

Challenges and Strategies Taken by English Language Educators in Tertiary Institutions during Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL)

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Abstract

The strike of COVID-19 pandemic has affected various sectors tremendously, including the education sector around the globe. This situation has forced the closure of most educational institutions, which include higher learning institutions. Since the Movement Control Order announcement, most teaching and learning processes in higher learning institutions were transferred online. The shift to online learning brings different challenges for teachers in higher learning institutions, including English teachers, regarding technological skills and assessment. In this study, the researchers adopted a multiple case study to explore the strategies of 34 English teachers from nine universities in Malaysia, Indonesia and Maldives to overcome the challenges during Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning. The data was collected through focused group interview sessions, individual open-ended responses via Google Forms and Whatsapp discussion threads. The recorded sessions were transcribed verbatim and analysed using NVIVO software to identify the common categories and themes. The findings showed that the teachers of English overcome problems concerning their technological skills by seeking help from their colleagues, attending courses, training and webinars and choosing suitable platforms for online learning, also conducting better online assessments. The faculty could also provide more webinars, online training, and courses to help teachers to perform better during online learning. This study is believed to shed some light on aspects that need to be considered while planning and executing a meaningful ESL online teaching and learning experience in higher learning institutions, particularly in developing countries.

Keywords: challenges, English language teachers, interventions, remote online teaching and learning, strategies, tertiary institutions

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Introduction

The pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has impacted several industries worldwide and temporarily shut down many educational sectors, including higher institutions. Higher education institutions face significant challenges in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on teaching, learning, research, student mobility, campus culture, and more (Loganathan et al., 2020). As a result, most higher instruction frameworks work through E-learning (Azzi-Huck & Shmis, 2020, as cited in Shahzad et al., 2021). This includes the National University of Malaysia (UKM), where online teaching and learning were conducted in Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL), as well as a temporary solution to allow students to continue their studies. ERTL represents an essential and stimulating moment for educators worldwide (Filipa, Marta, António & Luisa, 2021). This includes using comprehensive distance learning solutions for teaching or education, especially in teaching the English Language.

Considering this, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced universities to cancel in-person classes and send students back home. In Malaysia, implementing the Movement Control Order (MCO) in mid-March 2020 enabled a complete transition to online learning with unprecedented challenges. This forced colleges to offer courses through online portals and started embracing technologies such as Zoom, Microsoft platforms, Webex Blackboard, and digital video conferencing platforms such as Google Classroom (Larry, 2020).

Hence, due to the MCO, all the lessons and evaluations were carried out online for English teachers at the university level. This has not been the case since 2020. Due to the spread of COVID-19, universities have to close down to prevent further infections. A lockdown has been implemented where people are no longer permitted to freely go to public places to curb the contagious spread of the virus (Ferguson et al., 2020). As a result, teachers and students have had to quickly alter their teaching methods, regardless of whether they were experienced in and prepared for online education (Wu, 2021). It has been asserted that the only way to ensure education continuity during ERTL is through online learning (Daniel, 2020).

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, it could be seen that there is a gap in language teachers' readiness towards online learning mode. This, in turn, affected their teaching performance in the sense that the educators struggled to teach remotely due to the shift from face-to-face interaction to virtual learning (Macintyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). Thus far, there are limitations in elaborating on teaching English during ERTL as there are limited studies conducted in the Malaysian context which limits the writings to this study. The studies conducted were generally describing online learning with no specifications for the English Language. Adding to the point, there were limited studies conducted on the teaching of the English Language during ERTL, specifically in the Malaysian context of the tertiary level of education. Hence, this study will link the context of online learning during ERTL specifically to the strategies taken by English language teachers during ERTL. It needs a concerted effort to help and empower educators in planning and handling virtual learning (World Economic Forum, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to explore the strategies to overcome these challenges faced by the English teachers serving nine universities from three different countries in their online teaching and learning during the ERTL period. It is also believed that this study could shed some light on aspects that need to be considered while planning and executing a meaningful ESL online teaching and learning experience in higher learning institutions, particularly in developing countries. Accordingly, this study was designed to answer the following research question:

- How do English teachers in tertiary institutions overcome the challenges they face during ERTL?

