Overcoming Barriers to Student Engagement Online: Voices from L2 Instructors

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Abstract

During the Coronavirus outbreak, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education has become necessary, as ICT usage in education is a systematic and structured approach to improve the quality of education globally. This qualitative investigation used a convenience sample to meet the study's goal. Twenty L2 teachers were selected for a focused group interview in which they were asked questions about how L2 instructors manage the challenges of online teaching and how to keep L2 students engaged in online learning. The findings of this study are unique in that they provide a significant addition to the field of information and communication technology integration in EFL settings. The results of this qualitative research may be of use to policymakers and educators in assessing ICT and EFL activities, educational programs, resources, curriculum, and teaching methodologies in a variety of situations. In the future, it will be necessary to conduct a more in-depth investigation of the primary hurdles facing Jordanians.

Keywords: Student Engagement, Online Barriers, L2 instructors, Tertiary learning, adult education, distance learning.

1   Introduction

Historically, there has been a connection between the great scientific revolutions of mankind and the educational revolutions that followed. One of these revolutions is the Internet, which transcends or completely destroys the limitations of national and regional borders. It has evolved into a new style that has jumped from restricted to complete information and sciences, and it now occupies a prominent and critical role in our lives. It also separates current communication from previous generations. This relationship took on a pattern of reciprocity, with language functioning as the embodiment of a person's basic essence, as seen in the diagram below. Distance education (DE) has been more popular in recent years, thanks to technological advancements. DE is described by Keegan (2002) as "teaching and learning in which learning takes place at a different location than instruction" in which "learning takes place at a different location than instruction" (p. 20).

Students benefit from the sudden transition from conventional classrooms to virtual learning environments because it allows them to stay up with their language studies. Also mentioned was the fact that Online Instruction (OI) has provided language learners with a variety of opportunities, including the ability to collaborate with their peers, the development of critical thinking skills, the opportunity to participate in innovative projects, and the promotion of life-long learning through digital platforms (Hazaymeh, 2021). While this change has brought many advantages to language students and instructors, it has also brought about a number of important challenges (Hakim, 2020; Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Mathew et al., 2019; Nenakhova, 2021). To argue that such issues may create an excessive amount of stress on instructors is not an

exaggeration. This tension may have an affect on their teaching techniques and attitudes on OI.

Despite the fact that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) increases students' mastery of educational materials and allows for the repetition of courses that are not clear enough, learners' desire to study continues to be poor (Rababah, 2020, Rababah, 2021). As a result, the current study's inquiry of how L2 teachers deal with the problems of online teaching is justified. The current research also seeks to determine ways to keep L2 students motivated in online learning by conducting interviews with them as well.

2   Literature review

Teachers primarily utilize the TIP model to guarantee successful integration of technology. This model was created to assist teachers in planning, implementing and assessing the use of technology in the classroom and to provide teachers with a general method by which they can identify and address issues related to teaching in terms of technology integration (Roblyer & Doering, 2013), p. 52). The TIP model (see Figure 3.1 below) contains seven steps categorized into three phases: the first phase is the learning and teaching needs analysis, the second phase is the integration planning, and the third phase is the post-instruction analysis and revision stage. The seven steps assist in guaranteeing efficient and meaningful technology integration into teaching and learning.

