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The Impact of The Weaknesses of The Online Classroom in English Language Learning on University Students

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Abstract: The shift to online education, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly impacted higher education, particularly in English language learning. This study explores the weaknesses of online classrooms, including technological limitations and pedagogical challenges, and their effect on students' development of core English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The study uses a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing a questionnaire and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess the relationships between technological deficiencies, pedagogical gaps, and learning outcomes. Findings reveal that issues like poor internet connectivity, lack of interactive feedback, and limited engagement have a negative impact on language proficiency. The study recommends a hybrid teaching model, improved technical infrastructure, and targeted teacher training to address these challenges. These insights are critical for enhancing language instruction in online environments.

Keywords: Online classroom, English language learning, e-learning challenges, university students, pedagogical weaknesses, digital education, language acquisition.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, digital technologies have increasingly become integral to educational delivery. With the advent of high-speed internet, cloud computing, and interactive platforms, online education has grown from an auxiliary tool to a central mode of instruction in many universities worldwide. This transition became abrupt and non-negotiable during the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated the full-scale implementation of remote learning as a contingency response. Despite its widespread adoption, the online learning model—especially in contexts involving language acquisition—has faced significant scrutiny regarding its pedagogical and technological efficacy [1], [2], [3].

Among the most affected disciplines by this sudden transition is **English Language Learning (ELL)**. English, being both a global lingua franca and a core academic requirement in non-English-speaking regions, demands a learning process rich in interaction, real-time feedback, and multisensory engagement [4]. The nature of language acquisition, as explained by Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, is fundamentally social, immersive, and dynamic. In contrast, most online learning environments have been criticized for being static, decontextualized, and overly reliant on passive content delivery (e.g., recorded lectures, textual readings).

Moreover, the situation is more complex in developing countries or technologically under-resourced institutions, where students often face poor internet infrastructure, limited access to quality devices, and inadequate technical support. As a result, learners

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report significant challenges in engaging with online classes, participating in collaborative tasks, and receiving adequate feedback—all of which are crucial for mastering the English language [5], [6].

This study seeks to explore the intersection between **the structural weaknesses of the online classroom** and **the quality of English language learning** among university students. It investigates how deficiencies in online instructional design, digital infrastructure, pedagogical interaction, and learner engagement negatively impact students' ability to develop core English skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking [7].

Problem Statement

To what extent do the weaknesses of the online classroom hinder English language learning outcomes among university students?

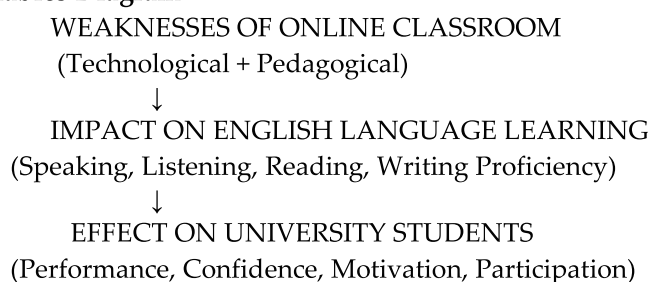
Study Hypotheses

H1: Technological and pedagogical weaknesses in online classrooms negatively affect students' English language proficiency.

H2: University students learning English online face greater challenges in developing key language skills compared to those in face-to-face environments [8].

2. Materials and Methods

Study Variables Diagram



Previous Studies

1. **Dhawan:** Identified a lack of digital literacy and training among educators as key factors weakening online pedagogy.
2. **Bao:** Highlighted diminished student engagement and poor time management in online learning environments.
3. **Almshouses et al:** Found that students studying English online reported lower retention and comprehension levels compared to in-person learners.

Importance of the Study

This study is critical as it highlights the pedagogical gaps in online learning, especially in a context where English is a second or foreign language. Understanding these weaknesses provides a foundation for restructuring online platforms to better support language learning.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the key technological and instructional shortcomings of online classrooms.
2. To assess the effects of these weaknesses on students' acquisition of English.
3. To propose recommendations for improving virtual language learning environments.

