



Effectiveness of Online Teaching in Developing Language Skills of Primary Students during COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption in the education system worldwide, compelling schools to shift from traditional classroom teaching to online modes of instruction. This sudden transition significantly affected primary education, particularly the development of language skills among young learners. Language learning at the primary level requires interaction, practice, and continuous guidance, which became challenging in an online environment. The present study aims to examine the effectiveness of online teaching in developing language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) of primary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary data, teacher feedback, and observations, the study highlights both the achievements and limitations of online teaching. The findings reveal that while online teaching supported listening and reading skills to some extent, it was less effective in developing speaking and writing skills, especially among students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds. The paper concludes with suggestions for improving online language instruction at the primary level.

Keywords: Online Teaching, Language Skills, Primary Students, COVID-19, LSRW Skills

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping the intellectual, emotional, and social development of individuals, and primary education forms the cornerstone of lifelong learning. It is during the primary stage that children acquire foundational knowledge, values, habits, and skills that influence their future academic achievement and overall personality development. Among these, language skills hold a central position, as they serve as essential tools for communication, learning, and social interaction. The development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills at the primary level directly affects students' academic success across all subjects. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption in the global education system. To contain the spread of the virus, governments across the world ordered the closure of schools, resulting in a sudden shift from traditional classroom teaching to online modes of instruction. Online teaching emerged as the only feasible alternative to ensure continuity of education during prolonged lockdowns. Digital platforms, virtual classrooms, recorded lessons, and online learning resources became widely used to reach students at home. However, the effectiveness of online teaching in developing language skills among primary school students remains a major concern. Young learners require constant interaction, emotional support, immediate feedback, and structured guidance, which are difficult to ensure in a virtual learning environment. Limited attention span, lack of direct teacher–student



interaction, and unequal access to digital resources further complicated the learning process. In this context, the present study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching in developing language skills of primary students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Concept of Language Skills at the Primary Level

Language skills are fundamental to the learning process and play a crucial role in the cognitive and social development of children. At the primary level, language learning focuses on the gradual development of four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interrelated and develop progressively through meaningful exposure, practice, and interaction. Listening and speaking skills generally develop first, followed by reading and writing, which require higher levels of cognitive processing.

Effective language development at the primary stage depends largely on a supportive and interactive learning environment. Classroom activities such as storytelling, rhymes, conversations, reading aloud, group discussions, and guided writing exercises help children enhance their vocabulary, comprehension, and expression. Teacher–student interaction and peer learning play a significant role in reinforcing language skills and building confidence among learners.

Language acquisition at this stage is closely linked to students’ emotional security, motivation, and engagement. Any disruption in regular classroom interaction, practice opportunities, or feedback mechanisms can adversely affect language learning. Since primary education lays the foundation for future academic learning, inadequate development of language skills at this stage may result in long-term learning difficulties. Therefore, ensuring effective language instruction at the primary level is essential for holistic educational development.

3. Online Teaching during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching was adopted as an emergency response to ensure the continuity of education in the absence of physical classrooms. Teaching–learning processes were conducted through video conferencing platforms, recorded video lessons, digital worksheets, educational applications, and messaging services. Teachers made considerable efforts to adapt traditional classroom methods to online formats within a short period of time.

Despite these efforts, online teaching at the primary level faced several challenges. Many teachers lacked adequate training in online pedagogy and digital tools, which affected the quality of instruction. Limited access to smartphones, computers, and stable internet connectivity created a digital divide, particularly among students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds. In addition, young learners required continuous parental support to attend online classes, which was not always possible due to parents’ work commitments or lack of educational awareness.

Reduced interaction, absence of peer learning, and limited opportunities for practice further affected the effectiveness of online teaching. As a result, while online education helped maintain academic continuity, it could not fully replicate the classroom environment necessary for the effective development of language skills among primary students.

4. Impact of Online Teaching on Language Skills



1. **Listening Skills:** Online teaching was relatively effective in developing listening skills, as students were exposed to audio-visual content, recorded lessons, and digital storytelling. Repeated access to recorded material helped some students improve comprehension.
2. **Speaking Skills:** Speaking skills were least developed during online teaching. Limited interaction, lack of face-to-face communication, hesitation to speak on digital platforms, and absence of group activities reduced opportunities for oral expression.
3. **Reading Skills:** Reading skills showed moderate improvement among students who had access to digital reading materials and parental support. However, students without proper guidance struggled with pronunciation and comprehension.
4. **Writing Skills:** Writing skills were significantly affected due to reduced practice, lack of immediate teacher feedback, and dependence on parents. Many students faced difficulties in sentence formation, spelling, and handwriting.

