International Journal of Educational Studies
ISSN: 2641-533X
Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 159-164.
2021
DOI: 10.53935/2641-533x.v4i4.168

Barriers and Enablers of Emergency Remote Education amid COVID-19 Pandemic: Perspectives of English Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this paper is to describe the barriers and enablers in emergency remote education from the views of language teachers amid COVID-19 pandemic. It involved eleven purposively sampled high school English language teachers in the Philippines during the school year 2021-2022. The qualitative data were processed using thematic analysis technique. The results revealed two superordinate themes: 1.) barriers of emergency remote English language education and 2.) enablers of emergency remote English language education. Under the first superordinate theme, barriers of remote emergency education, three subordinate themes emerged: 1.1.) problems in internet connection and materials; 1.2.) unfamiliarity with remote instructional design; and 1.3.) lack of skills in using remote technologies. Furthermore, under the second superordinate theme, enablers of remote emergency education, three subordinate themes were revealed: 2.1.) self-learning in using technology; 2.2.) instructional accommodations; and 2.3.) school and community support. These study outcomes provide practical insights that shape emergency remote education amid the current novel crisis. The barriers should be addressed, and the enablers should be cultivated, so that a successful remote English language education can be attained.*

***Key words**: Barriers, Enablers, Remote education, Language teachers, English, COVID-19.*
***JEL Classification**: I21 Analysis of Education.*

1. Introduction

Since the unfolding of COVID-19 across continents, nations, and territories around the world, it has drastically changed teaching and learning to a great extent. As schools continue to struggle, teaching and learning become more challenging processes as they need to be molded every moment to suit to the changing situations. As such, teachers all over the world must adapt to new teaching approaches, methods, and strategies at a pressured rate, facing a myriad of problems while attempting to draw support towards educational recovery. One of the temporary solutions applied by most educational systems and teachers is the range of educational practices collectively called emergency remote education (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021). Unlike similar practices in the past such as distance education, home education, and online education that are strongly grounded on theoretical and practical notions, emergency remote education is about making most of resources in the time of crisis. This collective practice has opened alternative teaching and learning approach to continue education in a virulent time. Within the Philippine educational context, emergency remote education adapted through three types: online distance learning, modular distance learning, and television- and radio- based instruction (Llego, 2020). The Department of Education Order No. 012 series of 2020 was issued, urging the schools and teachers to adopt the most responsive modalities based on the resources and capabilities of the learners. Of the three types of emergency remote education, it is the modular distance

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***Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.*
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learning in print format that has been the most widely preferred and applicable to the students (Bernardo, 2020) due to its practicality of not demanding much high technologies. One of the core curriculum subject areas in the Philippine basic education level is the English language. With the changed educational situation, it also needs to be redesigned to the emergency remote education modalities. An effective remote language education involves a set of knowledge different from those that have been used in traditional face-to-face teaching environments (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). Considering the recent educational transformation from traditional face-to-face to different emergency remote education, however, most teachers face a great challenge of delivering language skills and concepts in new different ways that they are not familiar with. Several scholarly works have been published to tackle the challenges in emergency remote education encountered by the language teachers and students (e.g., (Al Shlowiy, Al-Hoorie, & Alharbi, 2021; Hazaea, Bin-Hady, & Toujani, 2021; Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021; Mahyoob, 2020; Naqvi & Zehra, 2020; Widyanggara, Tanduklangi, & Siam, 2020)). The current research is an extension of these studies, contributing to the theoretical knowledge on the instructional problems and solutions in remote language education amid a novel situation. On a more practical perspective, this paper will present insights on possible measures to improve remote language instructional practices of the teachers in the field.

Thus, the central purpose of this research is to describe the barriers and enablers of emergency remote education from the experience of English language teachers amid COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Methods

This section presents the methods used in this study. It discusses the research design, sampling strategy, study material, data collection, and data analysis.

2.1. Research Design

This research used a qualitative approach. Creswell (1994) described qualitative approach to research as "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (p. 15). It is relevant to accomplish the main objective of this paper to describe the barriers and enablers in emergency remote education from the experience of English language teachers during the COVID-19 disruptions.

2.2. Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy used to select the participants of this study was purposive, specifically a criterion sampling (Patton, 2001). The main criterion considered for the selection is that the participants must primarily be English language teachers who have experience in emergency remote education since the onset of the global COVID-19 crisis. Drawing as many participants as possible despite the current constraints, this research involved a total of 11 participants.

2.3. Instrumentation

An interview guide was developed by the researchers to collect the needed data for this study. It mainly contained questions designed to stimulate responses on the different barriers and enablers in emergency remote education. These questions were validated by a language education specialist and an instrument development expert.

2.4. Data Collection

The researchers obtained the perspectives of the English language teachers through interview procedures. An adapted form called online interview was individually conducted with the participants. It is an emerging research method that uses communication mediated by computer technologies. Similar to personal interview, it typically asks participants to describe what they think or feel about an aspect. It may be synchronous or asynchronous (Salmons, 2015). Considering the convenience of the participants, the interview guide containing the questions was sent to the participants through Messenger or email to be answered offline. After three days to one week, these were accomplished and retrieved.