3. Results and Discussion

Section One: The Weaknesses of the Online Classroom

1.1 Introduction


The online classroom emerged as a technological response to contemporary educational challenges, notably during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic [9], [10]. However, this rapid adoption exposed critical limitations in its structure and

implementation—especially when evaluated against the pedagogical demands of language learning [11]. English, as a communicative skill, is highly dependent on dynamic, interactive, and feedback-rich learning environments. In contrast, many online classrooms are characterized by **technological instability**, **pedagogical unpreparedness**, and **limited interactivity**, all of which collectively hinder the quality of instruction and learning outcomes [12], [13].

1.2 Technological Weaknesses

1.2.1 Internet Infrastructure and Accessibility

A core limitation of the online classroom is its reliance on stable internet connectivity. In developing countries, such as Iraq, internet quality is inconsistent and often unreliable, especially in rural or economically marginalized areas. This digital divide has widened educational inequalities among students [14].

 **Example:** Students often experience delayed audio, screen freezing, or complete disconnection during live sessions, leading to loss of instruction, disengagement, and frustration.


Key issues:

- Interrupted class sessions
- Loss of real-time teacher-student communication
- Increased dropout from sessions

1.2.2 Limited Digital Tools and Platform Instability

While platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams became central to online education, they were not originally designed for language immersion. Many of these tools lack:

- Integrated pronunciation tools
- Interactive speaking simulations
- Multilingual support

 **Example:** Zoom's "mute all" setting restricts oral interaction, which is vital in English conversation practice.


1.2.3 Lack of Technological Support

Students and instructors frequently report difficulty in navigating platforms, troubleshooting problems, or using advanced features like breakout rooms or whiteboards [15], [16]. The absence of IT support increases anxiety and limits engagement, particularly during live language activities.

1.3 Pedagogical Weaknesses

1.3.1 One-Way Teaching and Low Interactivity

Many online lessons replicate lecture-based formats with minimal student interaction. Language education, however, thrives on student-centered activities such as role-play, peer correction, and group discussion. The absence of these limits student talk time and active learning.

 **Example:** A survey by Almahasees et al found that over 70% of students in online English classes participated less than twice per session.

1.3.2 Insufficient Feedback and Delayed Responses

Immediate correction is essential in language acquisition. Online classrooms often delay or minimize feedback, especially in asynchronous formats. Instructors are unable to observe facial expressions, hear mispronunciations, or monitor engagement levels as easily as in physical classrooms [17].

1.3.3 Poor Instructional Design

Many educators were not trained to deliver language instruction online and simply transferred physical classroom materials to the digital environment without adaptation. (Table 1) The lack of:

- Gamified exercises
- Interactive grammar tools

- Real-time quizzes
- compromises the effectiveness of instruction.

1.4 Institutional and Environmental Factors

1.4.1 Lack of Institutional Readiness

Institutions in developing contexts were largely unprepared for digital transformation. This unpreparedness manifested as:

- Inadequate learning management systems (LMS)
- Limited faculty training
- Absence of technical help desks

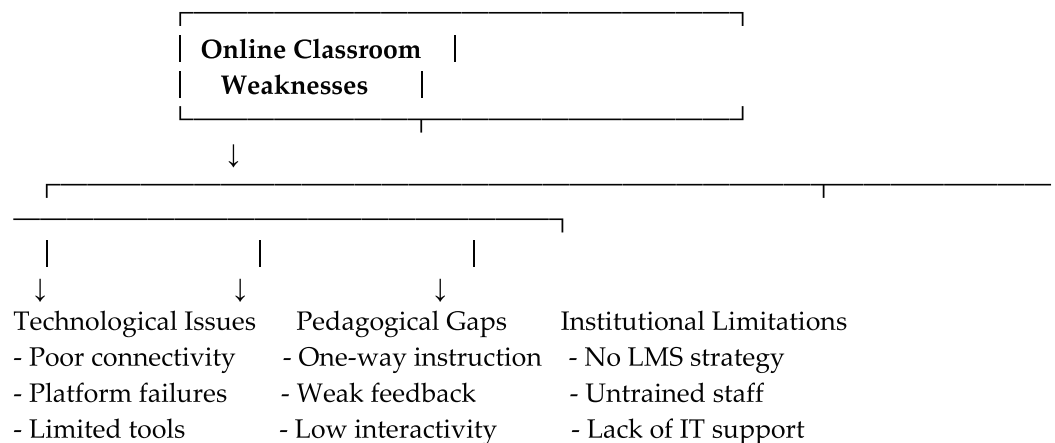
These limitations left both instructors and students unsupported.

