

Online Language Learning Facilitation: New Demands, Students' Viewpoints, and Material Development

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The Post Corona World has automatically brought about new conditions in language learning and instruction. The impacts and consequences of the pandemic on ELT would make part of the paper at hand. Some conceptual issues would accordingly be part and parcel of the propositions discussed throughout the initial part of this short paper. On the latter part, the paper discusses the viewpoints of some 49 participants sought through the final run of the modified questionnaire, among other means, developed and administered to the students of online classes to see how they feel about the rest of the process. Positive as well as negative points of online language instruction are categorically delineated to help enhance the instruction in prospect. The part which might have positively benefited most regarding the present circumstances is the material development domain by lowering the panic of the instructor in developing the material which might not only be much more appealing to the students but also help them enhance their language ability. Proposals for further research in several areas close the paper.

Keywords: Online, ELT, Learning facilitation, Post-Corona, Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

The major partners through the facilitation process of learners' language enhancement, with trivial differences between SLA and FLL, seem to be mainly: learners, a facilitator and a setting along with some gadgets inclusive of a textbook. It is true that each of the preceding four involved would hold, if not say hundreds, tens of sub-issues that would promote or hinder the facilitation. The concern in this paper is mainly on the third item, i.e.: the setting. In the case of post Corona world, though we do not know how long for sure, at least temporarily the third item which is class setting has been substituted or replaced by the virtual setting which is language facilitation through the internet or virtual classes.

Although the Post Corona World has automatically brought about new conditions in language learning and instruction, some of the very factors affecting the learning process might still be true and prevail in both types of these settings.

Such factors might positively affect learning and enhance it, or might hinder the facilitation and slow it down. They might be related to human beings and social factors (Azimi, 2006 & 2008),

they might be related to economic factors and mal-functioning or total lack of an equitable burden-sharing dynamics (Azimi 2010, 2016b, Azimi and Farahani, 2011), they might be related to lack of fairness in all respects inclusive of teaching and management (Azimi, 2020a, Azimi and Azimi, 2020a, 2020b), they might be related to facilitator's behavioral factors and awkward class conduct, testing and evaluation (Azimi, 2010, 2011, 2016c, Azimi and Azimi, 2020b), or they might even be related to the role of technology (Azimi, 2009, 2016a, Azimi and Azimi 2020b, Mohagheghnia et al, 2014) among many other things.

Positive & Negative Points of Online Language learning Facilitation

Provided that we admit that online instruction dramatically differs from classroom teaching, which truly seems to be so as there is no more a classroom in which the two sides physically attend, there are a series of differences between the two facilitation types, i.e.: online facilitation versus instruction in the classroom setting. These differences might be positive or negative or sometimes both depending on how they are viewed and from which angle, and/or how we treat them among other things. More would come in the latter part of the paper.

Material Development in the Post Corona World

It seems that the part which benefited most, is material development as a sudden change of circumstances took place and it brought lots of changes with it. The ordinary class setting inclusive of all its atmosphere conditions changed as there were no classes in their traditional form anymore. The virtual sphere took its place and the setting was totally fresh and in most cases without any precedence as the teachers had to improvise new techniques and procedures of their own to facilitate learning. The role of media drastically underwent catharsis as it became perhaps the most significant factor in instruction without which no teaching could have possibly been carried out.

Selection, gradation, adaptation, and many other acts in material development might be easier to do as there is quick access on the internet and paper and pen work is reduced.

As both sides, i.e.: the learner and the facilitator, have access to the internet spontaneously, there is an instantaneous possibility for both sides to jump on a wave and get in touch with close to accurate pieces of information and instances of true language usage as well as even use. The facilitator has a world of texts and discourses ready on the screen to appear in a flash of time and the facilitator can even make them usable very quickly.

Assessment and Evaluation

As evaluation and assessment are not to be delved into in this paper, not much is said about them in this regard in here. However, it should be said that both are so crucial in language instruction that without which a true estimation of the extent of learners' improvement may not be feasible, and their prospective steps or stages of language learning cannot be clearly and effectively programed. Hence, it demands research to deal with aspects of testing and assessment change in Language Instruction in the post-corona world. To refer to some of such new demands in this area, one might refer to the lack of assurance in real language knowledge of the learner, possibilities of

cheating, net problems and false assumptions in estimating what the learner really knows, and affective factors in online assessment, among other things. They might merely be just a few areas which require to be addressed in ELT and the related domains.