This paper will briefly discuss past related studies on the challenges and strategies taken by educators in tertiary institutions, methods used in this particular study, the study findings, the discussion on the results and finally, the conclusion.

Literature Review

Challenges faced by educators in Tertiary Institutions

Online teaching and learning are the most suitable approach for educational institutions since students are mandated to study at home due to the pandemic (Mohammed et al., 2020). This situation has led to a lot of challenges faced by educators and students in developing countries where online learning is not a common practice (Berita Harian, 2020). Despite the government's rapid outreach campaigns, there are still some limitations in the online teaching and learning environment, such as broadband networking, regulatory systems support, educator trends, and obtaining materials online (Ugnich, Meskhi & Ponomareva, 2019; Sadeghi, 2019).

Virtual teaching and learning could not be effectively delivered if the teachers were not mentally and physically prepared to assess whether online education supports and facilitates teaching English during ERTL. Challenges facing English teachers include familiarising themselves with the appropriate equipment and infrastructure, such as computers, smartphones, and Internet connectivity, as well as good technical skills and knowledge, the ability to maximise the benefits of the environment, the ability to have educators available when needed, and the ability to receive feedback and respond quickly from students. Lack of computer, Internet, mobile network access, and ICT-trained teachers in developing countries are observed (O'Hagan, 2020). The uneven internet infrastructure between East and West Malaysia creates gaps in educators' access to and performance in online teaching. In this context, from the perspective of English teaching by teachers who teach in rural areas, the challenge in conducting online teaching is greater compared to English teachers who teach in urban areas.

How educators manage online learning through mentoring and distance learning especially in teaching the English Language is crucial. Some English teachers have never been involved in online teaching and learning (Merler, Pastore, Mu, Rossi & Sun, 2020). Hence, the online teaching and learning environment has resulted in some complications based on the teachers' feedback. English teachers are not prepared for the sudden shift to online-only teaching and learning, but they are trying to find strategies to adapt and meet the new challenges.

Measures taken by educators in Tertiary Institutions

In overcoming the challenges faced during ERTL, teachers in higher learning institutions including the teachers of English, took different measures to ensure that the online teaching and learning process continued. In overcoming the challenges they faced concerning their technological skills, studies showed that English teachers seek help from their colleagues with better technological skills. Winter, Costello, O'Brien and Hickey (2021), in their research, explained that experienced colleagues could be used as role models. Working with and observing them utilising different technologies would positively affect other teachers' attitudes, beliefs and confidence in using technology during online learning. This can also be explained by one of the sources of self-efficacy by Bandura (1998), namely vicarious experience. As teachers observe their

colleagues' successes and failures, these people will become role models for them to imitate (Bandura, 1998). Teachers who see their colleagues who have successfully carried out an online class may feel they can accomplish the same and positively increase their self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is defined as one's judgement on their ability to organise and perform necessary actions to achieve the required performance (Bandura, 1977). Thus, teacher self-efficacy refers to how well a teacher can affect and influence students' success (Corry & Stella, 2018). According to Hampton et al. (2020) and Horvitz, Beach, Anderson and Xia (2015), teachers with a high level of self-efficacy are resilient as they work with extraordinary effort and find ways to overcome challenges. Apart from asking for help from others, teachers also upgraded their technological skills and knowledge by attending online training, courses or webinars to acquire better technological skills. Lee and Bailey (2020) stressed that educators should consistently participate in professional development and training courses to increase their knowledge and skills using digital learning resources such as e-books and e-notes. Inadequate knowledge and skills of ICT on behalf of the educators would put the available resources to waste. At University Teknologi Mara (UITM) in Malaysia, English educators were provided with training through a series of courses to assist the educators in conducting their online teaching instructions successfully during ERTL (Othman, Kadar, Umar & Ahmad (2020). By acquiring effectual teaching practices and utilising various pedagogical tools and technologies such as chat, games, blogs, videos, quizzes and forums, teachers can gauge students' interest and encourage them to learn faster (Carrillo & Flores, 2020).