1.4.2 Student Environment and Motivation

Unlike physical classrooms, students attending online classes may do so from noisy, distracting, or unstable environments. Coupled with low motivation, screen fatigue, and absence of peer presence, this reduces cognitive focus and learning quality. Figure 1 illustrates the interplay between technological issues, pedagogical gaps, and institutional limitations in online classrooms.

1.5 Illustrative Diagram

Figure 1. Components of Online Classroom Weaknesses



1.6 Summary of Key Points

Table 1. Categories of Weaknesses Affecting Language Learning in Online Education

Weakness Type	Description	Impact on Language Learning
Technological	Unstable internet, poor access, platform instability	Disrupts listening, speaking, and engagement
Pedagogical	Low interactivity, delayed feedback, rigid lesson plans	Hinders fluency, motivation, pronunciation
Institutional	Lack of policies, untrained instructors, missing support systems	Reduces overall system efficiency
Environmental	Noisy home settings, distractions, screen fatigue	Weakens attention span and retention

As shown in Table 1, technological weaknesses such as unstable internet and poor platform support significantly affect student engagement and language learning outcomes.

Conclusion of Chapter One

This chapter identified the multidimensional weaknesses of online classrooms, especially in the context of English language learning at the university level. Technological, pedagogical, and institutional factors interact to create barriers that

diminish the effectiveness of language acquisition. These deficiencies are particularly detrimental in environments where English is not a native language and learners rely heavily on structured, immersive, and interactive classroom settings.

Section Two: English Language Learning among University Students in Online Environments

2.1 Introduction to English Language Learning in the Digital Age

With the proliferation of online education, the teaching and acquisition of English as a second language have undergone a significant transformation. University students today are expected to achieve competence in English to access academic resources, communicate globally, and engage in professional environments. However, online learning platforms often struggle to effectively replicate the interactivity, immersion, and contextual usage required for deep language acquisition.

The virtual environment, while offering flexibility and accessibility, often lacks the authentic linguistic engagement that traditional classrooms provide, especially in speaking and listening skills. The present chapter delves into the **pedagogical, psychological, and practical dimensions** of English language learning in online classrooms, focusing on how these dynamics affect students' outcomes.

2.2 Key Components of English Language Learning

English language learning comprises four essential skills:

- **Listening**
- **Speaking**
- **Reading**
- **Writing**

These are supported by grammatical knowledge, vocabulary development, and pronunciation. In an online setting, each of these components faces specific challenges:

Table 2 illustrates the common challenges faced by students in online English language learning and their associated consequences, highlighting the significant impact on listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Table 2. Common Online Challenges in English Language Learning and Their Consequences

Skill	Common Online Challenges	Consequences
Listening	Low audio quality, distractions at home	Poor comprehension and delayed responses
Speaking	Lack of real-time feedback, anxiety in video calls	Inhibited fluency and confidence
Reading	Screen fatigue, lack of contextual cues	Skimming without comprehension
Writing	Plagiarism, lack of practice feedback	Grammar and syntax errors

2.3 Psychological and Cognitive Factors Affecting Online Language Learning

2.3.1 Student Motivation and Engagement

Motivation is a key driver in second language acquisition. In an online setting, many students struggle with self-discipline and consistency. Lack of face-to-face interaction with peers and teachers reduces **extrinsic motivation** and accountability.

2.3.2 Cognitive Load and Attention

Learning English involves processing new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and phonetic patterns. The online environment may increase **cognitive overload** due to the need to navigate multiple platforms, manage technical issues, and remain attentive without in-person engagement.

2.3.3 Language Anxiety in Virtual Settings

Students often experience "foreign language anxiety", which may be heightened in online classrooms due to the absence of immediate support or due to the stress of being recorded or seen on camera.