The TIP model serves as a framework for teachers upon which they can ask important questions that assist in their focus as to why ICT must be integrated into the activities of the lesson. The lack of use of ICT integration in improving classroom practices prevents the leveraging of advantages and opportunities that could improve learning processes (Rank, Millum, & Warren, 2011)
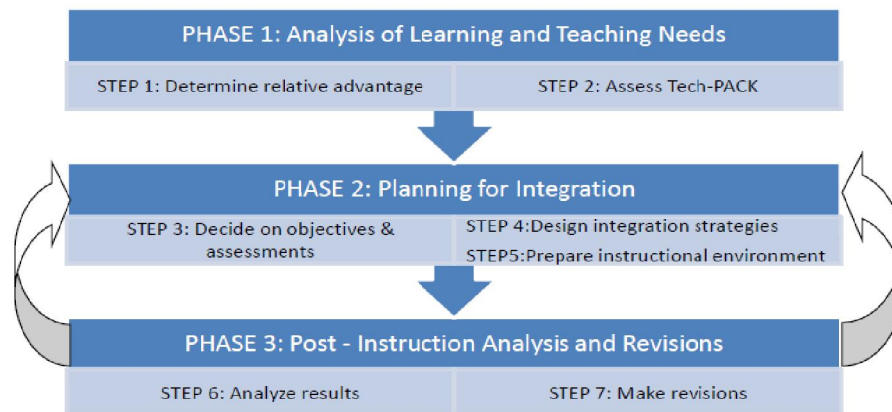
Note: Taken from Roblyer and Doering (2013), *Integrating Educational Technology into Teaching* (6th ed.),p. 53, Boston, MA. Pearson.

Figure 3.1: The Technology Integration Planning (TIP) Model Diagram

The fundamental factor impacting learning effectiveness is not the technological availability but the pedagogical design for ICT effective use (Mandell, Sorge, & Russell, 2002). Technology should be aligned with the curriculum and not vice versa (Earle, 2002). Thus, effective integration of ICT should concentrate on the design of the pedagogy in that the pedagogy should justify the way in which technology is employed. Effective ICT integration brings about potential learner's engagement in learning.

2.1   Related studies

These studies are discussed in this section to demonstrate the researcher's understanding of previous related research and to show where this study began and the gaps in current knowledge (Civelek, Toplu, and Uzun, 2021; Rababah, 2020; Ullah, Khan and Aamirs, 2017;

Alkhawaldeh & Menchaca, 2014; Rababah et al., 2012).

First, Civelek, Toplu, and Uzun's research aims to better understand Turkish EFL instructors' views toward online instruction (OI), how training influences those attitudes, and the challenges they face in delivering OI during the Covid-19 outbreak. Attendees included 70 English as a Second Language (EFL) educators (52 female, 18 male). This research relied on a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to gather data. An analysis of the data was performed using the statistical software SPSS 26. An independent sample t-test was then used to meet the study's goals by creating descriptive statistics for each item. In order to perform an interview data analysis, the participants' thoughts were recorded and repeating themes were identified. There are portions of relevant research in the literature that are not as useful as they seem in certain studies, according to Turkish EFL teachers who received online education during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Students at Jadara University in Jordan's English language program who are striving to finish online courses when school is closed were the focus of study conducted by Rababah (2020). To achieve the study's objective, it was chosen to use a convenience sample. We interviewed a group of twelve students about the challenges they faced when studying using ICT-based platforms. The interviews were conducted in small groups of three to four students each. A lack of effective training, a lack of accessibility, and instructors' teaching methods that were inconsistent with one another surfaced from students' comments.

Furthermore, Al-Shboul, Al-Saideh, and Al-Labadi (2017) explored the challenges that can prohibit students from making excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) in Jordanian higher education. A recent poll of Jordanian university students found that the overwhelming majority of respondents were in favor of classroom integration of information and communication technology (ICT).

A study by Ullah, Khan, and Aamirs (2017) found a link between students' perceptions of the Technology Acceptance Model and their academic achievement as undergraduates. There seems to be no substantial correlation between students' interest in computers, their usefulness to students, and their ease of access to online learning materials at the undergraduate level, according to the study's findings. According to several research, students may have a negative attitude toward online learning because of slow and limited internet access, as well as students' incapacity to grasp online learning.

Local study was conducted by Alkhawaldeh and Menchaca (2014), who used information and communication technology (ICT) to explore how students, instructors and administrators experience challenges when utilizing this technology (ICT). Because of this, Jordan's Ministry of Education was under a lot of pressure to provide extra resources and opportunities to help in the process of incorporating technology into the classroom.