5. Challenges in Online Language Teaching

1. **Limited Access to Digital Devices and Internet Connectivity:** One of the major challenges in online language teaching is the limited availability of digital devices and reliable internet connectivity. Many primary students, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, could not attend online classes regularly, which directly affected continuity of learning and language skill development.
2. **Lack of Teacher Training in Online Pedagogy:** Effective online language teaching requires specific pedagogical skills and familiarity with digital tools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers were not adequately trained in online teaching methods, resulting in limited use of interactive strategies essential for developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.
3. **Reduced Student Attention Span:** Primary school students generally have a limited attention span, which became further reduced in online learning environments. Prolonged screen time, absence of physical classroom engagement, and home-based distractions made it difficult for students to remain attentive, thereby affecting their comprehension and participation in language learning activities.
4. **Minimal Interaction and Peer Learning:** Language learning at the primary level relies heavily on interaction and peer engagement. Online teaching limited opportunities for group activities, discussions, and collaborative learning. The lack of face-to-face interaction reduced students' confidence in speaking and hindered the natural development of communication skills.
5. **Inadequate Parental Support, Especially in Rural Areas:** Online learning at the primary level requires active parental involvement for guidance and supervision. However, in rural areas many parents lacked educational awareness, digital skills, or time to support their children, which negatively impacted students' participation and progress in online language learning.

6. Effectiveness of Online Teaching



The findings of the present study indicate that online teaching was partially effective in ensuring the continuity of language learning among primary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a situation where physical classroom instruction was not possible, online platforms helped maintain a basic connection between teachers and learners and prevented a complete disruption of the teaching–learning process. Digital lessons, recorded videos, and online learning materials provided students with exposure to language content and supported independent learning to some extent.

However, online teaching could not fully replace classroom-based instruction at the primary level. The development of language skills in young learners requires continuous interaction, guided practice, and immediate feedback, which are difficult to achieve in virtual classrooms. The study reveals that receptive language skills such as listening and reading were supported more effectively through online teaching. Audio-visual materials, storytelling videos, and digital texts helped students improve listening comprehension and basic reading abilities.

In contrast, productive skills such as speaking and writing showed limited development. Reduced opportunities for oral interaction, lack of peer communication, hesitation to speak in virtual settings, and delayed teacher feedback negatively affected these skills. Furthermore, socio-economic factors played a significant role in learning outcomes. Students from urban and economically stable backgrounds benefited more from online teaching due to better access to digital resources, while students from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds faced greater learning loss. Thus, online teaching proved to be a supportive but incomplete alternative to classroom-based language instruction at the primary level.

7. Suggestions

1. Blended learning approaches combining classroom teaching with digital resources should be adopted in the post-pandemic period to enhance language learning, ensure continuity, and address learning gaps among primary students.
2. Teachers should receive systematic training in child-centered online pedagogy and digital tools to effectively engage primary students and support the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.
3. Interactive activities such as storytelling, role-play, reading aloud, and language games should be incorporated into teaching practices to promote active participation and improve communication skills among primary learners.
4. Regular assessment and timely feedback mechanisms should be strengthened to monitor students' progress, identify learning difficulties, and provide appropriate guidance for improving language skills.
5. Special remedial programs should be introduced to address learning loss caused by prolonged school closures, with focused support for students facing difficulties in basic language and literacy skills.

8. Conclusion

Online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic functioned as an emergency educational response to an unprecedented global crisis. In the absence of traditional classroom instruction, digital learning platforms played a crucial role in maintaining continuity of education for



primary school students. Online teaching enabled access to learning materials, teacher guidance, and structured lessons, thereby preventing a complete disruption of the teaching–learning process during prolonged school closures.

However, the findings of the present study indicate that the effectiveness of online teaching in developing language skills among primary students was limited. While receptive skills such as listening and reading benefited to some extent from audio-visual resources and digital content, productive skills like speaking and writing were significantly affected. Limited interaction, reduced opportunities for practice, delayed feedback, and unequal access to digital resources constrained effective language learning. Socio-economic disparities further widened learning gaps, particularly among students from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds.

The study emphasizes the need for well-planned, inclusive, and child-centered teaching strategies to support language development in future learning environments. Blended learning models that combine classroom instruction with digital tools can help address the limitations of purely online education. Teacher training, parental involvement, and targeted remedial interventions are essential to strengthen primary language education. Addressing learning loss and rebuilding foundational language skills is crucial to ensure equitable and sustainable educational development in the post-pandemic period.

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