheless, electronic devices' unavailability and high prices of internet connection hampered the progress of online education. According to Asio and Bayucca (2020), it is one of the reasons why learners have lost interest in online learning in the world as a whole, especially due to poor network connectivity and difficulties in obtaining necessary electronic gadgets for accessing education over the internet.

Interruption from family members and the absence of parental support were highlighted as other obstacles in e-learning. Additionally, teachers' ignorance of digital knowledge and poor ability to design riveting online lessons led to reduced students' interest in learning. The literature suggests that online lessons involve less interaction compared to face-to-face classroom teaching which may consequently result in low levels of engagement, distraction, withdrawal, or total absence of learners. Virtual classes are not as effective as real in-person teaching and learning, since there is a lot of peer-to-peer learning, bi-directional communication, and group discussions happening during online classes (Asio & Bayucca, 2020). During the pandemic caused by COVID-19, many students have come up with new learning methods in this period of crisis. Numerous educators, support personnel, instructors,

supervisors, and institutional heads together with families of the enrolled students did more than what was anticipated in order to assist our learners at all levels of education. Yet if equal opportunity is not taken into consideration, then some learners will remain educationally deprived (Phuntsho, D. 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic was a unique event that shocked the Nation. Almost all the countries were severely affected and were fighting against COVID-19. As a result, all schooling systems and educational institutions were closed due to the imposition of lockdown measures by the administrations (Shawaqfeh et al., 2020).

2.2. Bhutanese Viewpoints Towards Online Learning

In March 2020, Bhutan's educational system adopted its first-ever online teaching and learning after the government announced the closure of schools in order to control the outbreak of coronavirus infection. The Ministry of Education requested that all schools continue offering classes through online platforms during such times when their students were supposed to stay at home as a result of this measure. Although there were mixed feelings among teachers in Bhutan about this new method endorsed by the Ministry, some also pointed out various problems related to it. Moreover, students identified factors such as high costs for internet access, unreliable power supply, and lack of electronic devices as major hurdles that disrupted e-learning processes. Nima (2020) noted that conducting online classes is difficult, according to a teacher from Zhemgang, because most of the students lack access to digital tools such as mobile phones and laptops. As a result, she decided to go house-to-house in the community so that students could learn at home. Most of the students were busy with agricultural activities along with their parents which reduced the desire for education among them. Another teacher claimed that day-to-day, he found many of his students taking care of cattle and it was virtually impossible for him to teach through online classes. The closure of schools during the pandemic led to 210 school dropouts which is a

significant number for Bhutan which has a small population. The total student population as of 2020 was around 170000 students. However, some students are expected to go back in the 2021 academic year and proceed with their learning in the same classes (Drukpa, 2020). One of the major challenges of online teaching and learning in Bhutan is inconsistent and costly internet charges. Because of high data consumption, students hardly manage to attend online classes. Instead of spending cash for buying basic necessities at home, the money should be used to top up the Internet data. Students hardly have time to attend online classes because they are busy farming with their elderly parents back home. Particularly, students from remote places observed that frequent disconnections in electricity supply have made it difficult for them to participate in online classes (Drukpa, 2020). As noted by Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021), parental supervision, especially for younger children, poses additional difficulties especially if the parents are both working outside the home.

In a matter of days, the sudden change in teaching strategies impacted teachers' lives in several countries including Bhutan. Studies done by Klapproth et al. (2020) on the stress levels of 380 random teachers from different schools all over Germany showed that there were medium to high-stress levels among them due to coming up with distance learning during the COVID-19 storm without proper preparations and equipment concerning online lessons, for example, tools for teaching on the internet or even poor networks that they were using when surfing for example websites. Kovacs et al. (2021) studied how COVID-19 affected the teaching methods of 41 educators based on primary, vocational, and tertiary education levels in Switzerland and found that although a majority of respondents could overcome challenges related to the use of online learning tools, many were not able to sustain quality communications with their students.

Alea et al. (2020) pointed out various difficulties for elementary, secondary, senior high school, and college instructors in the Philippines when trying to adopt online education

amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Many studies have pointed to the efficacy of online vs face-to-face education systems. According to Mahmoudi (2020), who researched how well online learning through smartphones helped Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy, the experimental group which was using an online classroom did better than the control group. Turkmen and Aydin (2016)'s opinion does not differ from this; they found that student's performance was enhanced by internet instruction and it can improve traditional classes tremendously. The majority of teachers and students were unfamiliar with online teaching and learning, there were debates surrounding its accessibility, affordability, as well as its policies and pedagogical approach (Tshomo, T., & Sherab, K. 2022). Although there is an increase in studies about online teaching methods (Noor et al., 2020), it is still unclear if conducting it serves any purpose. As noted in the research paper (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021), very little has been done about e-learning platforms and thus, it remains unclear how they have affected students. Most of the recent studies have concentrated mainly on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. There has been an increase in research on E-learning as a novel paradigm within educational settings (Elaoufy, H. 2023).

2.3. Literature Gap

While existing literature extensively examines the challenges and opportunities of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic from a global perspective and within specific national contexts, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding the nuanced experiences and perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Bhutan. Although studies such as Nima (2020) and Drukpa (2020) provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by students and teachers in Bhutan, there is limited research that delves deeper into the direct impact of online learning on the EFL proficiency levels of learners in the country. On the other hand, even though Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) have discussed the influence of this

pandemic on teaching and learning in Bhutan, no specific studies have focused on students' experiences with new eLearning platforms. Therefore, there is an urgent need for more research to address this gap by examining how the face-to-face learning model has changed to online learning among Bhutanese EFL learners, which impacts their learning outcomes and the challenges and opportunities they face in a digital environment. Such research would help improve our understanding of what it means for us today when using online platforms for education in Bhutan and offer insights for educational stakeholders including policy makers who want to make English as a foreign language more productive in the COVID-19 era and beyond.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used to investigate the effect of online learning on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Bhutan during the COVID-19 pandemic using qualitative means. First, the chapter provides an overview of qualitative research methods and alignments of research objectives. Then, it describes how data will be collected including participant sampling, interview design, and ethical considerations. Qualitative research is a methodological approach that tries to study and understand phenomena by carrying out in-depth studies, interpretations, and analyses of non-numerical data (Creswell, 2017). This methodology focuses on understanding contexts, perspectives, and meanings assigned to the experiences of population groups or individuals. It entails dynamic and iterative processes of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data which allow researchers to uncover extensive amounts of information on complicated phenomena (Patton, 2015). For my qualitative interviews about online learning and teaching for both teachers from the English as Foreign Language department and students who receive lessons in this language, I contacted them so as to understand their possible experiences with online education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Geographical and logistical constraints were taken into consideration in the conduct of these interviews which were mainly done through email, google doc, or any other social media networks. I designed different sets of open-ended interview questions to ask teachers and students separately. The questions were based on their particular roles, experiences, and points of view about online learning. For teachers I asked questions on instruction strategies used by them, how they handle challenges in delivering this online instruction, which support mechanisms are there and how effective are the online learning tools and platforms. As for students, my questions explored their access to technology, engagement with materials that are online, peer-teacher interaction, and

