

**Prospects for Online EFL Instruction for
Sudanese Tertiary and Secondary Levels**

Prepared by



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Abstract

The educational system from elementary to tertiary level has been tremendously disturbed during the lockdown period of the novel coronavirus disease not only in Sudan but also across the whole globe. Educationalists have been wondering whether the pandemic will change education forever to switch from in-class learning to virtual instruction. This study is a visualization to predict the image of English language teaching amid and after the pandemic and to forecast the roles that the Sudanese EFL course-designers and teachers can play in the online instruction modes Also, how the new trends in teaching English that rely entirely on the web and social media tools such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Messenger, etc , and be adopted for the Sudanese basic education to tertiary level and the strategies for developing and implementing materials for virtual EFL instruction to Sudanese students. The paper also aims to find out what strategies teachers need to prep themselves to teach their students effectively. The paper employs interviews to study the perceptions of teachers on online teaching and evaluation strategies. The interview questions involved the required essentialities of online teaching and learning in education amid the COVID-19 pandemic and how EFL course designers can effectively transform language learning materials into online instruction. The results showed that it is extremely critical that both teachers and course designers respond to these urgent curricular needs of teaching English via the Internet as well as the significance to train the English language teachers for this purpose.

Keywords: Online and virtual EFL Instruction, Instagram and WhatsApp messenger social media tools, COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

In-class teaching modes have faced serious challenges of persistence amid the novel coronavirus disease. Accordingly, the question whether English language teaching as well as the other subjects, will continue to be in classes or online to help students to learn at home have been intensively investigated. Bakia et al (2012) defined the term “online learning” to refer to a wide range of programs that use the Internet to provide instructional materials and facilitate interactions between teachers and students. Is it expected that online learning might be adopted fully online for the Sudanese basic and tertiary levels, with all instruction taking place through the Internet, or will the online instruction be combined with face-to-face instruction as perceived by Horn and Staker (2010)? The benefits of language online learning using multimedia have been investigated by Maria (2015) to find out that this teaching mode enhances the students’ ability regarding their conversational skills. Also, Ajjan (2008) advocated that learning online encourages students to

engage in collaborative and creative learning. The aim of this study is to open doors for online EFL teaching approaches to prepare the Sudanese teachers and students to engage in online instruction. The study will also suggest online EFL course-designing strategies that language course designers and teachers might implement to teach English language online. The existing language-teaching materials available on the web and social media tools comprise a set of YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook files that combine videos, sounds and/or texts to help students learn and practice the language. How these materials can be adapted to match the needs of the Sudanese EFL learners at the basic and tertiary levels is a critical objective of this study. Additionally, what these innovated online teaching modes might require in terms of the education and training equipment by the Sudanese Ministry of Education is another important area to consider.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to help the Sudanese EFL course-designers and teachers to provide appropriate online EFL materials and instruction to the Sudanese EFL students at the basic and tertiary levels.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the severe effects Covid-19 pandemic to force education to move from in-class to online instruction, and in order to respond to concerns of providing accurate online instruction, serious and effective steps have to be taken through research on: How the Sudanese EFL course-designers can provide appropriate online EFL materials for teachers at the basic and tertiary levels, what technology and online teaching requirements are critical for EFL teachers to adequately teach English to their students? Additionally, what education and training equipment should the Sudanese Ministry of Education make available to ensure accurate online instruction. And finally, how can students be counseled to study fully or partially online.

Methodology of the Study

This study implements qualitative interviews as a research method to gain the EFL teachers' opinions on the prospects of online EFL instruction for Sudanese basic and tertiary levels. As for the study sample, all the selected EFL teachers for the interview teach English in the basic and tertiary levels in Khartoum State. Their teaching experience vary and the duration of their experience was counted from the year they were awarded their degrees. These EFL teachers have been carefully selected on the basis of their use and understanding of the existing online EFL materials. They have actually been using the existing online EFL materials to expand the English curriculum for the basic and tertiary levels. Four of them had Masters' degree in English or Linguistics while the rest were B. A. holders in ELT or English language. As for the levels they were teaching, seven of them teach English to secondary school students while three of them teach in the basic levels. Concerning their gender, there were seven male teachers while the rest were females.