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2.5. Data Analysis

The data gathered from the online interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, a technique for identifying, examining, and organizing themes found within a set of information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the process, the researchers analyzed the codes and interpreted them into categories. Then, the similar categories were grouped into subordinate and superordinate themes, structuring the results to answer the stated goal of the study.

3. Results

The goal of this qualitative study is to describe the barriers and enablers of emergency remote education from the experience of English language teachers amid COVID-19 pandemic. This section presents the results.

Superordinate Theme 1: Barriers of Emergency Remote English Language Education

Several factors emerged to be barriers in attaining the goals of the emergency remote English language education amid the COVID-19 crisis. The teachers explicate these barriers as problems in internet connection and materials; unfamiliarity with remote instructional design; and lack of skills in using remote technologies. They are discussed as follows.

Subordinate Theme 1.1: Problems in internet connection and materials. Since emergency remote education mostly relies on online distance learning and modular distance learning modalities, internet connection and materials are a major resources needed. However, in a developing country, these resources pose a barrier for many English language teachers in this study. It can be gleaned in their following selected statements:

> *"One of the challenges that I experienced is the problem in the internet connection. As we all know, we cannot ensure a good internet connection five times a week. If the internet connection is not good, it affects the time and the lesson in general"* -Participant 10.
>
> *"In production of printed modules, as a teacher, there are insufficient materials such as paper, ink, and machine. It is hard on the part of the teachers especially to those who do not have personal printers. Moreover, some spend their own money for the materials"* -Participant 06.

Subordinate Theme 1.2: Unfamiliarity with remote instructional design. Teachers around the globe are mostly trained in the traditional modality of teaching. However, with the short and quick change to remote education, the English language teachers encountered another essential barrier as they found themselves unfamiliar with the remote instructional design. A sample of narratives of the teachers provides evidence:

> *"I am not familiar with translating activities to print modular learning modality. I find it not appropriate to teach language skills like phonics and intonation in print modular learning"* -Participant 04.
>
> *"Remote assessment is unfamiliar as well. It is really hard to get a valid and reliable assessment from our students. Additionally, it challenging as well to give exams and activities"* -Participant 10.

Subordinate Theme 1.3: Lack of skills in using remote technologies. Digital technologies play a major component of remote instructional delivery. Since majority of the English language teachers in the past were trained in the traditional instructional delivery, it also follows that they may not possess all the essential skills in using remote technologies. This barrier can be observed in the following selected statements of the teachers:

> *"Familiarity on 21st century technology was one of the most difficult things that I have experienced as a teaching English remotely. It is our first time using the LMS we have now, so both sides are not yet used to accessing it"* -Participant 07.
>
> *"Misuse of technology is one problem I encounter. Some of these issues are caused by a lack of training while others are caused by the attitudes on using technology, and yet others are caused by hardware issues"* -Participant 01.

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Superordinate Theme 2: Enablers of Emergency Remote English Language Education

Despite the sudden and forced migration to emergency remote education, the teachers found enablers to attain the goals of the emergency remote English language education amid the COVID-19 crisis. These enablers include self-learning in using technology; instructional accommodations; and school and community support. They are elaborated as follows.

Subordinate Theme 2.1: Self-learning in using technology. At this point of a challenging time, luxury for professional development activities to learn how to use technology for remote learning is difficult. Thus, the English language teachers have to learn by themselves how to use technology needed to plan, implement, and evaluate remote instruction. This enabler can be observed in the following responses of the teachers:

> *"I am a person who is not that technology knowledgeable, but because of our new way of teaching and learning, I learned how to use the technology, different applications, and tools in order to cope with the changes and to make the teaching and learning more productive and meaningful"* -Participant 10.
>
> *"I needed to learn different technologies used in remote English teaching with extra effort of my own. I created video contents. I also designed lessons in the LMS. There is no way but to step forward by learning how to use technologies"* -Participant 11.

Subordinate Theme 2.2: Instructional accommodations. Making remote teaching and learning in these disruptive moments a responsive and effective one requires a careful reconsideration of the instruction. Hence, accommodations were employed by the English language teachers, reshaping the goals, contents, strategies, and assessment. Such an enabler is reflected in the following words of the teachers:

> *"I adjusted the things needed to answer in the print modules that were given to the students, wherein they would only answer the essential activities"* -Participant 06.
>
> *"I try to make the subject as asynchronous as possible. This means that they access the learning materials and answer the task in their own pace"* -Participant 07.