2.4 Institutional and Technological Support for English Learning

Many universities lack tailored digital tools for language instruction. Essential supports include:

1. **Interactive speaking tools** (AI tutors, real-time oral feedback systems)
2. **Asynchronous content** (pre-recorded lessons with captions, graded readers)
3. **Collaborative learning environments** (forums, peer review platforms)

In many cases, however, institutional investments in these tools are insufficient, leading to fragmented or ineffective learning experiences.

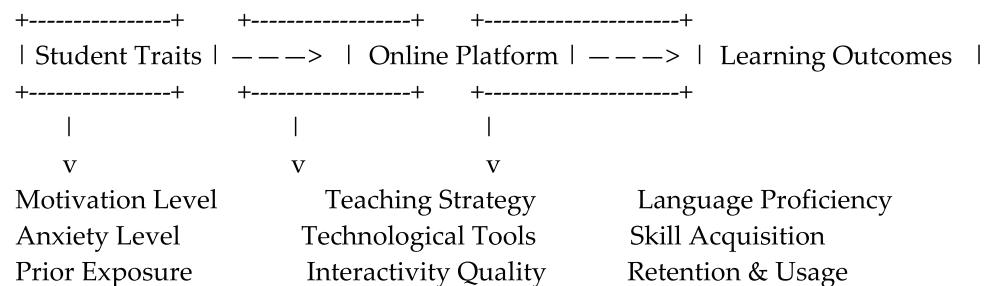
2.5 Pedagogical Strategies for Online English Teaching

Some effective pedagogical strategies include:

1. **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**: where learners use language to accomplish meaningful tasks (Ellis, 2003).
2. **Blended Learning**: combining asynchronous video lessons with live practice sessions.
3. **Flipped Classrooms**: students watch lectures on their own time and use synchronous sessions for speaking or discussion.

However, without proper training, instructors may default to lecture-heavy sessions that do not promote interactive learning.

2.6 Illustrative Diagram: Cognitive and Pedagogical Dynamics of Online English Learning



2.7 Empirical Evidence and Case Studies

1. **Case Study – Saudi Arabia**: Students reported that online English classes led to reduced speaking fluency due to limited opportunities for real-time dialogue.
2. **Case Study – Iraq**: A qualitative study showed that many students rely heavily on translation apps instead of building vocabulary organically, indicating a shift toward passive learning.
3. **Global Trends**: A UNESCO report notes that less than 25% of students in low- and middle-income countries had access to reliable online language labs or tutors.

2.8 Conclusion of Chapter Two

English language learning in online environments poses unique challenges that impact student performance, especially in speaking and listening skills. These challenges are rooted in psychological, technological, and pedagogical gaps. Without appropriate interventions—such as interactive tools, trained instructors, and motivational support—students are unlikely to attain the desired proficiency levels. Addressing these issues is critical for higher education institutions seeking to maintain academic standards and support student success in a globalized world.

The Third Section: Statistical Analysis Of The Questionnaire (The Impact Of The Weaknesses Of The Online Classroom In English Language Learning On University Students

1. Questionnaire (Survey Instrument)

This questionnaire is designed for university students who are learning English through online platforms. It is structured around the two main variables:

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
2. Age: __
3. Year of Study: __
4. Faculty: __
5. Level of English Proficiency: ☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced
6. Internet Access Quality: ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

Section B: Weaknesses of the Online Classroom (Independent Variable)

(Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Item	Statement
B1	I frequently experience internet connectivity issues during online English classes.
B2	The online platform (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet) is difficult to use or unstable.
B3	The online classes lack interaction between students and teachers.
B4	The teaching methods used online are less effective than in face-to-face classes.
B5	I do not receive timely feedback on my English learning progress.
B6	Online learning materials are insufficient or poorly organized.
B7	I find it difficult to stay focused during online English lessons.

Section C: Impact on English Language Learning (Dependent Variable)

(Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Item	Statement
C1	My speaking skills have improved through online classes. (<i>Reversed Item</i>)
C2	I struggle to improve my pronunciation through online learning.
C3	Online classes make it difficult for me to understand spoken English.
C4	I do not practice writing enough in the online environment.
C5	My reading comprehension has decreased due to reduced class interaction.
C6	I feel less confident using English after online instruction.
C7	My overall performance in English has declined since online learning began.