The interview questions elicited the EFL teachers' opinion on the challenges they think might face online instruction for basic and tertiary levels and the effects that virtual instruction might have on the EFL students. Of considerable importance too, are the course designers' roles as well as the classroom teachers' in the online instruction modes. The interview also elicited the teachers' opinion on whether the online materials available through the social media are suitable for online

teaching and learning and whether these materials can be adopted for teaching the Sudanese students in basic and tertiary levels, and what media (audio, video or textual) the existing EFL online materials are more focused on. As for the pedagogical requirements to ease the switch to online learning, the interview questions addressed the affordability of the Ministry of Education to provide technology equipment and to launch teachers' training to satisfy the online instruction requirements. The interview also involved the issue of motivation to learn virtually by both teachers and students. In other words, whether collaboration will be fostered among the teachers or among the students to benefit more from this innovative mode. The interview questions lastly addressed the issue of fairly grading the students' performance using online assessment method.

Administration of the Interview

With the novel online teaching technology that not many Sudanese EFL teachers are familiar with, the selection of a sample from these teachers was carried out carefully to make sure that the interviewees involved in this study are familiar with the use of the existing online EFL materials; and have developed attitudes on what these novel teaching modes require, as well as what they might suggest for keeping their students engaged. The interviewees were allowed to provide as much feedback as possible to state their opinions with much adherence to the sequence of the questions.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure that the findings of this study are valid and reliable the interview was conducted by the same interviewer using the same sequence possible, and with much focus on the core of the questions that followed the same sequence.

Literature Review

Previous Studies

In a study entitled: "Social Media in English Language Teaching and Learning" Li (2017), which investigated the use of social media tools such as YouTube, Blogs, Forums and Wikis in teaching, the researcher found out that the top three tools that are used for learning English are YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp, with YouTube being the most prominent tool both daily and weekly, followed by Wikis and Facebook. WhatsApp also reflected the students' preference of tools for English learning but not as frequently as the other social media tools. The results of the study showed that students favor using social media with classmates more than engaging with their classroom teacher, especially in students' sharing with and obtaining materials from each other to complete assignments. The study recommended that educators should promote knowledge sharing in terms of collaborative learning to help students to engage more effectively in group team work. Also, Pearson Learning Solutions and Babson Survey Research Group in the US (Seaman, 2013) conducted a survey on the use of social media. The results showed intensive use of Wikis, Forums or Blogs to carry out the writing tasks and online discussion while Facebook provided a learning environment for the students to interact. A study that focused on the influence of social media in teaching and learning vocabulary of the foreign language entitled: "The Impact of Social Media on Learning English: A Critical Study in English Language Teaching ELT Context", which was

conducted by Raw Parupalli (2019). The study concluded that social media is powerful to engage students to learn the new vocabulary items. The results also revealed positive students' attitudes towards Facebook-assisted teaching which resulted in a slight improvement in post-test achievement and most importantly, it was recommended that the university under study should catch up with the rapid social and technological changes and give students more responsibility in planning their e-learning activities. In order to determine the language skills to address through specific social media tools, research has been conducted to find out what tool could suit the different skills of learning language basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Due to its interactive mode of presentation, YouTube is found to be a useful tool to boost vocabulary understanding and practice. In a study that investigated the effects of Facebook-assisted teaching on learning English for specific purposes, conducted by Slim et al (2019), the experiment showed no significant difference between the two groups in terms of achievement though students had extremely positive response and high satisfaction level with Facebook-based materials.

The new online teaching-and-learning method of e-learning and out-of-class online instruction have started to become alternative learning styles since 2006 especially during the SARS period but the Covid-19. It is noticeable that Sudanese students have been using this new learning method on unofficial basis for a variety of learning tasks. The most common unofficial tools among Sudanese students involve YouTube and Facebook. EFL students in particular, most frequently use these tools to exchange videos, texts, images and that can help them practice the foreign language. Li (2017) stated that these tools are common among students of English language because they are packed and stacked with a number of videos for teaching-and-learning purposes. In addition to the three Moodle built-in tools: Wiki, Forum and Blog, these have been the four so-called official teaching and learning tools used in the English language department such as YouTube there is also the use of unofficial tools (i.e. Facebook and WhatsApp) that students voluntarily use to exchange course materials. According to Phasita (2017) what made social media play a distinguished role in foreign learning and teaching is its feature of technology-supported learning tool for public and tutorial use, in addition to the ability of these tools to create digital social media that makes vocab presentation exciting and interactive. Woo et al. (2007) maintain that multimedia materials can enhance students' motivation to learn the language.