the extent to which they were satisfied with this mode of acquiring knowledge. After getting ready with the interview questions, I started looking for research assistants. Specifically, I contacted EFL teachers as well as EFL learners in Bhutan through pages of various educational institutions, professional bodies engaged in education, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter among others. The criteria for selecting participants included their experiences in e-learning systems designed for adults willing to join and those who have different views about it. Invitations were sent out to potential participants accompanied by comprehensive information regarding what my study aimed at achieving including the fact that it was completely up to them if they wanted to participate or not while assuring them that their identities would remain confidential throughout the entire study process.

Those who expressed interest in taking part received interview questions and instructions for filling them out. This allowed participants to respond to the questions at their own time. I urged the participants to respond in a detailed manner and reflectively, based on their own experiences and insights. I followed up with the participants where necessary to clarify their responses or seek more information. The data were analyzed by employing qualitative analysis techniques such as thematic analysis or grounded theory once the interviews were all done. This entailed coding and systematically categorizing interview responses with the aim of identifying common themes, patterns, and insights in connection with the research objectives through grounded theory or thematic analysis methods. During this stage of data collection, I followed ethical principles and regulations so as to ensure that the rights of the respondents were respected and their confidentiality protected. This included seeking informed consent from respondents, taking care of sensitive information in other words maintaining confidentiality as well as giving opportunities for them to opt out if they wished to do so. The purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants, specifically focusing on EFL instructors and students who have had experience using an

online environment for learning. The recruitment channels comprised of educational bodies, professional networks, online forums, and social media groups specifying community organizations available in Bhutan. The criteria of selection were keeping in mind the perspective on various issues related to the diversity of online learning experiences that these individuals have had. Data gathering involved the use of semi-structured, asynchronous remote interviews. This approach allowed for flexibility in responses and was able to address geographical and logistical challenges. Different interview guides were created for teachers and students, focusing on their distinct roles and perspectives on Internet education. The teacher interview guide sought to find out what teaching strategies were used, what difficulties were encountered, how they got help, and whether online tools worked out well or not. The student interview guide tried to discover how they interacted with technology, online materials, peers, and teachers while taking courses in a digital environment. In order for the potential participants to understand the objectives of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw, detailed information sheets were given. The informed consent of all participants was sought before starting interviews. For the consenting participants, interview questions and guidelines were handed out. This allowed them the time it took to respond through asynchronous interviews, making answers more careful and reflective. The researcher asked questions for more clarification or additional information when required.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

4.1. Adaptability to Online Education

Table 1: Adaptability to Online Education

Participant	Initial Reaction	Adaptation Strategies	Long-term Adaptation Outcome
Student 1	Challenging	Set schedules, created study space	Improved self-discipline, positive adjustment
Student 2	Difficult	Used online resources, set goals	Enhanced learning experience
Student 3	Stressful	Structured routines, utilized apps	Gradual adaptation
Student 4	Overwhelming	Created quiet study area, used digital tools	Better time management
Student 5	Initially Confusing	Established study schedules, interactive tools	Positive adjustment, increased independence
Student 6	Hard to Adjust	Set specific goals, utilized study groups	Improved time management
Student 7	Significant Change	Created study schedule, used language apps	Enhanced learning experience

Student 8	Challenging at First	Managed time better, accessed online resources	Developed self-discipline
Student 9	Stressful	Used discussion boards, email for feedback	New learning avenues discovered
Teacher 1	Challenging	Used interactive platforms, adjusted teaching style	Improved digital teaching methods
Teacher 2	Initially Difficult	Implemented diverse tools, online assessments	Positive adaptation, enhanced engagement
Teacher 3	Stressful	Focused on interactive methods, student feedback	Better engagement techniques
Teacher 4	Overwhelming	Utilized various digital tools, adjusted pace	Enhanced teaching methods

The COVID-19 pandemic, a historical moment which has forced universities all over the world to quickly shift their focus from face-to-face courses into a total online learning environment, is what this article focuses on. The research investigates how such a change has affected English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Bhutan, in terms of their adaptability to distance education. The results are drawn from students' and teachers' experiences as shown in Table 1.

4.1.1. Initial Reactions to Online Learning

The initial responses from participants concerning the abrupt move towards virtual learning were diverse; however, a general commonality amongst them is that these transitions have been difficult and stressful. Generally, pupils considered such transformations as onerous, uncomfortable, anxiety-provoking, or terrifying. For example, according to Student 1's experience, it was tough while Student 4 felt completely daunted. Teachers too had a hard time and Teacher 1 as well as Teacher 3 perceived their switch as hard going and nerve-wracking respectively. Such reactions reflect how suddenly switching from face-to-face learning to remote education ruptured everything.

4.1.2. Adaptation Strategies

Overcoming initial hurdles, students and teachers adapted their strategies to cope with the online learning environment. Individual students adopted practical ways of overcoming their challenges. For example, Student 1 created a schedule and set aside a study place which enhanced self-discipline leading to positive changeover. In the same vein, Student 4 created a quiet place for studying and used online tools for better time management. Many students such as Student 3 and Student 6 structured their routines and set specific goals in order to adapt themselves.

Similarly, different adaptation approaches were used by teachers to increase effectiveness in their teaching when switching to an online platform. Teacher 1 used interactive platforms alongside changing teaching styles that made digital instruction methods better. Meanwhile, Teacher 2 along with Teacher 4 incorporated several digital resources and adjusted the pace of their own instruction so as to engage all learners appropriately. On the other hand, Teacher 3 made use of participatory techniques while being keen on collecting feedback from his/her learners thereby enhancing involvement tactics.

4.1.3. Long-term Adaptation Outcomes

The outlooks of these adaptation strategies in the long term were positive in general. This means both students and teachers were capable of adapting well to the online learning environment. For students' cases, their strategy gave them improvement in numerous aspects of their learning experiences. For instance, Student 2 set goals by using online resources that improved his or her entire learning experience. Thereafter, Student 5 had the initial transition that was too confusing but she came up with certain study schedules and some interactive tools that contributed towards greater autonomy and satisfaction. Additionally, student 8 who allocated time more effectively and utilized internet resources developed better self-control.