Furthermore, considering students' current learning situations, teachers also had to find suitable online and social learning platforms. In their study, Gao and Zhang (2020) mentioned that an educator gathered students' responses about their current learning situation to determine students' preferable online learning platforms and appropriate assessments during ERTL. This would eventually promote students' participation in online learning. In their study, Siah, Huang, Poon and Koh (2022) discovered that teachers increased students' participation and engagement during online learning by offering different communication and learning platforms.

Additionally, the teachers also needed to address challenges concerning conducting assessments during ERTL. Although Utting and Legeard (2020) disclosed that online assessment reduces operational time and makes the marking process easier since this can be done automatically using embedded tools, teachers still face some challenges due to internet connectivity. According to Nasri, Husnin, Mahmud and Halim (2020), another way of accommodating the needs of teachers and students with inadequate internet coverage and no proper devices is to conduct their lessons via WhatsApp and Telegram. The students could also watch the lesson recording, which is sent to them via WhatsApp or Telegram. They could also send their assignments via the same social media. This is consistent with the study conducted by Aroonsrimarakot, Laiphrakpam, Chathiphot, Saengsai and Prasri (2022), where they found out that students preferred recorded videos and audio to be uploaded and be available online so that they could watch them repeatedly as they need. This portrays that proper assignments, planned activities and tests can assist teachers in assessing their students and can also help students grow and improve (Das, 2022). Additionally, it is also indispensable for teachers to practice an interactive teaching approach (Das, 2022) as online presentations and the combination of various assessment methods were preferred by the students since some of them were struggling with problems especially in regards to internet connection (Guangul, Suhail, Khalit & Khidhir, 2020).

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach in which a multiple case study was conducted. This study involved nine public universities in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Maldives. A multiple case study was chosen as the researcher believes that this issue of this study is a contemporary phenomenon and needs further in-depth investigation within its real-life context (Creswell, 2014). Due to the pandemic, there was a restriction movement order globally. Hence, educators need to carry out their lessons online. Thus, they faced many challenges throughout the ERTL. They also employed many strategies or treatments to conduct online lessons more effectively. Hence, this study was carried out to explore the challenges faced and the interventions or strategies taken by the English teachers of these universities in teaching English courses during ERTL.

Participants

Due to the pandemic, there was a restriction movement order globally. Therefore, the researchers need to carry out this study via online interviews. Zoom was selected as the online platform as the researchers' university paid for the subscription fees and it has recording features. The semi-structured interviews were conducted once or twice for each university. Besides the interview, the researchers used a Whatsapp discussion thread and an open-ended questionnaire which was administered through Google Form for data triangulation. Abbreviations were used for Focus group interviews (FGI), and Online Responses (OER). The universities were chosen as the dean or the director of the university volunteered to participate in this study. Indonesia, Malaysia and Maldives were chosen because English is considered a second or foreign language in these countries. As these countries are also developing countries, many citizens face almost similar challenges particularly financial constraints which resulted in the insufficient number of devices to learn and teach online during ERTL, financial constraints in purchasing mobile data and internet accessibility, particularly in suburban and rural areas.

The participants were chosen via purposive sampling to ensure that rich data from selected participants could be obtained. They were chosen as they fulfilled characteristics that the researcher had determined and were in accordance with this study's research objectives, a) English teachers serving at a public university and conducted online learning during the time; b) their students are English as a Second language/ English as a Foreign Language learners, and c) willing to be interviewed. In total, 34 teachers of English from nine different universities in three countries volunteered to participate in this study. Pseudonyms (P1-P34) were given to all the participants to replace participants' names for privacy and confidentiality.