The reason why YouTube is the most frequently used tool for English language learning as stated by Li (2017) is that the English language department has created several videos for teaching purposes and that it has exhibited its ability in picture-sharing, wall-posting, and music-sharing. But the question whether all these videos are appropriate for foreign language learning is critical because not every material matches the learning objective and not every learning objective is systematically addressed in the e-learning tasks. Accordingly, it is critical to find out how the content of the Sudanese EFL curriculum can be reshaped into e-learning materials, what additional e-learning materials are required to provide for the essentials of e-learning. The use of Web tools to remotely learn English also involved LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, We Chat, and Weibo for both required and non-required course-related materials. Wiki, Forum and Blog are also useful tools for developing EFL students' writing skills remotely. The Sudanese Ministry of Education through its EFL course-designers and language teachers can invest the implications of these findings to provide for better learning strategies to Sudanese EFL students.

Vygotsky (1978), Harrison and Thomas (2009), and Harrison (2013) stated that Facebook can provide language learners with new prospects of real-time cultural and linguistic interchange. Besides, Van Lier (2004) argued that Facebook provides the conversational features and can represent ideal websites to language learning using images of objects, places, events or things, that can be shared by the students and their language teacher in order to maximize language learning and through the use of podcasts and videos as advocated by Swain (2007). In the recent years, students can benefit from high-performance mobile devices which have enhanced connection and interaction features. This can provide learners with more opportunities of target language contact, thus contributing to the improvement of their academic performance.

Benefits of Online Instruction in the EFL Classroom

Akbari et al (201) investigated the impact of online social networks in terms of enhancing the students' engagement in learning by comparing two different groups; a control group using face-to-face education and an experimental group using the social network Facebook. The study revealed significant differences between the two groups in terms of learning, engagement, and motivation. The conclusions of this study imply significant outcomes for any state intending to move from the face-to-face instruction to online instruction. A state such as Sudan can reduce the hassle of spending on the development of new materials by using existing online materials. A serious challenge that probably faces most Sudanese students at the basic and tertiary levels is the challenge of providing laptop for every learner. This could be solved by mounting a projector or a monitor for the whole class to follow the instruction so that the students can later use cellphones at home.

Another merit in using online EFL instructional tool such as YouTube or Facebook is that motivation and engagement are higher with the use of these tools in teaching and learning. One reason is that the online EFL materials are designed in more attractive ways to the students who study with much more enjoyment than in face-to-face classes. Kuh (2001) stated that flexible interaction with the teachers and peers is another reason why online materials are enjoyed by the students as in the face-to-face environments there is not enough time for establishing interaction and that students show much effort to collaborate with their peers.

As for how recorded online materials on YouTube can help students develop their language skills, Maria (2015) advocated that these materials help students recognize the exact pronunciation and imitate it later and that they can also foster collaborative and creative learning among the students. The wide spread of using social media in language learning brings us to the conclusion that the world will eventually move from the traditional modes of studying a language on textbooks or travelling abroad to learn that language from the native speakers to total virtual language-learning methods over the Internet. With the use of online media, assimilated existence within the environment of the native speakers is possible. Movies, live news, TV shows are all possible means of assimilating the native environment. It is important to note that the language learnt in these contexts is the authentic, spontaneous language with a specific focus on the speaking and listening skills rather than writing skills, typical of formal textbooks. This entails that online learning is moving education toward adopting new ways of language-learning that was largely overlooked in the past teaching methods.

Carlson (2002) listed out some benefits students can gain from the educational technology. It is taken with no doubt that using technology to learn can speed up and increase the efficiency of both instructional and non-instructional teacher activities including students' attendance, grading, textbook distribution, and preparation of administrative reports (Carlson, 2002: 123).