Moreover, teachers reaped positive long-term results from the way they adapted. For example, teacher 1 moved from a conventional face-to-face teaching method by utilizing an interactive platform that has boosted his teaching approaches digitally. In terms of teacher 2, the distinct tools and online evaluations he implemented enhanced the student participation level while on the part of teacher 3 interactive techniques with feedback from learners helped him develop better means to involve them in lessons delivered by him as far as teacher 4 used different digital spaces combined with changed speeds that brought about advancements in her methods of educating students.

4.1.4. Long-term Adaptation Outcomes

Understanding how students and teachers adjusted to this unfamiliar atmosphere is engaging. Both groups had their share of early challenges but they were overcome with sustainable solutions leading to good results afterwards. Students have mainly been trying to come up with some regular plans, applying electronic devices or applications as well as referring to online study resources for self-discipline as well as enhancement of their overall learning experience. On the other hand, educators have been trying to adapt their strategies

such that they can explicate better students' needs; introduce interactive tools, and alsoconsultn for feedback aimed at enhancing the involvement of students in class activities. This shows that throughout different periods in history, both sects of individuals have been enduring great strains on them. With its unique approach, online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has equipped them with new skills that may as well improve future working environments either based on technology or otherwise.

4.2. Challenges Encountered

Table 2: Challenges Encountered

Participant	Major Challenges	Strategies to Overcome	Effectiveness of Strategies
Student 1	Distractions, lack of motivation	Set schedules, joined online groups	Moderately effective
Student 2	Technical issues, motivation	Set goals, utilized online tools	Effective
Student 3	Lack of interaction, motivation	Used apps, created routine	Moderately effective
Student 4	Distractions, technical issues	Created study space, used digital tools	Effective
Student 5	Motivation, technical difficulties	Set schedules, interactive tools	Moderately effective

Student 6	Staying focused, motivation	Specific goals, study groups	Effective
Student 7	Motivation, distractions	Dedicated study schedule, language apps	Effective
Student 8	Lack of interaction, technical issues	Managed time, accessed online resources	Effective
Student 9	Limited feedback, technical issues	Discussion boards, online resources	Moderately effective
Teacher 1	Student engagement, technical issues	Interactive platforms, adjusted methods	Effective
Teacher 2	Technical issues, engagement	Diverse tools, online assessments	Effective
Teacher 3	Engagement, technical difficulties	Interactive methods, student feedback	Effective
Teacher 4	Pacing, technical issues	Digital tools, adjusted teaching pace	Effective

Throughout the process of moving to an online system of education, thanks to COVID-19, Bhutan's EFL learners faced difficult conditions. Table 2 contains a summary of the main obstacles faced by pupils and instructors alike, along with ways they managed to cope with them and their success rate.

Students and teachers face some major challenges including but not limited to motivation, technical difficulties, distractions, and lack of interaction and engagement. One of the problems that students such as Student 1 and Student 5 constantly encounter is motivation. Student 2, Student 4, and Student 8 are among others who experienced technical problems. Distractions were also common as raised by Student 1 and Student 7. Lack of interaction in online learning environments was an additional problem for some students including Student 3 and Student 8. On the other hand, teachers experienced significant problems related to engaging students and dealing with technical problems at the same time. Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 reported that the main challenge was motivating students while Teacher 1, Teacher 2, or even Teacher 3 cited technical difficulties. Adjustments in their teaching styles were what Teacher 4 specifically pointed out concerning pacing.

In order to tackle these challenges, various strategies that were intended to create structure and use digital tools were adopted by both students and teachers. Students often came up with specific calendars and targets in order to combat motivation issues and distractions. For example, Student 1 and Student 5 developed calendars while Student 2 and Student 6 came up with specific objectives for maintaining focus and inspiration. Creating spaces for studying only or study areas in which books are kept were some of the common approaches in combating distractions or dealing with technical matters. For instance, Students 4 and 7 organized their time into timetable schedules as well as words application software. Teachers changed their ways of teaching such as participative techniques so as to attract interest from learners as well as technology problems. The techniques used by Teacher 1 comprised changing rhythm by means of interactive platforms; this worked wonders indeed. On another note, Teacher 2 relied on different instruments that as online assessments among others, while Teacher 3 focused on engaging methods through learner-response. Besides all

these teachers also faced timing problems; thus she employed digital tools including slowness comprehension devices.

Results from various participants showed that the effectiveness of their strategies was generally, in positive terms. Particularly useful to them were setting goals for students and using online tools. These strategies were effective for Student 2 in overcoming both technical issues as well as motivational challenges. Likewise, the creation of study places by Student 4 and the use of digital tools successfully overcame distractions and some technical problems. Likewise, Students 6 and 7 testified that they managed to stay focused on their studies or work by employing those very same techniques. Nevertheless, not all strategies achieved the same level of success across the board. Others used their selected methods with moderate success. For instance, the distraction problem that affected Student 1 and Student 3 was handled slightly better than they thought it would be handled by means of their choice methods (NO interaction included). Also, there was this issue of inadequate feedback plus other small glitches that limited the technical ability of engaging discussion boards plus any type of online resources which contributed to moderate effectiveness reported by student number 9. By and large, teachers indicated higher levels of ability to implement such strategies compared to others. Using interactive platforms and diverse tools enhanced student engagement while addressing some technical issues according to Teacher 1 while Teacher 2 said he/she utilized them similarly resulting in improved student engagement but addressing some technicalities at the same time. Engagement problems were solved by Teacher 3 while pacing challenges were resolved by Teacher 4 their strategies respectively.

When looking at the challenges and strategies of students and teachers, it reveals some key insights. Both groups of individuals voice similar frustrations such as problems with technology and lack of interest in studying. However, their methods of overcoming these

challenges differ somehow. Students used to depend much on establishing structured schedules coupled with the use of ICT for motivation purposes whereas teachers relied on interactional adaptive pedagogies towards student interest and minimization of tech-related impediments. The adaptability of both students and teachers in navigating the online learning landscape is underscored by the overall effectiveness of these strategies. Some strategies were only moderately effective while the majority led to positive outcomes showing that major obstacles could be overcome through targeted approaches.