Subordinate Theme 2.3: School and community support. A successful emergency remote education is ideally a joint effort not only of the teachers but also of the school and community. This notion is observed in the experiences of the English language teachers in this study as they drew support from the people in their schools and community. The following selected statements express this notion:

> *"I usually seek support to effectively plan and implement distance English language instruction with our program head and fellow teachers. They are more seasoned and adept in terms of blending technology and education"* -Participant 02.
>
> *"We conduct home visitations and talk to the parents and give them pieces of advice on how to involve themselves in the studies of their children. They also patiently visit the school and get the print modules for their children"* -Participant 05.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to describe the barriers and enablers of emergency remote education from the experience of English language teachers amid COVID-19 outbreak. Drawing support from the scholarly works, the results are discussed as follows. When it comes to the barriers in remote English language education, the study shows that problems in internet connection and materials is a major concern. This outcome is not new as several recent studies conducted across levels, disciplines, and participants report technological and material resources as a major block to hurdle in emergency remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Cahapay and Labrador (2021) found out that secondary teachers expressed that scarcity of structural resources such as gadgets and internet that are required for the effective delivery of the lessons was a challenge. This result is complemented by Rotas and Cahapay (2020) who indicated that for many students, unstable internet connectivity and inadequate learning resources that were major difficulties. Another barrier encountered by the English language teachers as found in this investigation is the unfamiliarity with remote instructional design. The COVID-19 crisis necessitated the redesign of education to the emergency remote education. Apparently, an effective remote language education requires a set of knowledge different from those that have been used in traditional face-to-face teaching environments (Baran et al., 2011). This problem

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is echoed in a previous study which revealed related barrier as that instructors used to the former teaching methods and lack of teaching design specialty for new methods (Makoe, 2012). Hence, with a different language education training in the past, teachers may have difficulty dealing with a rapid transition to remote language education as proven in this current study. The English language teachers also perceived that lack of skills in using remote technologies made it hard for them to implement remote education. The hastily organized remote language learning environment resulted to various technological issues especially at the start where teachers need to troubleshoot problems related to technology with themselves (Choi & Chung, 2021). Thus, scholars suggest that it is necessary to provide language teachers with responsive and adequate professional development opportunities to become familiar with different remote technology tools and develop related competencies that will allow them integrate these remote technology tools into the language teaching (e.g., see Jiang, Zang, Zhou, and Cao (2021)). Looking at the other side of the coin, enablers of remote English language education were also uncovered in this research. The transition from the old to new educational modality has not been an task. Its success, according to Winter, Costello, O'Brien, and Hickey (2021) depends on educators having the knowledge and skills for remote teaching. However, in the lack of time for professional development activities to capacitate the teachers, self-learning was an inevitable enabler. This phenomenon is related to the self-efficacy, or the ability to, related to technology use (e.g., see (Cahapay & Anoba, 2021; Dolighan & Owen, 2021)) that teachers adopted during the educational transitions. Moreover, it was found out that the English language teachers employed some instructional accommodations to enable remote education. Cahapay, Lorania, Labrador, and Bangoc II (2021) featured similar instructional accommodations employed by the kindergarten teachers through adaptation of alternative teaching modes and materials to enable remote education amid COVID-19 lockdown. Bassok, Weisner, Markowitz, and Hall (2021) drew in their study some alternative strategies employed by the teachers to suit the needs and conditions of the learners. Thus, in realizing the remote language education during a global crisis, this study emphasizes the need for instructional modifications. Lastly, school and community support was found to be a helpful enabler of remote English language education. The changes brought by the COVID-19 confinement have created barriers to the ways of providing different aspects of support in the bigger context of institutions (Alevizou, 2020). Thus, in educational context, the school and community support is important. Support from the school covers how teachers collaborate, network, socialize, share, and help each other in times of need (Gallagher, 2020). The parents are also essential partners in the successful delivery of remote education by making themselves involved in the learning of their children, which produce a positive ripple effect on the learning outcomes of children (Cahapay, 2021).

5. Conclusion

The goal of this study is to describe the barriers and enablers in emergency remote education from the views of language teachers amid COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. The major outcomes showed two superordinate themes: 1.) barriers of emergency remote language education and 2.) enablers of emergency remote language education. With regards to the barriers of remote emergency education, three subordinate themes were found: 1.1.) problems in internet connection and materials; 1.2.) unfamiliarity with remote instructional design; and 1.3.) lack of skills in using remote technologies. On the other hand, under the second superordinate theme on the enablers of remote emergency education, three subordinate themes were shown: 2.1.) self-learning in using technology; 2.2.) instructional accommodations; 2.3.) school and community support. These results provide practical insights that has implication to emergency remote language education amid a novel crisis. First, resilient structural resources in terms of technology, internet, and other material resources needed to plan remote language education should be collaboratively provided by authorities to the teachers. Furthermore, as pointed in the discussion, there is a need to develop professional development activities that address the pedagogical needs of the teachers in integrating technology, pedagogy, and content. Generally, the barriers found should be addressed through existing enablers and such l existing enablers ike the community support should be strengthened, so that a successful remote language education can be attained.

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