For this study, researchers Rababah, Bani-Melhem, Jdaidawi, and Rabibah (2012) conducted semi-structured interviews with Jordanian EFL in-service teachers in order to identify the hurdles that keep them away from adopting information and communication technology (ICT) in their classes. Research shows that EFL instructors' use of ICT in the classroom is typically subpar due to a range of issues they deal with, as shown in this study. Roadblocks to success include, but are not limited to, the following: a lack of time, inadequate training, a lack of finances, a lack of trust, a lack of computer hardware and software, and a lack of expertise.

3   Methods

When conducting the present study in 2020, the researcher used focus group interviews, which is a qualitative research technique in which a group of individuals is selected and questioned about their ideas or perceptions on a certain issue, as part of his or her methodology (Creswell, 2018). The participants in the research were twenty second language (L2) instructors from a variety of nations who were asked to respond to a series of questions concerning the subject. The objectives of the study were conveyed to the participants, and they were assured that any information gathered would be utilized only for

academic research purposes alone. In order to analyze the data and keep students interested in online learning, the researcher used coding to make sense of the information gathered. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed exactly as they were spoken. While attentively listening to the recordings, the researcher articulates his objectives, and the team goes through the replies of the participants three times before transcribes them. All of the interviews took done in identical environments and settings in order to ensure that all of the participants were treated equally. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, the researcher paraphrased and repeated some of the replies. With their verbal and nonverbal features (i.e. body language and facial expressions), these audio-recorded, face-to-face interviews contributed to the accuracy and authenticity of the research.

4   Results

This section summarizes the research results in relation to the tool employed to address the study questions:

The first research question: How would an instructor overcome the obstacles inherent in online education?

The researcher conducted interviews with teachers to ascertain how they overcame hurdles. The researcher started by questioning about the ways in which the informants resolved their challenges. According to I.A, the solution/resolution is determined by the nature of the individual's obstacles in online teaching/learning. This may be achieved via a number of activities and the development of strong and healthy relationships with pupils.

Another teacher feels that students' anxieties will stifle their creativity and contribute to their uneasiness. According to I.B, providing them with online teaching and one-on-one assistance may help individuals overcome their concerns. Instructors may create online demonstrations of the learning management system's usage and access. Inviting them to a new eLearning webinar in which he or she will walk them through the process is a good place to start. This concludes the chat. Making students feel at ease

is critical to their comfort in an eLearning environment. I.C summarizes the responses in three points. Obstacles in social contexts include the following: Overcome Make the first contact prior to the start of the course. In an email message, introduce yourself and provide instructions on how to get started. She continued by emphasizing the importance of social interaction and online socializing. It is vital for youngsters to have positive role models who can demonstrate how to interact and learn in an online environment. Gilly Salmon's five-stage model is effective for improving online socializing for educational purposes.

According to I.D, there has always been a digital divide in access to technology resources and the Internet, and COVID-19 has worsened the situation for individuals who lack adequate access to these tools. To close the gap, it is critical to provide equal opportunities for all students, to facilitate content effectively, to be patient with students, to strengthen group work, to investigate and offer Internet-connected sites, and to conduct a prior analysis of students' digital competence and access to ICT resources.

Like a prospective instructor, one strategy for overcoming the obstacles associated with online learning/teaching is to educate students about the existing circumstances and teaching style, as I.E. Additionally, developing a shared knowledge with students may assist in the development of a bond between instructors and pupils. You should address with your pupils any barriers or concerns they may have while studying online, as well as any supporting strategies that may assist them. There is no such thing as a generic collection of duties, in my opinion, I.N stated.

According to I.F, the move from synchronous to asynchronous learning is a long-term trend. The primary impediment, however, is not so much the technology used in the training process as it is administrative challenges such as control, feedback, and so on. This disadvantage may be somewhat addressed with synchronous technology. I am a strong advocate for asynchronous (online) instruction and learning.