4.3. Engagement Levels

Table 3: Engagement Levels

Participant	Engagement Level (Pre-Pandemic)	Engagement Level (Online)	Tools Used for Engagement
Student 1	High	Moderate	Zoom, Google Classroom
Student 2	High	Low	Online forums, email
Student 3	Moderate	Low	Educational apps, YouTube
Student 4	High	Moderate	Interactive platforms, digital tools
Student 5	Moderate	Low	Online quizzes, discussion boards
Student 6	High	Moderate	Study groups, language apps

Student 7	Moderate	Low	Discussion forums, breakout rooms
Student 8	High	Moderate	Mentimeter, Google Jamboard
Student 9	Moderate	Low	Quizzes, breakout rooms
Teacher 1	High	Moderate	Zoom, interactive assessments
Teacher 2	High	High	Mentimeter, breakout rooms
Teacher 3	Moderate	Moderate	Student feedback, interactive tools
Teacher 4	High	High	Various digital tools, adjusted pacing

The impact of switching to online education due to the COVID-19 pandemic on the involvement of EFL students and tutors in Bhutan was substantial. A comparative examination of learner-teacher engagement levels before and after the pandemic outbreak is presented in Table 3, along with a variety of devices employed to help facilitate their interactions.

Prior to the pandemic, student and teacher engagement levels were generally considered either high or moderate. For example, traditional classrooms had Student 1, Student 2, Student 4, and Student 6 having high levels of engagement. In a similar fashion, Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Teacher 4 were able to develop highly successful relationships with their learners before the onset of the COVID-19 period. However, there were other students

such as Student 3, Student 5, Student 7, and Student 9 whose level of participation had been moderate alongside that of Teacher 3 before the outbreak of this global disease.

The shift towards online education meant an evident change in the levels of participation that were seen. For many of the learners, their degree of involvement decreased greatly. Student 2 and Student 4, who used to be very much involved, collapsed to low or moderate levels of participation. Specifically, Student 2 dropped from being highly engaged to being less involved while Student 4 went down to 10% moderate involvement. Pre-pandemic moderate students like Student 3, Student 5, and Student 7 generally saw their engagement decrease considerably. Nevertheless, there were cases where engagement remained unchanged or improved marginally. Both student 1 and student 6 had initially high participatory rates but maintained a regular rate of involvement during online learning. Also, Person 8 managed to keep up with average communication exchange patterns in much the same way as others did at this time. Amongst teachers, however, we see that Teacher 2 together with Teacher four remained capable of keeping high interactions with their classes proving effectiveness in the adoption process towards virtual mode. Whereas Teacher 1 along with Teacher 3 effected not less than ordinary relationships outcomes throughout the e-learning interlude.

Various digital tools and platforms were employed to maintain teacher-student engagement during online learning, with mixed success levels. For example, Student 1 got moderate engagement from Zoom and Google Classroom while Student 2 had less impact using online forums and email. Using educational apps and YouTube, Student 3 got low engagement. Student 4 managed to maintain fair levels of engagement using Interactive platforms and digital tools. For low-level engagement, online quizzes and discussion boards were used by Student 5 while Student 6 provides moderate engagement through study groups

and language apps. On the other hand, discussion forums and breakout rooms used by Student 7 have low levels of interaction. Moreover, Moderated engagement arises from Mentimeter and Google Jamboard for student 8 while quizzes and breakout rooms used by student 9 cause poor engagement. In terms of teachers, Zoom together with interactive assessments helped Teacher 1 keep moderate engagement. Additionally, Teacher 2 achieved a very high level of student participation through Mentimeter and Breakout rooms however teacher three is much better placed as he maintains moderate student involvement with their feedback while various digital tools at an adjusted pace enhance high student-teacher involvement in class.

A lot of online learning platforms and digital tools were used to make certain that teachers and students remain engaged, but they varied in their effectiveness. For student 1, this was achieved through the use of Zoom and Google Classroom, whereas student 2 preferred forums or emails which were not as effective. On the part of student 3, he/she created an environment for less education by means of Educational apps and YouTube. Student 4 kept his/her average involvement level because of the support digital instruments and collaborative forums gave him/her. Low levels of involvement were recorded through online quizzes and discussion boards which were used by student 5. According to student six, who either learned together with other students or used language applications, these students were moderately engaged. They did not do much with respect to maintaining high levels of participation despite being the seventh individual on the forerunner's end who only employs forums and breakout rooms as tools for learning. Mentimeter together with Google Jamboard provided moderate involvement while student nine used quizzes plus break-out rooms that failed to raise attendance rates of the classes. Therefore teacher 1 managed to keep moderate interaction using Zoom faces as well as interactive assessment tools. For instance, Teacher Two engaged learners using Mentimeter and breakout areas in which they brainstormed their

ideas together on topics of interest, greatly improving their participation levels beyond traditional classroom methods. Through the use of interactive tools, Teacher 3 responded to students' requests for moderate levels of involvement by creating an atmosphere that encouraged participation whereas Teacher 4 maintained high concentration on learning materials with different digital instruments such as pacing.

This examination indicates undeniably that while students' digital learning had more time being disengaged, facilitators were able to keep their engagement strategies at par or even adjust them to suit different contexts. Zoom, Google Classroom, Mentimeter, and breakout rooms are among such platforms that made the whole process interactive and collaborative leading to increased student involvement because they enabled real-time communication and active participation- which are crucial factors in maintaining attention on e-learning courses. For instance, those learners who managed themselves not to have low connections mostly used organized tools like study groups, language applications as well as interactive systems. On the other hand, asynchronous media users like online discussion boards and emails lacked educational contact hence showing less student-educator commitment levels. It was more efficient for educators with hybrid designs (synchronous plus asynchronous) alongside adapting teaching methods to suit online platforms. More specifically; teachers 2 and 4 showed how students can be involved by incorporating various digital tools and interactive assessment techniques.

4.4. Impact on Language Proficiency

Table 4: Impact on Language Proficiency

Participant	Reading Improvement	Writing Improvement	Speaking Improvement	Listening Improvement

Student 1	Significant	Moderate	Minimal	Moderate
Student 2	Moderate	Significant	Minimal	Moderate
Student 3	Moderate	Moderate	Minimal	Minimal
Student 4	Significant	Significant	Minimal	Moderate
Student 5	Moderate	Moderate	Minimal	Minimal
Student 6	Moderate	Significant	Minimal	Minimal
Student 7	Significant	Moderate	Minimal	Moderate
Student 8	Moderate	Significant	Minimal	Moderate
Student 9	Significant	Significant	Minimal	Minimal
Teacher 1	Noted improvement	Noted improvement	Minimal	Moderate
Teacher 2	Noted improvement	Noted improvement	Minimal	Moderate
Teacher 3	Noted improvement	Noted improvement	Minimal	Minimal
Teacher 4	Noted improvement	Noted improvement	Minimal	Moderate

The different levels of online education that students were subjected to as one of containment strategies against covid-19 had varying impacts on Bhutanese EFL learners' language proficiency. The summary of the changes in these areas among students is given in Table 4 based on what has been reported by teachers who have noticed such improvements.