METHOD(S)

This part of the paper, hence, attempts to be more of a quantitative nature as it deals with counting and frequency of occurrence of responses. On the quantitative side of this study, following semi-interview dialogs, which had a lot to teach me, some students of various fields of study, out of a pool of close to 200, were selected and after they agreed to be asked questions regarding this study, their viewpoints were gathered and a semi-final questionnaire was made to see how participants would respond. After a couple of modifications, the modified questionnaire was prepared and was administered to some 49 final participants in the study. Their responses were categorically ranked based on frequency of response occurrence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire which was administered to seek the ideas of some 49 participants of both genders provided the following results presented according to the frequency of occurrence of each response:

1. It is a good idea that we are at home and feel safer with respect to the pandemic outbreak and we are fine with our classes;
2. Professors should care more about the possibility of our being cut-off from the internet;
3. Purchasing the internet connection is costly;
4. If I had a computer, it was much better;
5. The internet speed varies and sometimes it is not okay as the internet providers differ;
6. For language learning class, virtual classes seem very good as we hear the words aloud through our ears and better recall their pronunciation;
7. We are worried about the exam;
8. If we could have seen the instructor during the session, it had been much better;
9. Other people at home distract us every now and then;
10. Excluding the internet connection costs, our other expenses have reduced during our university study;
11. A little artificiality is felt in some of our special courses;
12. It does not seem that fair that some instructors have chosen and introduced some representatives.

What follows would appear to be some of the advantages or privileges as well as disadvantages of online sessions or in specific 'ELT virtual classes'.

Advantages of Language Learning Facilitation through Virtual Sphere:

Hereby, what proceeds would be some of the positive points of online facilitation. It should not be taken as all-prevailing; rather, they should be taken as more or less shared commonalities all around the world. They might make areas for further research as well. The positive points are to the following effect:

1. It saves much of the students' time which they were formerly supposed to put for commuting to the educational location;
2. It has lowered fees and costs for:
 - a. the educational system, as there is almost no energy consumption costs and or parts and repair fees for the heating or cooling systems among other ones, and service personnel are reduced drastically lowering the expenses;
 - b. the instructors, in the form of personal costs as well as commuting;
 - c. the learners, at least regarding the dormitory fees, commuting and transportation among other ones.
3. Though comparative research is required, it seems that the 'affective' factors involved in facilitation would differ. As there is no physical attendance, learners would be less panicky in saying what they are to say, and would feel less shy and less preserved to talk, among other things;
4. There is the possibility of learners' family members listening to the instruction provided by the facilitator. Some highly disciplined instructors might oppose it, though it doesn't bother this facilitator at all;
5. It lowers the learners' guards so that they do not much stand on the defensive simply because they are not seen in person and it is not a face to face process;
6. They seem to have more concentration as the factors for distraction, such as the presence of other learners, among other things, are minimally reduced; questions are typed and this buys time for them not to feel agitated;
7. They have more time to think as there is less probability of being interfered by others commonly involved in ordinary class settings;
8. They may feel free to search through the internet or to carry out self-study or personal training activities; this might be both positive and or negative due to the many other factors involved in the facilitation process – as an instance, if there is an instructor who is weak and awkward in one way or another, the learner who does this type of running away from the mal-control of the so-called teacher, might positively use the time for learning; in contrast, provided that the facilitator is an excellent one, the learner might miss at least some or part of sessions because of the bad experience the learner had had with an awkward teacher before, and it may take some time for the same facilitator or some other learners to put this learner on the right track again, until then this independence of this latter learner type would be counted a disadvantage;
9. Learners, especially some rather bullies among other ones, would not be able to negatively interfere with other learners' learning attempts;