Research Procedures

The institution authorities were contacted via email to obtain their permission to conduct this study. The authorities of those institutions permitted us to contact the English teachers. The teachers who volunteered in this study were briefed about the study's objectives. The participants have given their consent to participate in this study and they have signed the consent letter. They could withdraw from the study at any time they wished. They agreed to be interviewed, participated in Whatsapp discussions and responded to the open-ended questionnaire via Google Forms. Each focus group interview took approximately 120 minutes. There was one Whatsapp group for each university. The participants posted some pictures of the workshop posters, relevant documents and answered questions that were not asked during the interviews in the Whatsapp groups

First, the researchers designed the semi-structured interview questions. The interview questions were based on the research questions. Dodds and Hess (2021) mentioned that there is not much difference between online and face-to-face interviews in qualitative research as long as the ethical procedures are fulfilled. The interview questions were validated by three experts. These experts possess a Ph.D. in TESL/TESOL and have more than 10 years of working experience in teaching English at tertiary institutions. The interview questions were amended based on the experts' comments. Then, letters were sent to all participating universities to obtain the gatekeeper's permission to conduct the research. The participants from each university were added to a Whatsapp group of that particular institution created by the researchers. Any necessary information regarding the research was sent to the Whatsapp groups. All participants were given a consent letter to seek their permission to be interviewed. Only two researchers took part in this interview session to ensure that the participants did not feel pressured by the presence of many researchers. The interview sessions were recorded and later transcribed. The participants were given the transcriptions for them for member checking to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected. The transcription was written the same words as were used originally or verbatim. In other words, the transcriptions consist of grammatical errors as there are no changes made to the transcriptions. Two weeks after the semi-structured interview sessions were conducted, each participant was asked to answer the open-ended questions through Google Forms. Three research instruments were employed in this study for triangulation purposes in order to ascertain data reliability.

Data Analysis for Qualitative Data

The process started by importing the data from all three research instruments into Nvivo 12. Multiple data sources are vital for triangulation (Yin, 2017). Nvivo 12 is a tool to analyze a rich and large amount of data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The data from the research instruments were analyzed using six steps of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). NVIVO 12 was used to find the codes and categories before conducting a thematic analysis. The researchers read the transcripts a few times to familiarize themselves with the data. Subsequently, the data were explored to find the keywords, and they were coded through a query in which all the keywords of the data were displayed. Thematic analysis was carried out to identify the common themes. The themes were later reviewed and defined. Next, the themes were named to produce a written report. The coding and themes were checked by the experts. Three experts checked the coding of the data. Cohen Kappa values above 0.8 were obtained.

Results

Overcoming the Challenges Concerning their Technological Skills

In overcoming the challenges concerning their technological skills, the participants took a few measures:

- a. Seeking help from colleagues who are better in technological skills
 - b. Upgrade their knowledge by watching YouTube and Tik-Tok
 - c. Upgrade their knowledge by attending online courses, webinars, training and courses
 - d. Finding suitable online learning/social media platforms
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- a. Seeking help from colleagues who are better in technological skills

During the first few weeks of ERTL, many teachers were not familiar with online teaching, especially the online platforms. Thus, they needed someone to teach them before they could practice the skills on their own. Most of the participants sought help from their colleagues and form small groups. The department also conducted a mentor-mentee program whereby the tech-savvy lecturers would guide their colleagues who need guidance. They sought help from their colleagues especially in teaching them about the features offered by the online platforms. They needed this knowledge in order for them to use and select the appropriate platform for their own learners. They learned how to handle assignments, post notes, tick students' attendance and log in. They also discussed with their friends their ways of using technology. They stated that they would remember what they have learned and practice them.

“We tend to have talking circles where those who are good at it like Bella, okay..(laugh) will teach us, in a very small group. Okay one by one how to handle assignments, how to post notes, how to..aa..aa tick students' attendance” (P3, FGI)

“Its just that sometimes those little things **I would ask Bella** or (laughs). Those are the little things that.. you know like.. ok Bella, could not **log in. How?** Those little things.”(P1, FGI)

“...and then **I would also umm discuss with my friends** like Puan Hazlina and also Puan Farhanah. In terms of you know **their own ways of using certain technology.**” (P7, FGI)

b. Watching videos on YouTube and TikTok

The participants also watched many videos on YouTube and TikTok to learn more about the new technology in teaching, designing games, and how teachers in other countries deliver their lessons using technology. P1 stated that TikTok is very resourceful and helpful. By watching videos on TikTok, the participant can learn new hacks for teaching and learning for students and teachers. The participant also learned how students plagiarised their assignments based on the students' acts in the videos.