Results and Discussions

Future Trends for the Anticipated Sudanese Online EFL Program

To professionally prep for EFL e-learning, it is critical to address the question whether online EFL instruction face any challenges. Marsha et al (2020) coins Kebritchi et al (2017) who outlined some of the challenges that face this novel teaching modes some of which are (1) access to digital devices and Wi-Fi, (2) the teachers' training issues, (3) course content issues, and (4) how to engage students remotely using a distant computer and make them participate in the learning process. These concerns are true for most of the Sudanese EFL educators who are so resistant to training themselves to implement the online instruction with Web EFL content that has not covered the curriculum yet. Further challenges deal with the educational policies about e-learning programs and the ability to provide the technological devices necessary for e-learning. Further challenges involve class-management and grading the students' performance. All these foreseen problems may never be addressed without making the equipment available with proper language teacher-training. With the limited resources in Sudan, the challenges become much more difficult to solve. Candilio (2015) stated that previous research has shown a set of problems with online learning some of which are: poor level of commitment over time and it is often notice that learners do not show interest to meet long-term learning sessions. All these challenges require careful planning of course, before switching to online teaching.

Online EFL program Requirements for the Sudanese Educators

The social media revolution the whole world is facing, as stated by Samuels (2013:2) where people will be communicating through the Internet using aural, visual, and written discourse, is not always easy. The issue of the techniques EFL teachers need to implement online teaching and how to select from the myriad of multimedia-based materials available is critical to address before any attempts are made for this novel e-learning technology. There are many course-monitoring difficulties to address in online learning environments. Without proper strategies teacher may never handle the instructional tasks professionally.

Welcoming the new era of learning online without any worries will render the learning opportunities detrimental; teachers need to be trained, online equipment needs to be provided, and classes need to be reshaped to accommodate the innovative teaching mode. All these considerations are critical for adopting and accurate online learning instruction for Sudanese Students, not only for EFL learning but also for learning all the school subjects online. Students, on the other hand, are the least to worry as they already use social media to exchange course-related materials with classmates both for learning and for completing assignments. Acheaw et al (2015) stated that students have the habit of using social media for English Learning on daily basis on the average of 3 hours a day. Teachers, however, need the techniques that can help them in planning and developing EFL materials as well as monitoring the progress of the course-work (Rapanta, C. et al 2020), as the task

of manually monitoring and evaluating students' progress specially on homework is one the most cumbersome teacher's task. Luckily, educational online technology can help much in this regard.

Implications for the Sudanese Anticipated Online EFL program

The implications of research finding on students' use of social media per gender involve important curricula concerns. Li (2017) found that female students were inclined to use Instagram whereas male students used Wikis. As for WhatsApp and Forums or Blogs, Li found out that these are used more often by males than females. So, should there be different materials per students' gender? Since both males and females are graded by the same course materials, and since it is important to achieve fair learning opportunities for both genders, it is important that materials be made fair too. This requires that the design of the EFL material should fairly utilize tools attractive for both genders, no gender specific tool should be ignored for the other. In other words, the same e-learning writing material on Instagram should be developed using Wikis to ensure fair learning opportunities for both genders. Accordingly, the implications for the Sudanese anticipated online EFL program can be stated precisely: fair online EFL materials for both genders for fair grading outcomes.

As for the responses to the interview questions, the EFL teachers who were interviewed for this study strongly agreed that the most challenges that will face the switch to online instruction involve the accessibility of educational technology and the preparation of teachers to instruct online. Other challenges the interviewees believe are serious involve the course designers' role as well as the classroom teachers' to provide appropriate online instruction. The question whether the EFL materials currently available online are suitable for virtually teaching students at the basic and tertiary level is responded to differently. Some teachers believe that these materials could be used for that purpose with teachers carefully selecting and expanding or modifying them. Other teachers believe that the design of newer online Materials is critical, arguing that the Sudanese EFL learners have specific objectives that are achievable by specific content. Additionally, they also claim that the media of these materials, being audio, visual or textual, is not carefully weighed over the Sudanese course content for basic and tertiary levels. This group also believes that there is much more focus on some media at the expense of other media. Accordingly, the teachers' agreement to adopting these existing online EFL materials vary tremendously.