Section D: Open-Ended Questions

1. What do you think are the biggest weaknesses of online English classes?
2. What improvements would you suggest for online language learning platforms?

2. Data Analysis Model (AMOS / Smart PLS)

You can use **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** to test your hypotheses. Here's how your model would look:

Model Structure:

Independent Variable (IV):

Weaknesses of the Online Classroom

→ Measured by items B1–B7

Dependent Variable (DV):

English Language Learning Challenges

→ Measured by items C1–C7

Hypotheses to Test:

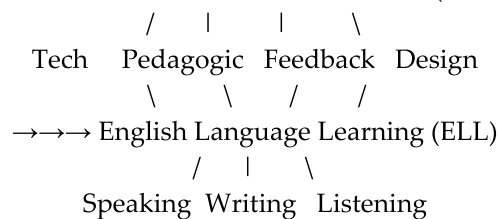
1. **H1:** Weaknesses of the online classroom significantly affect English language learning performance.
2. **H2:** Technological issues (sub-factor of IV) negatively correlate with speaking and listening skills (sub-factors of DV).

Statistical Tests to Perform:

Test	Purpose
Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)	To check internal consistency of each construct (IV & DV).
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)	To group questionnaire items into meaningful factors.
Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)	To validate the factor structure (for AMOS).
Path Analysis (SEM)	To test the direct and indirect effects between variables.
Correlation Analysis (Pearson)	To assess the relationship between sub-components.

AMOS / Smart PLS Path Diagram (Simplified)

Weaknesses of the Online Classroom (WOC)

**4. Conclusion**

1. **Technological and Pedagogical Deficiencies:** The study confirms that significant technological challenges—such as poor internet connectivity, lack of interactive tools, and unstable platforms—adversely affect students' ability to acquire and apply English language skills effectively.
2. **Negative Impact on Language Proficiency:** The absence of real-time feedback, low student-teacher interaction, and limited engagement opportunities have led to a decline in students' motivation, fluency, and overall performance in English, especially in speaking and listening skills.
3. **Psychological and Cognitive Strain:** Students experience digital fatigue, low motivation, and heightened language anxiety in virtual environments. These factors contribute to reduced cognitive focus and lower retention of language input.
4. **Unprepared Institutional Infrastructure:** Universities, especially in developing contexts, were unprepared for the sudden shift to online education. Lack of digital pedagogy training and weak learning management systems (LMS) further weakened instructional delivery.
5. **Gap Between Instructional Design and Language Learning Needs:** Most online teaching models are not tailored for communicative language acquisition. The use of lecture-based formats without interactivity hampers the immersive nature required for effective English language learning.

Recommendations

1. **Adopt a Hybrid Instructional Model:** Universities should implement a blended learning approach that combines the flexibility of online education with the effectiveness of face-to-face interaction, particularly for language courses.
2. **Invest in Infrastructure and Platform Upgrades:** Academic institutions must improve internet accessibility, invest in stable platforms with built-in language learning features (e.g., pronunciation tools, speech recognition), and provide technical support to both students and instructors.
3. **Train Faculty in Digital Pedagogy:** Teachers should receive comprehensive training in virtual language instruction methodologies, such as Task-Based Learning and Flipped Classrooms, to promote interactivity and engagement.
4. **Enhance Feedback Mechanisms:** Online platforms should be enhanced with tools for real-time formative feedback, peer assessment, and teacher monitoring to replicate in-class support.
5. **Promote Student Motivation and Psychological Support:** Institutions should offer counseling and motivational programs to address online learning anxiety and to maintain student morale.
6. **Develop Custom Content for Language Learning:** Universities should collaborate with linguists and instructional designers to create interactive, gamified, and culturally relevant English language content tailored for online delivery.
7. **Policy Formulation and Strategic Planning:** Policymakers in higher education must develop long-term strategies for e-learning sustainability that prioritize language learning quality and digital equity.

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