10. There seems to be almost no waste of time on the campus and in corridors, among other places, as no attendance exists in any real classroom setting. This might also be positive or negative depending on the many factors involved inclusive of the facilitator type and personality and learners' characteristics. Nonexistence of real classroom setting as well as on campus nonattendance may be negative when a learner is contingent upon other learners, both emotionally and learning-wise. A Learner might, for instance, be learning much better through interaction with other learners. This nonexistence might be positive, as in the case when there are some glum who lower down others' spirits and cause one another to be put more on the defensive; among other things;
11. No time is wasted in the taxi or on the bus for commuting; this time might be positively used for more autonomous study; if it is a second language acquisition setting [an SLA setting], it may be regarded a negative point as the chances for outside acquisition in the native setting are adversely reduced;
12. Usually and provided that the financial status of a learner is not lean, the learner is more physically prepared and ready in a virtual setting, perhaps less hungry or thirsty and or even less tired, as the learner would have food handy and might even lie down and participate. There may be the possibility of quick access to what the learner wishes at home while at the same time participating in an online session. Further research may be needed on this item which was just touched on a bit in here of course;
13. There is the case of reduced time for makeup. This might especially be true for most girl students as a part of their nature of course. Depending on age, religion, family control, and many other factors, online classes would require less time wasted in clothing, combing, makeup and the like as no face to face class attendance is required. Although it might be rare, this might possibly be true regarding a dandy wasting too much time on mere appearance as well;
14. There is more autonomy for the learner in the virtual sphere, perhaps interpreted as a negative point by some, freeing much of the learner's time.

Disadvantages of Online Language Learning Facilitation:

The negative points seem to be to the following effect:

1. The teaching learning process is rather more of a sedentary type and automatically less active;
2. It might be the case that neither the instructor nor the learners know each other at all as they might never meet or see each other even on the screen, let alone in person. The only thing existing is perhaps the instructor's voice! Which might also be monotonous making the learners drowsy;
3. There is a very limited control over the learner's writing on the spot; not much is quickly checked regarding errors, mistakes and slips;
4. The process is a bit artificial and that feeling of attending an actual university or formal class is not created at all which might negatively have an impact on learning, especially regarding the facilitation or Learner Affective Factors;

5. The co-learners or peer group positive effect would not exist that much through online classes and that may demote learning;
6. The effect of wealth differences would be revealing as expensive equipment might be much needed and even quite effective a factor on unfair mark differences at the end of the course; it requires the wits of the facilitator as well as experience to reduce the effect of 'money' per se;
7. The locale where the learner is living might have a negative effect on online language learning and facilitation as the speed and internet access may differ from place to place depending on the internet provider differences;
8. Social inequalities might have their impact on online learning as well as class setting as those who are rich might have more guts to talk and participate; it is to the prudent of the facilitator to encourage every and all of the learners to do their best not the rich;
9. Yet, the overall class setting seems to have something that online instruction does not; this perhaps reminds us of the Gestalt view that the whole might have something beyond the rest of the pieces put together; When I myself see my students in a real class setting, I may quickly gather the attention of a distracted learner in one way or another, in a way that I see and feel approval in their eyes; however, the problem with online classes is that the instructor does not know for sure who is truly listening and or attending and who is not;
10. Communication among colleagues which might positively affect instruction is drastically downgraded because of virtual instruction;
11. It may be true that online learning and facilitation reduces the transportation and commuting fees and fare, among other things, but it may cause some other charges as well, such as internet connection fees, or the need to pay for and buy a computer, a laptop, or a smart cellphone, among other equipment, and some parts and pieces; this item by itself requires much discussion and interdisciplinary research, far beyond the scope of this limited paper;
12. The more we work with machines, the more we would or might feel to be like a machine, a state of being detached and aloof. Right today, I heard of a colleague inflicted with Corona Virus who passed away some months ago while I heard and knew nothing about this demise and loss during the whole of this long time at all!

The preceding two lists do not claim to be comprehensive and if we communicate with the learners and contemplate more, some more items might surely be added.

CONCLUSIONS

In a nutshell, the Post Corona World seems to have brought with it new circumstances in language learning and facilitation perhaps never seen before. Regarding the impacts and consequences of the pandemic on ELT, the advantageous points as well as the drawbacks are numerous. They might include financial, affective, and rational issues of various types but whether we like it or not they are part and parcel of the present global circumstances, some already discussed throughout this short paper. The viewpoints of some 49 participants in virtual sphere sought through the final run

of the modified questionnaire, among other means, were presented accordingly to see how they felt about the rest of the process. Some of the issues raised might be globally true. For others, supplementary research is proposed so that we observe further enhancement of language learning facilitation regarding the new global circumstances. The lowering down of the guards of both the learner as well as the facilitator seems to be apparent, the former in becoming more entangled in learning through participation, and the latter in thinking of new ways for material production and preparation. Proposal for further research in several areas hereby follows, thus closing the paper.