“I would look on **YouTube** especially on how you know **teachers umm in other countries deliver their lessons using technologies and I learn a lot from them.**” (P7, FGI)

“But I also uhh.. I think **TikTok nowadays is very resourceful.** Yes. Because when you have Tik Tok, you can see the students act. You know? Those act that students can do is very useful. Because **I will know the students what they do in terms of assignments. If they plagiarize things and then you know they just copied things.** So, TikTok is **very useful.**” (P1, FGI)

“**Watching TikTok videos for new hacks of learning and teaching for students and teachers.**”(P1, OER)

c. Attending webinars, online tutorials, courses, training and workshops

The participants also attended webinars, online courses, online tutorials, training and workshops which were mostly provided and managed by the university. They stated that it was because they wanted to improve their capabilities to handle online learning and also their technology related skills.

“Sometimes I would **attend webinar**. By, usually **UiTM lecturers would share their skills**. Okay? For those who have skills and knowledge in terms of online games, and then they will share it and make it a webinar for us. I will usually attend those kinds webinar to **improve my capabilities to handle online learning**.” (P3, FGI)

“Firstly, **we do have seminars** when we were in the PKPB umm you know PKPB timeline here. A few months ago, we had **some seminars on how to use Microsoft Teams**, ... Umm these seminars were **managed by the faculty**. So, the faculty provided some seminars for us to join in order **to improve our umm technological related skills**.” (P17, FGI)

“I also attended online courses like MOOC and Coursera to gain relevant knowledge” (P1, OER)



Figure 1. Poster on a webinar conducted by one of the tertiary institutions (derived from Whatsapp thread of discussion)

The posters of the webinars below were shared by the participants through the Whatsapp application. These were some of the webinars they had attended in improving their technological skills especially in operating online learning platforms such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), UFUTURE platform, Google applications (Google Classroom and Google Meet) and Microsoft applications (Microsoft Teams and OneDrive). Some of these webinars were organized by their universities. They also attended public online courses like MOOC and Coursera.

d. Finding suitable online learning/social media platforms

One of the measures taken by the participants to overcome the problems they encountered during online learning was also trying to find suitable online learning platforms. They distributed questionnaires and conducted surveys with the students. They also shared the platforms used by them and the students for synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

The participants provide their students with a set of questionnaires asking for the online learning platforms and social media platforms that the students prefer. It was carried out so that they could understand their students better. P2 gave a few options to the students by asking them what their preferences are and coming out with the best plan to help the students while P3 stated that she conducted her classes using the platforms that the students chose. P15 added in the open-ended responses that she chose platforms that are available and accessible for the students. This statement is derived from the following responses:

“My first class itself... **I provide them with a questionnaire...** In my questionnaire also I asked about their prefer..aa..platform..their, **platform that they prefer to use**, whether Google Meeting, Zoom or Microsoft Teams. I'll ask them and most of them answered Google of course. And then I also **asked about the social media platforms that they prefer**. Okay, I prepared...I prepare all those questionnaires okay, with that kind of questions, for me **to understand or to know my students better...** Then, based on the responses, then I do... **did a bit**” (P15, OER)

If the students were still unable to do presentations due to problems with the internet and platform, the teachers would allow them to pre-record, but that was going to be the last resort. The student could watch the teaching recording using the recording and send their presentations via Whatsapp and Telegram

“If the students have problems with their internet and platform, I will use Whatsapp and Telegram to send my teaching recording. I also asked them to prerecord and upload their presentations on YouTube and share their link with me ” (P30).