Students, in an ideal world, would be able to study at their own pace and choose their own time and location for learning (including the particular device). If online courses/lectures are presented simultaneously and without limitation, most likely mirroring what is often done in a face-to-face lecture, I believe that all of the disadvantages of both formats are combined. There is little to no social interaction, and there are few options for where and when to study, among other reasons. Thus, rethinking everything is, in my opinion, the key to establishing an online lecture or course. Migration of face-to-face courses to the online environment on a one-to-one basis

To conclusion, I.O states that there are a variety of hurdles to online learning and teaching. Among them is motivation, which is described as the drive to conquer a challenge. On the other hand, there are economic and psychological considerations to make.To close the gap, it is critical to provide equal opportunities for all students, to facilitate material effectively, to be patient with students, to enhance group work, to explore and offer Internet-connected sites, and to conduct a prior analysis of students' digital competence and access to ICT resources. Infrastructure availability, learner expectations and attitudes, capability for online learning, and socioeconomic changes all play a role in these concerns. As a result, developing an understanding of your students' concerns is vital!, I agree that online courses need far more effort than face-to-face classes. However, my experience has shown me that it all comes down to how you organize and convey your belongings. Additional information is available in the section below, I.K said.

The second research question: How can we maintain students' interest in online education?

This section discusses the results from the instrument that was used to address the second research question. In a focus group interview, the interviewees were questioned. Their replies were categorized as follows.
The first theme: Interactions and motivation.

While contact is critical to the educational process, I.E believes that the present online platforms are insufficient for organizing a fully interactive connection. Web seminar technology may be utilized in conjunction with Anders Norberg's suggested inverted method + collaborative learning as a palliative. It should be highlighted that this strategy throws a great deal of pressure on the educator and necessitates intense practice. This is the cost an educator must bear in today's atmosphere. I.F One of the challenges of online learning. The author claims we can get more students involved, though, by using a case study approach and a problem solving mindset. Approach based on simulations, collaborative threading or branching assessment technique and a collaborative project strategy focused on learning objectives.

To keep students involved in online learning, motivation is vital. As an e-tutor, you may motivate students by highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. Managing their time as a host is another critical element, but it all relies on how effectively they are encouraged to learn, I.C. remarked.

According to I.I., the teacher should give key learning materials such as handouts, slides, and urge learners to prepare an assignment on the subject being taught during the first session. Other attendees should be encouraged to offer questions about the presentation itself. She continues, "Listen to your pupils and encourage them."Contextualize learning and connect it to students' chosen modes of instruction and personal experiences, as I.M sees it. Moreover, warming up at the start of each session is beneficial, as is giving a space for students to address concerns.

The second theme: New curriculum and instructional methodologies.

It is often difficult to tell if pupils are engaged online. However, this is challenging in a face-to-face environment as well. According to I.N., just a portion of the needed learning occurs in a synchronous classroom or online video conference setting. Typically, a significant

amount of time is spent asynchronously or in peer conversation on activities, assignments, and reading and comprehending course material. What I'm saying is that instructors probably only see a tip of the iceberg in the classroom and have no idea how to evaluate students' online replies. For instance, when the instructor tells a joke, everyone is muted since they are meant to listen and not interfere. They will not activate microphones to laugh and so provide good feedback to the instructor.

According to I.J., you may certainly include quizzes and other forms of structured engagement into lectures. That may be preferable than nothing. I believe it is considerably preferable to take a more flipped approach. Require students to read texts and listen to lectures at home prior to meetings (be demanding; have them report on something from their preparations prior to the meeting as an example) and use valuable time together for discussions, follow-up on learning, problem solving, application, presenting and discussing student contributions, introducing the next section of the course, and so on.

I.E, I believe that it is critical to redesign our curriculum to align with the idea of online education. All course materials should be accessible without relying heavily on the internet. Materials and recorded lectures should be published on the learning platform so that students may study at their convenience and from any location. Additionally, using a variety of open communication channels (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, forums, etc.) increases engagement with online learning.The critical point is to redesign the course material by breaking it down into tasks (i.e. 4-6 tasks). This technique enables teachers to give their lessons while also administering exams.