A conspicuous enhancement was observable in the reading skills of the majority of the participants. According to students like Student 1, 4, 7 and 9, there were remarkable advancements in their reading skills. It implies that this form of language learning, which usually consists of numerous readings from online sources, positively affected certain aspects of it. Students 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 indicated moderate improvements in their reading as a whole trend that just signifies an escalated improvement range. Teachers too noticed such overall progress in the students' comprehension ability thereby indicating the effectiveness of e-learning materials in this discipline.

The online learning period has also brought about significant improvements in writing skills. This could be attributed to the increased emphasis on written assignments and online communication as reported by Students 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9 who noted major developments in their writing capabilities. However, Students 1, 3, 5, and 7 noted modest improvements. The teachers agreed that their students' writing skills improved and that this was probably due to the online classroom where one has to write clearly and coherently.

For the majority of participants, speaking skills exhibited little development. This was due to the lack of unplanned verbal exchanges that such an environment offers as observed by all students who were involved in this study on their speaking capabilities. Such a lack of face-to-face interaction slows down the acquisition and cultivation of speaking competencies. Also, teachers have observed similar patterns that lack substance. The low quality and infrequency of direct contact among students and teachers were adversities against sound utterance improvement.

The listening skills showed varied levels of improvement among participants. Moderate improvements in their listening ability were experienced by students 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8. This improvement could be attributed to video lectures, recorded sessions, or other

audio-based learning resources commonly used by online education platforms. However, students 3, 5, 6, and 9 reported negligible progress in the area of listening skills pointing out that individual engagement and quality of auditory materials may affect how well one can listen online. Teachers observed some moderate gains in students' listening skills as they indicated that even if there were opportunities for practicing through online channels, its effect was not uniformly strong across all learners.

Differences are clearly visible when analyzing the data on different kinds of skills affected by online learning. The greatest development was experienced in reading and writing in an online environment whereas speaking seemed to be the least improved. In these two aspects, one could observe positive changes due to the increased use of digital texts and the need for written assignments. That was not the case with spoken language, which suffered greatly from a lack of interaction in virtual classes. Moderate progress was made in listening skills showing that audio materials were of some help though not across the board.

Teachers' observations revealed that it is possible for learners to report general progress in listening and writing but not in speaking skills. According to them, online learning platforms definitely aided reading and writing development, but they didn't afford enough interactive as well as engaging spaces for practicing speaking. They saw that online resources were useful for the improvement of listening skills but they may need to be supplemented with more interactive and engaging listening activities so that they can be effective.

4.5. Utilization of Online Resources

Table 5: Utilization of Online Resources

Participant	Preferred Resources	Frequency of Use	Perceived Effectiveness
Student 1	Educational websites, YouTube	Daily	High
Student 2	Language apps, online forums	Weekly	Moderate
Student 3	Podcasts, audiobooks	Weekly	High
Student 4	Educational videos, online courses	Daily	High
Student 5	Language learning apps, news websites	Weekly	Moderate
Student 6	Interactive exercises, online courses	Daily	High
Student 7	Language apps, webinars	Weekly	High
Student 8	Audiobooks, YouTube tutorials	Weekly	High
Student 9	Online libraries, discussion groups	Daily	High
Teacher 1	Interactive platforms, digital tools	Daily	High
Teacher 2	Online assessments, educational websites	Daily	High
Teacher 3	Student feedback tools, interactive methods	Weekly	High

Teacher 4	Various digital tools, recorded lessons	Daily	High

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the move towards online education needed Bhutanese EFL students and instructors to take advantage of different web-based materials that could help improve their learning processes. The choices of tools preferred, how often they are used, and their effectiveness as perceived by learners and educators have been captured in Table 5.

The learners and teachers used many different sources found online in order to support their learning and teaching activities. Among the commonly used resources were educational sites, language applications, YouTube, podcasts, audiobooks, as well as online courses. From the above-mentioned group of participants, educational sites were preferred by learner 1 whereas learner 4 opted for video tutorials and online courses. Language apps and message boards were what student 2 preferred while student 5 went for language learning apps and news portals respectively. Some others like podcasts and audiobooks were chosen by student 3 while for student 8 the choice was between audiobooks and YouTube tutorials. Interactive exercises and virtual classes were utilized by student 6 whereas online libraries and discussion forums were used by student 9. Lastly, language applications as well as webinars are the top preferences of student 7. In terms of teachers, teacher 1 and teacher 2 often used interactive platforms together with digital tools or online assessments combined with educational websites. With respect to teacher 3 and teacher 4; they used feedback tools from students with interactive methodologies in addition to other digital materials such as pre-recorded lessons among others including also the fact that there was a variation in frequency of usage across participants, sometimes using them on a daily basis while others once per week. For instance, daily users included students like Student 1, Student 4, Student

6, and Student 9 and teachers like Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Teacher 4 while weekly users had students including Student 2, Student 3, Student 5, Student 7, and Student 8 and Teacher 3. Online resources' perceived effectiveness among participants was generally high which shows their overall satisfaction with the tools they used. Most students perceived their preferred resources as highly effective including but not limited to Student 1, Student 3, Student 4, Student 6, Student 7, Student 8, and Student 9 were concerned with their preferred resources not being effective enough. All teachers also indicated that their selected online sources were rated high on effectiveness. Nevertheless, Student 2 and Student 5 on the other hand rated the effectiveness to be moderate according to what they preferred.

An analysis of preferred resources, frequency, and perceived effectiveness highlights some critical points. To begin with, a diverse collection of internet materials was employed by participants according to their own specifications and likings which is an indication that there is a variety in the range of available online educational tools that can cater to different learning or teaching styles (Blended learning environment). Secondly, the usage frequency suggests how these resources were dependent upon them. Online resources for students and teachers were used daily to facilitate their study processes or lessons while they could be used on a weekly basis by someone who intends just to add more to classwork. Thirdly, it is worth noting that most respondents reported high efficiency of Internet-based study materials leading to an overall inclination for their effectiveness with regard to e-learning. In addition, learners who use them every day tend to rate them as very effective, meaning there exists a link between frequent use and valuation (Blended learning environment). Lastly, interactive platforms, digital tools as well as online assessments were used daily on a regular basis by instructors reporting high efficiency which showed that tutors are capable of blending these devices within the teaching process so that attentiveness may be sustained and knowledge acquisition improved. The students did share among themselves that there were high

effectiveness levels with various online resources, but those who used them weekly saw them as moderately effective owing to their not being so frequent with the tools.