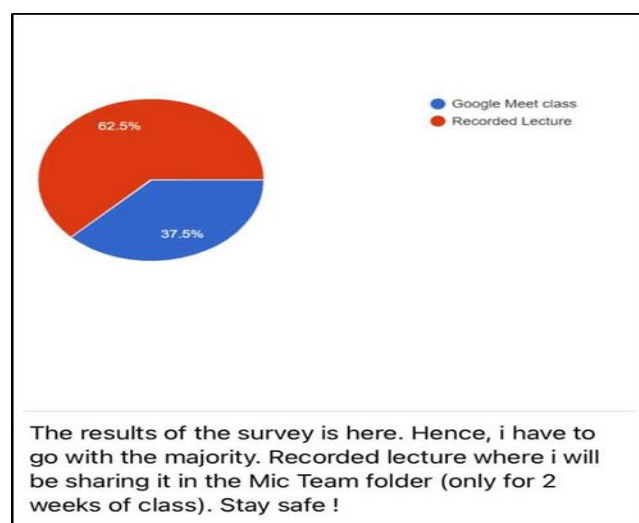


Figure 2. Students' results from the questionnaire (derived from Whatsapp thread of discussion)

Overcoming the Challenges Concerning Students' Assessments

The participants also stated that they were having difficulties marking all the assessments online. Online marking was time-consuming and even made their hands sore as they were using the mouse to mark. A participant had to buy two tablets and another participant had to print out the hard copy of the assessment as she believed the marking process was smoother offline than online. Giving formative questions using online games such as Quizizz and Kahoot also enabled them to reduce their workload and the students could get prompt responses after attempting the questions. This could enhance the students' comprehension of the given topic and improve their retention power.

“My arm became sore you know in terms of using the mouse to like umm mark and grade your student's assessments. So, ahh last semester and including this semester, I bought two, I bought two joint tablets.” (P7, FGI)

“Umm you know when we have to mark online kay that would be the as for... for myself a bit difficult kay because **I don't really fancy online marking** kay. Umm another one is that, it will take some time ay and ahh what you know like for most of the lectures we have to teach more than you know four classes, let's say five classes and it will take some times okay to finish marking all the assessment. **you have to print it out to make it your hardcopy but then for the marking that it will become smooth compared to the online.**” Alright and then when we talk about marking-online marking and online games like Quizizz and Wordwall... **reduce my workload and students get prompt responses after attempting the questions. They enjoyed and improve their understanding too** (P18, FGI)

Based on the analysis, in overcoming the challenges concerning their technological skills, the participants in this study took a few measures such as seeking help from colleagues who are better in technological skills, upgrade their knowledge by watching YouTube and Tik-Tok, boosting their knowledge by attending online courses, webinars, training and courses and also finding suitable online learning/social media platforms. In addition, in overcoming the challenges concerning students' assessments, the participants printed out students' written assignments and marked them offline, bought new tablets, and prepared students' assessments through online games.

Discussion

In this study, the researchers intended to explore the strategies or interventions employed by English teachers of the institutions to address the challenges they faced during ERTL. As highlighted in the study, the findings indicate that English teachers overcome problems concerning their technological skills by seeking help from their colleagues, upgrading their knowledge by watching videos and attending courses, training and webinars, choosing suitable platforms for online learning, and conducting better online assessments.

The findings showed that the participants needed help from their colleagues whom they considered technology experts, and one participant was helping her friends with technology. This is related to one of the sources of teachers' self-efficacy, vicarious experience. When the participants in this study observed their colleagues' successes, they became role models to imitate (Bandura, 1998). This is also in tandem with Winter et al. (2021) as they mentioned that

experienced colleagues are useful as models and by working with them closely, teachers' would have more positive attitudes, beliefs and confidence in utilising technology during ERTL.