The third theme: New tasks / groups

There are various possible ways. Teachers throughout the educational spectrum are increasingly adopting active pedagogies into their courses, and some are even doing research on the subject. Active approaches, which have now gained widespread recognition, were developed in this atmosphere. They are founded on the notion of requiring students to take an active part in their own learning and growth, as their name implies. I.A stated that while student engagement is critical to the learning process, the term "student engagement" encompasses more than simply participation in a proposed activity; it also refers to the fact that the proposed activity should benefit the students, as students learn when a context is created in which they can participate meaningfully and in-depth.

Keeping the engagement of students during distance teaching is a serious problem that is encountered when using e-Learning platforms. In this regard, T.L stated that I think that proposing some pedagogical tasks or teaching strategies can help to resolve this problem. For example, we can propose some pedagogical tasks that require a regular intervention of the learners. Furthermore, we can adopt some teaching methods like problem-based learning, collaborative learning, and learning by doing, etc. In addition, we can use some intervention rules that help the system or the teachers to intervene in order to assist the learners in the suitable times and moments.Create breakdown rooms/group and ask students to do online tasks in groups, meanwhile check how active they are. According to I.T,despite the fact that some behaviors are encouraged for both (such as demonstrating your interest in their learning process), I would argue that engagement is mostly dependent on whether they are studying 1:1 or in a group; live or programmed; and whether they are studying in person or online. This could be possible by making the classes into discussion tables where the student participates in a sharing of knowledge and thus be the protagonist of their own learning, I.Q said. I.R stated that is could be by getting students to use online applications and upload assignments to the institutional system, in a prudent period that is not so extensive. Also to design their own learning resources online in a kind of reverse classroom learning.While it is true that student engagement is a challenge, the interactive case-based approach helps; in I.S's opinion, smaller groups are simpler to manage

from the instructor's perspective and can be more effectively pushed to attain needed learning.

It is advisable to avoid becoming fatigued by zooming in and out. Students have disconnected as a result of screen fatigue caused by extended teaching periods; as a result, I. H. divides the lesson into short (20 minute) sessions, which are supported by a 5 minute timeout/break during the middle of each session. Introducing a quick quiz (using information from the previous session) at the start of the subsequent session stimulates re-engagement and checks students' recall of particular value goals. Similar gains may be gained by using the same method in a multimodal delivery environment where students can opt to learn online or on-campus. Additionally I can recommend to stick to these principles shown helpful in experiments: Try to maintain a positive mood. Track your progress. Imagine the end of the task and the good feeling of having completed the task. Don't let yourself be distracted (not even by thoughts of things you would like to do).

A technique made by I.C, I upload my presentation well on time so that the students are able to do some preparation. i ask a students to do the screen sharing of the presentation and thus student involvement is ensured. I make the session as interactive thus students feel they have opportunity to clear any doubts.

According to another instructor (I, E.), rules should be created from the beginning to ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them and the ramifications of certain behaviour. Interact as much as possible with the youngsters by encouraging them to answer questions or take part in dialogues as much as feasible. Allow students to complete assignments through video recording rather to the traditional written submission method. This may be done by building dynamic and engaging online learning resources that respond quickly to a student's enquiry and offer immediate feedback to the learner.

5   Conclusion and recommendations

In the year 2020, a researcher used focus group interviews as a component of his study methodology. An elicitation of opinions on a specific issue is accomplished via focus group interviews in qualitative research, which is conducted on a small group of individuals (Creswell, 2018). Twenty L2 language (second language) teachers from a variety of different countries participated in the study and answered questions regarding the issue. Participants were made aware of the study's objectives and were informed that any information they supplied would be used only for academic reasons if they agreed to participate. For the sake of data analysis and maintaining students' interest in online learning, the researcher used coding techniques. The interviews were filmed and then transcribed into the database exactly as they were spoken. The findings of this study are unique in that they provide a significant addition to the field of information and communication technology integration in EFL settings. The results of this qualitative research may be of use to policymakers and educators in assessing ICT and EFL activities, educational programs, resources, curriculum, and teaching methodologies in a variety of situations. In the future, it will be necessary to conduct a more in-depth investigation of the primary hurdles facing Jordanians.

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