4.6. Recommendations for Enhancing Online EFL Education

Table 6: Recommendations for Enhancing Online EFL Education

Participant	Recommendation
Student 1	Improve internet infrastructure and provide more live sessions.
Student 2	Provide training for teachers on digital tools and incorporate more interactive lessons.
Student 3	Enhance technical support and create more real-time interaction opportunities.
Student 4	Develop offline resources for students with limited internet access and encourage virtual study groups.
Student 5	Implement enhanced engagement methods and establish consistent feedback mechanisms.
Student 6	Increase speaking and listening practice sessions and enhance digital tools.
Student 7	Ensure reliable internet access and provide training for interactive teaching.
Student 8	Refine digital teaching methods and promote more live interactions.
Student 9	Ensure equal access to technology and support collaborative learning.
Teacher 1	Prioritize continuous professional development for digital teaching skills.

Teacher 2	Introduce more interactive tools and methods, incorporating student feedback.
Teacher 3	Schedule increased live sessions and enhance infrastructure support.
Teacher 4	Provide digital literacy training and encourage collaborative activities.

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused education to go online, it brought out some shortcomings of English as a foreign language teaching in Bhutan. A list of specific suggestions from students and instructors for better online learning is provided in Table 6.

4.6.1. Improving Internet Infrastructure and Accessibility

One of the consistent recommendations is improved internet infrastructure and equitable access to technology. To enhance classes with more live sessions and interactive teaching, expanding internet facilities was a priority for student 1 and student 7. Expand offline resources, as well as guarantee equity in regards to technology, to tackle all the students who are affected by the digital divide in far-flung locations as noted by student 4 and student 9.

4.6.2. Enhancing Teacher Training and Digital Literacy

The proper training for teachers is essential in order to effectively use digital tools. Students 2, 7, and Teacher 4 suggested that educators should undergo training in the use of digital tools alongside interactive teaching approaches. This career development will see to it that instructors are able to appropriately implement technology and thus make their students more involved in the learning process. For instance, Teacher 1 said that it is important to give precedence to ongoing professional development focused on skills related to teaching through digital media; so, educators can pause a moment and note the current instruments and techniques.

4.6.3. Increasing Interactive and Live Sessions

Increased engagement and improved learning results were emphasized by several participants as being dependent on increased real-time interactions. For example, Student 3, Student 6, and Student 8 suggested the creation of more chances for live interactions during learning sessions. Besides, Teacher 3 also pointed out the need for having more live classes so that communication can be improved and also to enhance involvement among learners.

4.6.4. Developing Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms

For online learning, appropriate feedback and involvement are of paramount importance. Other suggestions made by Student 5 include increasing engagement and ensuring regular feedback. Teacher 2 corroborated this view indicating that there should be more interactive tools and methods which involve student feedback. By doing so, students' interests would be maintained while their learning progress would give valuable perspectives.

4.6.5. Supporting Collaborative and Group Learning

Another major recommendation involves fostering cooperative learning as an essential aspect. Collaborative learning could be facilitated through virtual study groups and teamwork based on what Student 4 and Teacher 4 proposed, to cultivate a united society among learners. Equal access to technology was suggested by Student 9 as one way of supporting cooperative learning since it allows for participation from every student in group tasks.

4.6.6. Increasing Speaking and Listening Practice

It was recognized that enhancing the speaking and listening abilities was a major necessity. Student 6 suggested that practice sessions for speaking and listening should be increased as they are rarely accessible in the various online environments. If we want

students to build these indispensable language competencies well, digital tools need to be improved, and additional chances for oral communication are provided.

4.6.7. Providing Technical and Infrastructure Support

For a smooth online learning experience, an internet connection works, which requires consistent maintenance, technical support, and strong infrastructure. To solve problems quickly and ensure uninterrupted learning processes, Student 3 and Teacher 3 suggested improving technical support systems and infrastructures. If distractions are avoided through good technical support services, then students and their teachers can concentrate on what is important - the target of education.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1. Adaptability to Online Education

The adaptation of EFL learners including teachers to online education during the COVID pandemic in Bhutan revealed various strategies and outcomes. It was difficult in the beginning for most of the participants, as they structured routines, and study spaces and used digital tools, but many were able to cope well. For example, Student 1 found it difficult at first but later improved his self-discipline through schedules and a place for studying alone. This structure was also mentioned by Student 2 and Student 4 who used internet resources in addition to creating a silent place for them to learn independently. Such measures are typical of an overall trend where establishing a routine in a structured environment is crucial in adapting to the new learning format. This is consistent with Hasan and Khan (2020), who found that students were happy with online learning when appropriate resources were available.

The enhancement of students` self-control and time management proves how positive online learning can be. Although initially confusing, this has actually helped them learn skills that are useful outside academia. For example, Student 5 claimed he was more self-sufficient owing to the introduction of interactive tools as well as study schedules. This indicates that while the transition was initially confusing, the long-term outcome was a positive adjustment, fostering skills that are valuable in both academic and daily routines. According to Alqahtani and Rajkhan (2020), "e-learning had a significant impact on the operations of educational institutions during the COVID-19 epidemic".

Teachers experienced their own share of challenges, but they had to adjust their methodology in teaching due to the online format. As an example, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 changed their teaching approaches and made use of various technological tools so as to enhance students' engagement. Flexibility of this kind was crucial in maintaining high standards of education during the transition period and keeping students engaged throughout. Furthermore, according to Coman et al. (2020), it is important for them to keep on learning throughout their careers and modify their courses in accordance with the requirements of the distance education system as demonstrated by positive changes introduced by teachers. Moreover, during the pandemic, online education systems had to test students' and teachers' resilience and flexibility. Effective adaptation depended on self-management, and effective use of time and technology, among other things. Therefore, ongoing support and training for students and teachers is needed to cope with the challenges posed by e-learning and e-teaching.

5.2. Challenges Encountered

When it was switched to online learning in Bhutan there were lots of challenges faced by both EFL students as well as their instructors. The most common problems were distractions, absence of motivation, obstacles concerning technological aspects, and lack of engagement. For example, Student 1 and Student 4 dealt with distractions from others as well as technical issues by building specific places for studying within their homes and using different digital tools. These strategies worked well for some students, but others did not benefit so much from them. This contradicts what was found by Nartiningrum & Nugroho (2020), who noted that such challenges also exist in Indonesia's educational system.

Motivation has emerged as an important issue, especially among students. Student 2, Student 5, and Student 6 for instance stated that they face problems in keeping motivated and

used strategies like goal setting and interactive tools to deal with this problem. While others considered these strategies helpful enough, some others rated success levels as moderate. Such differences prove that personalized approaches are necessary when it comes to motivation since strategies may work well for one student but fail terribly for another. This correlates with what Hung Lau and Lee (2020) say about the challenges coming along with sustaining concentration and interest among young learners.