Furthermore, the participants also watched videos online, such as Youtube and TikTok. They attended some of the webinars to improve their technological skills especially in operating online learning platforms such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), UFUTURE platform, Google applications (Google Classroom and Google Meet) and Microsoft applications (Microsoft Teams and OneDrive). Some of these webinars were organised by their universities. They also attended public online courses like MOOC and Coursera. The findings disclosed that the teachers have high self-efficacy despite their challenges during ERTL. Self-efficacy is defined as one's judgement on their ability to organise and perform necessary actions to achieve the required performance (Bandura, 1977). The participants portrayed this quality by being resilient in finding ways to ensure they were better prepared to conduct the online learning instruction each time. This is consonant with Hampton et al. (2020) and Horvitz et al. (2015), as they found out that teachers with high self-efficacy are resilient as they work with extraordinary effort and find ways to overcome challenges. By attending the webinars and courses, the participants showed they knew the importance of acquiring effective online teaching practices. As Carrillo and Flores (2020) mentioned, teachers who acquire teaching practices and utilise various pedagogical tools and technologies such as chat, games, blogs, videos, quizzes and forums, teachers can gauge students' interest and encourage them to learn faster.

One of the measures the participants took to overcome the problems they encountered during online learning was also trying to find suitable online learning platforms. They distributed questionnaires and conducted surveys with the students. They also shared the platforms used by them and the students for synchronous and asynchronous sessions. The findings were consistent with Gao and Zhang (2020) as one of the participants in the study also gathered students' responses about their current learning situation to determine students' preferable online learning platforms and appropriate assessments during ERTL. The findings also showed that students preferred recorded lectures instead of synchronous sessions. Since some students were struggling with internet issues, most students preferred online presentations and the combination of various assessment methods (Guangul et al., 2020). Aroonsrimarakot et al. (2022) also confirmed this as they found out that students preferred recorded videos and audio to be uploaded and available online so that they could watch them repeatedly.

Utting and Legeard (2020) stated that online assessment reduces operational time and makes the marking process easier since this can be done automatically using embedded tools. In this study, the online assessments used are Quizizz, WordWall, and Google Forms. However, the findings in this study show the opposite, as the participants found online marking troublesome because the lecturers are not well trained in marking the students' answers in soft copy. Moreover, the participants also allowed their students to send their recorded presentations through WhatsApp and Telegram. Correspondingly, Nasri et al. (2020) also asserted that another way of accommodating the needs of students with inadequate internet coverage and no proper devices is to conduct their lessons via WhatsApp and Telegram. Students could also send their assignments via the same social media.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation for which the participants in this study had never prepared before. Although online learning is quite common among them, fully online learning is

a novel experience. Based on the findings, the participants in this study faced two major challenges: technological skills and conducting assessments. In this study, the researchers also explored the strategies or interventions employed by English teachers of the institutions to address these challenges. The findings showed that English teachers overcome problems concerning their technological skills by seeking help from their colleagues, upgrading their knowledge by watching videos and attending courses, training and webinars, choosing suitable platforms for online learning, and conducting better online assessments. This study is believed to shed some light on aspects that need to be considered while planning and executing meaningful ESL online teaching and learning experience in higher learning institutions, especially during Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning. This includes English teachers, tertiary institutions and also the Ministry of Education. Through the findings, the English teachers could discover other strategies used by other English teachers in different institutions in coping with the current learning situation. Additionally, the administrators in tertiary institutions could identify the possible challenges faced by their respective English teachers and provide the assistance and support needed to carry out the process of teaching and learning successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic. As for the Ministry of Education, appropriate measures could be taken to overcome the challenges the teachers and students face by providing a stable network connection with long-term sustainability. Workshops and training should be provided to facilitate the teachers to update their knowledge from time to time. Financial assistance or financial loan should be given to educators to help them purchase more devices.

Limitations

This study was embarked on to explore the challenges faced and the interventions or strategies taken by the English teachers of these universities in teaching English courses during ERTL. This study was conducted in three countries namely Malaysia, Indonesia and Maldives involving 34 teachers of English. Although the approach employed in this study is suitable for describing, comparing, evaluating and understanding different aspects of a research problem (Yin 2017), the results of this study could not be generalized to the larger population. The sample could not represent all the English teachers teaching at tertiary institutions.

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