Further research

As for further research, it seems that there is a whole new horizon for exploratory research as there has not been a pandemic of this length of time in the last couple of decades at least since the time a new surge of interest and need in foreign language education arose. There is also a vast area of interdisciplinary research in various language related domains. It may be noteworthy to refer to a few to the following effect:

- I. Language learning facilitation,
- II. Assessment, testing and evaluation, and
- III. Material development

As for teaching or rather language learning facilitation, which we might look at it as some online language facilitation method, there is the research area of new teaching techniques or procedures with the use of computers as well as the interactive communication for sharing instructors' improvisations to make 'learning facilitation' interesting enough to keep the learners 'on' rather than making the teaching a lullaby for them to take a nap and daydream.

In language assessment and testing, we have to think of new ways of tapping learners' command of language throughout the course as well as at the end, with an eye onto: expenses and fees of testing; time consumption limitations as testing might become more individually centered rather than group testing; how to deal with internet connection problems as in the case of sudden need of purchasing internet connection by the test-takers while they are being tested; facilities differences [cell phones, computers, and laptops, both inter and intra device type]; access to all types of devices for finding answers to the questions raised by the instructor without any proctor attending or supervisor monitoring as each test-taker is separate somewhere at home at a different location (i.e.: then there is no such a thing as a proctored exam or a proctored test); and last but not least, you might never be sure if the test-taker is really the same person who is supposed to be given a test or the one who is taking the test is someone else! We might have to find ways for each through research.

In material development, there is a whole new world of research. It starts with a philosophy of education and narrows down to the final product which would be a text or series of textbooks which would actualize our objectives at least through some discourse of various types, after which it would be the turn of the other partners in the process of facilitation to do their jobs, the more each one succeeds the better the product, 'the learning'!

Regarding the philosophy of education we adhere to, we might come up with a totally different textbook to the following effect: **whether** we give supremacy to religion, which may of course be of various types, with its various degrees of each on a continuum perhaps, from leniency and each individual's own selection and freedom of choice in religion as of the case stipulated in the holy Quran saying: 'laa ekraaha feddin' [1:256, Al Baqara: Ayah 256] (which according to my understanding means: there is no compulsion in religion) to its most extremist negative side of the continuum which is killing or decapitating another human being just for that man's beard length, or the horrible case of someone or rather some entity behind a car wheel running over the unknown pedestrians of all walks of life on a sidewalk at another country where that 'unknown entity' has taken refuge to, all intentionally and purposefully, which seems to be pure madness or lunacy; or **whether** we give supremacy to a globalized educational view which by itself might be drastically two thoroughly different things standing in almost absolute contrast: one taking the Queen of an X country as a goddess to be always obeyed in one way or another, and the other taking global virtues such as badness of thievery, value of helping others inclusive of both humans or other creatures, value of kindness, amongst many other things, along with some learning of local needs and local requirements to live at peace with the nature around oneself, in which other humans are also taken as part and parcel of the nature; or even **whether** we give supremacy to or rather, (through bamboozlement, enticement, or being doomed), we are enforced not to be a gallows bird and are pushed to, then, actually give supremacy to the complexes of an unknown local ruler who because of molestation, bad education, inferiority complex and the like, since childhood, has forgotten the Almighty and himself and hates all others, whoever they are, but has to just tolerate them because of their puppetry roles, amongst many other types of 'whether'!, 'we might come up with a totally different textbook as product'.*

To remind ourselves of where we are in material development, we seem to be just at the scratch here. Following the determination of all those fundamentals, among many other things, through research in each of those following steps stated in the form of protocols in the literature regarding syllabus design and material preparation, we would get to the surface structure at the very end which is actually the product itself, i.e.: the textbook. There is a huge body of research for us embedded herein then to be carried out in prospect.

*I have even heard of a ruler during whose reign 'world geography' was forbidden to be learned and taught as a field of study at some sort of varsity or higher education institution without any rationality! Also, I still think of the reason why Genghis's grave place is unknown!

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