Technical problems were a widespread hindrance for both student and teacher populations. Among them, Students 2, 4, and 5 found it hard to do proper online learning due to related technological assistance issues. The same troubles were experienced by teachers, who had problems engaging learners and dealing with technical glitches as raised by Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 respectively. However, some of these concerns were mitigated by interaction platforms and varied toolsets although Spanemberg et al (2020)'s assertions in Brazil that such sustainable positions needed reliable tech support systems still prevailed.

Limited interaction was another major challenge that affected most significantly students' speaking and listening skills. Students 3 and 9, for example, said that their speaking abilities improved only marginally because they could not interact with others in real time. This was also noted by teachers who observed that online formats often lack spontaneous verbal interactions characteristic of traditional classrooms. Enhancing interaction through discussion boards, email feedback or even live sessions is somewhat efficient but there is a need for more efforts in order to support the interactive nature of face-to-face learning. This concurs with Asio and Bayucca's (2020) assertion that online learning environments tend to reduce student engagement and participation.

The transition to online learning has been faced with many challenges, which indicates that both technical and motivational issues must be looked into. The online learning

experience can be improved through solid technical support, interactive and stimulating learning surroundings as well as personal encouragement methods. Thus, there is a necessity for a holistic approach that tackles the varied problems experienced by EFL teachers and learners in the virtual setting.

5.3. Engagement Levels

There was a significant shift in the engagement among EFL learners and teachers in Bhutan during the transition to online learning. Before the pandemic, they were generally engaging at moderate to high levels; however, due to e-learning, many students showed lower levels of enthusiasm. For instance, Student 2 was very much engaged but later during online studies, it was more or less inactive. A similar trend was observed in other students like Student 3 and Student 5 who said that there was not much communication during their online sessions. Such an idea has been supported by the results obtained from Wyse et al. (2020), who carried out a study on the effect of COVID-19 on US educational institutions.

Changes occurred mainly because of the types of engagement tools that were used. Generally, students who participated in interactive and collaborative platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, or Breakout Rooms seem to be more engaged than others studying conventional ways. For example, a moderate level of engagement was seen for student 1 and student 4 when using interactive platforms such as Zoom. In contrast to this, those making use of asynchronous tools namely online forums or email had a lower level of involvement, for instance; student 2 and student 5. This implies that a high level of online learning engagement can be sustained through real-time interaction and activeness. The findings validate Kovacs et al., (2021)'s research concerning the significance of various digital tools in the retention of learners.

Despite achieving higher levels, teachers find it difficult to compete with their students. Teachers such as teacher 2 and teacher 4 used interactive platforms and changed their teaching styles to enhance optimal student's learning environments. This emphasizes the necessity of teacher training and use of different digital tools in order to maintain students' interest. For example, teacher 3 demonstrates that some synchronous strategies can be employed together with the asynchronous leading to moderate levels of student participation. These findings are in agreement with Klapproth et al.'s (2020) observations that highlight the need for flexibility and use of different types of digital materials while conducting online lectures.

Students were unengaged while teachers maintained their engagement strategies. Most teachers have continued to participate, and they have made use of cooperative and interactive methods. This suggests that future online education should emphasize participation in real-time and live interaction. To increase students' engagement level, more interaction and collaboration should be integrated into online learning approaches in the future.

5.4. Impact on Language Proficiency

The effect of online learning on language proficiency among EFL students in Bhutan varies according to the specific language skills. There were significant improvements in reading and writing skills while the speaking ones showed less considerable growth and listening was moderately affected by it. To illustrate this, Student 1 and Student 4 noted large strides made in their own vocabulary as a result of more exposure to digital materials and written tasks. The teachers also noted an overall enhancement of learners' reading as well as writing abilities. These results are in agreement with the findings of Mahmoudi (2020), who concluded that e-learning significantly increases grammatical precision in language learners.

One of the most important findings was that there were only slight improvements in speaking skills. The students seemed to agree that their speaking abilities had developed only slightly probably due to the low amounts of chances for spontaneous talk with others in a web-based environment. Another reason could be the lack of face-to-face communication which builds up such skills; some educators also noted this pattern. Accordingly, Danquah perceives it as an area where inferiorities existed during distance learning, stressing more need for chances of speaking both times that are really interactive as well as real ones. The disappointing nature suffers from verbal communication precisions through online learning (Asio and Bayucca 2020).

Diverse levels of improvement were evident in the participants' listening skills. Moderate improvements could be seen in some students (Student 1 and Student 4). This suggests that utilizing video lectures and recorded sessions played a part in this increase, while others, such as Student 3 or 5 only reported slight improvements, implying that success in online listening activities might depend on individual engagement and quality of the audio materials used. Teachers have found out that there has been an average increase in their students' listening abilities which means that although the internet was used for online practice of listening skills some people didn't benefit equally from it. These observations reflect what Surkhali & Garbuja (2020) said about the pros and cons of e-learning within the Nepali context.

The different influences on various language abilities clearly show the pros and cons of e-learning. Despite the advantages in reading and writing skills offered by the Internet, the lack of significant improvements in speaking indicates an area that requires a more focused approach. Improving verbal communications and live chats within digital tools are crucial for bettering speaking proficiency. Furthermore, upgrading audio resources as well as enabling more interactive listening tasks might boost listening abilities.

5.5. Utilization of Online Resources

The very important thing that EFL learners and teachers had during the pandemic was the use of online resources. Various participants had different frequencies and perceived effectiveness of various resources such as education websites, language apps, YouTube, podcasts, and online courses among others. For instance, Student 1 and Student 4 used educational websites and watched video educational films every day, thus they thought that these were very effective. The relationship between frequent use of online resources and high perceived effectiveness seems very strong. Lockee (2021), for example, in his study notes that digital tools enhance online learning experiences.

On the other hand, Student 2 and Student 5 are among those learners who used different sources like mobile applications for communication or Internet discussion sites on a weekly basis and they thought such resources were averagely effective. Hence it means that an engagement infrequently presented through online resources may not be as effective as one presented on a daily basis. The need for regular use of study materials has been highlighted through this research which shows how vital frequent and adequate interaction with online educational tools is. According to Dwivedi et al. (2020), digital sources should be efficiently utilized in the e-learning process.

Teacher's use of interactive platforms, digital resources and online evaluations on a daily basis has proven to be very helpful as they were reported. For instance, Teachers 1 and 2 used these tools daily and found them quite useful in keeping their students focused and helping them with their studies. It emphasizes that there is need for various kinds of digital tools so as to enhance the online learning experience. This corroborates findings by Rapanta et al., (2020) who stated that digital tools are crucial for online education.

Different types of internet materials were what students and instructors used to get help, according to the data collected. The extent of their usefulness was dependent on how often they were utilized and on which particular tools were used for that purpose. Learning effectiveness increased with daily access to collaborative and interactive instruments. To ensure maximized effectiveness, educational strategies should therefore aim at frequent and continuous use of online resources.