Concerning the interviewees' opinions on the pedagogical requirements to ease the switch to online learning, the interviewees unanimously agree that the Sudanese learning environments are not currently prepared for online instruction, and should thus be provided with the necessary educational technology. They concluded that the Sudanese Ministry of Education should prep the learning environments for these students by all possible means. Regarding the staff training to satisfy the online instruction requirements, all the interviewees agreed that this issue is extremely critical for the success of online instruction. Also, some interviewees believe that technophobia and lack of technology training are the main reasons why some teachers, unlike the students, are not fully motivated to teach online. Other interviewees believe that these reasons lie behind the lack of collaboration among the teachers themselves. Other causes of low motivation involve the absence of educational equipment to handle the online teaching mode. On the topic of how to ensure fair assessment for the students using online assessment tools, most interviewees believe that honestly

assessing the students' tasks performed online will not be likely in the absence of appropriate assessment tools.

Conclusion

Most of the results of this study pertained to the importance of the government support for educational equipment and the EFL teachers' training to play their roles effectively for accurate online teaching. It was found out that the strategies to handle students' monitoring and participation remotely are extremely critical for the students' progress in language learning as it is the only way to remotely keep the students motivated and engaged. As for the design of the online EFL materials, it is concluded that the online materials should involve the whole course and consist of tasks covering all the basic skills equally. It is also found out that these online tasks should be fostering interaction between the students' and the teacher as well as between the students with each other. In other words, the language-learning tasks should be fun, easy to use and immediate in providing feedback. Regarding the existing EFL materials available online through WhatsApp, YouTube and the like, teachers recommend that these materials should be selected and redesigned to match the needs of the Sudanese EFL students at the basic and tertiary levels before switching to online EFL instruction.

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Appendix

Focal Questions of the Interview

- **Prologue:** To start with, we are so grateful for your participation in the interview of this study. As you already know, the purpose of this interview is to help EFL teachers and course designers to present accurate online instruction for basic and tertiary levels in Sudan in response to the world moving to online learning due to the pandemic.
 1. To start with, what challenges do you think, face language teaching for basic and tertiary levels to switch from in-class learning to virtual instruction?
 2. Do you think that some language-learning basic skills might be affected by the switch from face-to-face instruction?
 3. What roles can the Sudanese EFL course-designers play in the online instruction modes?
 4. Also, how do you think EFL course designers can effectively transform language learning materials into online instruction?
 5. What about the Sudanese EFL teachers' role in the online instruction modes?
 6. Based on your personal use of EFL materials available through the social media such as: WhatsApp, Instagram, Messenger, do you think these EFL materials can be adopted for teaching the Sudanese students in basic and tertiary levels?
 7. Which of the following online EFL materials do you think are more focused on: audio, video or textual?
 8. Most teachers believe that the Sudanese Minister of Education can't currently afford to provide laptop for each student, what strategies can teachers implement to make students benefit from the minimum use of technology in the English classroom?

9. With regard to the online teaching requirements for Sudanese EFL students in the basic and tertiary levels, what are some of the required essentialities of online teaching and learning in education amid the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. What techniques do you think Sudanese EFL teachers should implement to provide appropriate foreign language learning?
11. Do you think teachers will be welcoming the EFL online instruction?
12. What about the students?
13. In your opinion, how could online EFL materials motivate your students to learn English?
14. In your opinion, do you think students' performance could be fairly managed to equally grade students' assignments done online?
15. How about the collaboration among students? And when their collaborations results into plagiarism, do you think that assessment will be fair?
16. Do you think that EFL teachers should go for technology training to learn how to provide appropriate learning for their students?
17. Do you suggest any training areas for EFL teachers to use multimedia-based materials appropriately?
18. Well, technophobia is often opposed to motivation. Do you think that it will effect online learning for these students?
19. What strategies can be provided for these students to prep themselves for effective online learning?
20. Do you think the current course materials are suitable for online teaching and learning? What amendments do you suggest for EFL course designers to enhance these materials for virtual language learning?