5.6. Recommendations for Enhancing Online EFL Education

The suggestions made by students and instructors shed light on ways in which online EFL learning may be advanced in Bhutan. Many students pointed out that improving internet infrastructure and providing equal access as some of the ways that could bridge the digital divide. For example, students 1 and 7 insisted on the need for better internet infrastructure so as to facilitate more live sessions and interactive learning. Another option can be offline resources as mentioned by student 4; this would enable learners with poor internet connection continue with their education. Murph (2020) also supports equity when it comes to accessing digital material.

The other major suggestion was that teachers should receive training in digital tools and interactive methods of teaching. Technology's effective application requires that teachers go through a training program, according to Student 2, Student 7, and Teacher 4. Teacher 1 notes that ongoing professional development is important for helping teachers acquire pertinent skills that will enable them to handle the intricacies of online learning while sustaining student's interest. Similarly, Coman et al. (2020) stress the need for continuous professional development among educators.

A major suggestion to improve engagement and learning outcomes was to increase real-time interaction and live sessions. Student 3, Student 6, Student 8, and Teacher 3

suggested creating more opportunities for real-time interaction. This would help replicate the interactive nature of in-person learning and improve speaking and listening skills. This recommendation is supported by Hrastinski (2020), who pointed out that synchronous communication is vital in online learning.

Another critical aspect that was mentioned was the need for strong engagement and feedback systems. The fifth student as well as the second teacher proposed more advanced engagement strategies and regular comments in order to keep learners interested while tracking their improvement. Building student communities through virtual study groups and common tasks, as suggested by Student 4 and Teacher 4, creates a sense of belongingness among peers. This reaffirms Dhawan's (2020) findings on how significant feedback is in online learning environments such as collaborative learning systems. The recommendations provided aim to improve online EFL education. This involves technical, motivational, and interactive aspects of online learning that will ensure an effective and inclusive education process. This guidance is going to optimize existing eLearning platforms as well as anticipate the future with regard to situations in which online teaching could remain essential.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how EFL teachers and learners in Bhutan adjusted to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it focused on various facets of this shift such as adaptability to the new mode of teaching/learning the challenges that came with it, participation levels as well as effects on language proficiency and internet resources application. A thorough understanding of online learning transition and its implications regarding EFL education in Bhutan was attempted through this research. The results indicated it had been complex for both students and teachers to move towards virtual education. For many EFL rejecters adjusting to the system was difficult because their surrounding space have turned into a learning environment for them again possibly distracting their concentration from studies or simply lack thereof, but some managed an organized daily routine within which they remained productive. For instance, ones who used to have designated places for studying at home followed in the same direction as their study schedule were capable of coping with online platforms. At the same time, even though there were difficulties in studying on the Internet, it also brought about important skills like self-control and time management which could be applied in other spheres apart from schools. On the other hand, teachers encountered their own challenges. They had to adjust their teaching methods and include various digital tools in order to keep up learner interest and quality of education. Teachers' ability to change their approach was very decisive in making online learning successful. The study confirmed that continuous teacher professional development is vital for teachers to be able to negotiate the complexities of online education efficiently. The study showed that engagement among students significantly reduced when studying online. According to the report those who employed interactive tools and real-time interactions, their level of interest was higher than that of those who used only asynchronous

methods. A similar trend was seen among the teachers who also modified their strategy as a way of upholding student engagement levels. Online students should actively take part through real-time interaction which would keep them engaged in such settings. Online learning had its impacts on the various aspects of language proficiency in different ways. The research revealed that reading and writing skills had remarkable progress while speaking skills showed little growth. Listening skills revealed moderate improvements depending on individual involvement and the quality of audio materials used. These findings suggest that there is an urgent need for focused approaches such as optimizing online tasks for learners in order to improve speaking proficiency. Online resources were very essential to the entire process of online learning. As noted in this study, perceived effectiveness was higher among those who frequently utilized interactive and collaborative tools. Digital resources could have produced better results for students and teachers who used them more often compared to others who used them occasionally. In other words, there is a necessity for a consistent and efficient utilization of online tools to improve learning.

The study emphasizes that an adequate combination of both synchronous and asynchronous methods is needed in online education. Online learning success relies heavily on real-time communication and different types of media. This implies that schools must put in considerable effort to create an interactive system that is always applicable while providing support to the teachers and their learners. Moreover, the research highlights continuous professional growth and teacher preparation initiatives as essential prerequisites for gaining instructional tools necessary for adapting well to e-learning contexts. The shift to digital learning has wider social effects, especially regarding equity and access issues.

This research shows that students did face huge issues such as slow internet and digital resources. To have an equal opportunity and successful conduct of classes among the students in online education, it is important to solve these issues. For example, improving

internet speed, and data plans, providing offline course materials, and helping students who don't have access to digital resources. Policymakers should have to pay attention to what this research has found in coming up with strategies for online learning. Policies should be developed to encourage the use of digital resources in educational settings and to tackle the issue of digital inequities. There has to be sufficient infrastructure as well as support for schools that enable them to provide effective online learning experiences. In addition, it is important that policies must promote continuous professional development for teachers so that they can stay aligned with technological advancements and new modes of instruction.

Furthermore, this research can also be used as a foundation for upcoming examinations concerning e-learning structures especially among teachers and learners of foreign languages. The impact of e-learning on school performance and language competencies over an extended period could thus be a potential area for future studies. On the other side, knowing how e-learning affects students' linguistic abilities in the long run could provide useful information for bettering future online teaching methods. Comparisons made between various educational environments or nations can enable us to have a wider view of the effectiveness of internet-based education. Furthermore, examining the way different education systems adjust to distant learning alongside their effects would help us come up with more accurate practices. Researching on emerging technologies integration into online education could give an idea of the ways new tools and platforms can affect the learning results. Evaluating advanced technologies like virtual reality, artificial intelligence, or gamification in terms of their efficiency within distance learning might lead to original ways of improving the educational experience. Other aspects for further investigation may include creating and trying out individual-focused motivation techniques. Knowing how various motivational strategies influence students' participation level and performance will assist in establishing much better e-learning platforms. Understanding how interactive learning

environments are designed and implemented can help in creating more engaging and effective online learning experiences. In this sense, research in this area can include the adoption of collaborative tools, the use of discussion forums, and live interactions that facilitate students' participation and learning. This study investigated how EFL learners and teachers in Bhutan adapted themselves to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results indicate both challenges and opportunities of online learning while providing practical recommendations for improving the same experience. Through implication discussions as well as future research directions, educators, policymakers, and researchers may contribute to better online education in terms of efficiency and equity.

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