The Challenges Experience by Students in Learning English Language via Zoom Platform

(A Study Focused on Grade 10 Students in Mawanella Educational Zone)

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Abstract- The distance education has been promoted in the world after Covid- 19 pandemic and Sri Lanka too was influenced by it. As a result, a popular app called "Zoom" was utilized in the field of English language teaching. Since online learning is a novelty to Sri Lankan students, it was significant to investigate the challenges experience by them in learning English via "Zoom". Thus, the research questions of this study were related to what challenges Grade 10 students in Mawanella educational zone experience in learning English via "Zoom" and students' perception regarding learning English via zoom. Moreover the benefits of using "Zoom" in learning English, the problems teachers observe related to students learning English via zoom platform and teachers' suggestions and solutions for students' problems related to learning English via "Zoom" too were investigated. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected by a questionnaire and an interview respectively and a mixed method approach was applied to derive the conclusion. The research sample involved 100 students and 10 teachers in Mawanella educational zone. In accordance with analysed data it was found that more than 55% of student sample experience challenges such as signal and network issues, power cut, less face to face interaction, lack of attention, technical issues, lack of equipment etc. It was evident that the students were demotivated to learn via 'Zoom" due to above mentioned problems. It was found that 84% of student sample decided that "Zoom" sessions are successful to a certain extent due to the problems they experience but 12% did not have a clear perception of "Zoom" and 41% of the student sample was with somewhat clear perception of "Zoom". It was suggested to provide a proper training to both teachers and students regarding the facilities provided in "Zoom" app to optimize the teaching learning procedure. In addition, it was recommended to keep a recording of the lessons for the students.

Index Terms- Challenges, Distance education, English language learning, Motivation, "Zoom" platform

I. INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka English has been taught as a second language since middle of the 20th century (Jayasuriya, 1988; Sedere, 2008). Teaching English language includes grammar, vocabulary and four skills which are listening, speaking, reading, writing and these were mainly taught in physical classrooms before Covid - 19 outbreak. In addition, up to 2019, English subject was taught in physical classrooms as interactive sessions with face to face relationship between the students and the teachers. However, in the past few years, online learning platform has been promoted as the mode of giving instructions in education system (Reimers, & Andreas, 2020). When the physical classroom became an impossibility due to various reasons, "online learning" was uplifted to be the only solution in teaching learning procedure (Wargadinata, et al, 2020). Thus, the mode of conveying instructions in education system in the world has under gone a drastic change (Dhawan, 2020, Serhan, 2020) and Sri Lanka too was influenced by this change. The scenario of teaching and learning English language in Sri Lanka too became a part of this revolution. Mainly, face to face interactive classroom was replaced by online learning platform. As a consequence, one of the major online platforms selected by teachers and students in teaching and learning procedure is "Zoom" (Dharma, Asmarani, & Dewi., 2017) . As a result, utilizing "Zoom" has become a popular tool of English language teaching and learning since the outbreak of Covid -19 pandemic.

On the other hand, several researches (Lowenthal, Dunlap, & Snelson, 2017) have depicted the challenges that the students experience when utilizing "Zoom". Therefore it is worthwhile to investigate the challenges experienced by students when they engage in learning English via "Zoom" platform.

II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

A. Significance of the study –

After Covid-19 pandemic, the field of English language teaching needed the support of online learning method. This revolution in English Language Teaching (ELT) field was common to Sri Lanka too and due to that fact online learning was optimized. Sri Lankan students who learn English as a second language had to select distance education mode after Covid-19 pandemic. Further, online learning is somewhat a novelty to Sri Lankan students and due to that reason most of them experience difficulties in dealing with that. Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the challenges faced by these students in learning English via "Zoom". On the other hand, the investigation has its significance on making teachers and other responsible persons in the field of education aware of the problems that students face when they learn English via "Zoom". In addition, it is expected to bring out certain kind of solutions, recommendations and suggestions to solve these problems. Thus, the responsible persons would be able to take necessary steps to develop the facilities for online learning mode. Moreover, this research is important as distance learning mode too has become as popular as physical classroom on present day. Therefore online learning is considered as an essential part in teaching learning process in current context.

B. Literature Review –

When distance learning procedure is considered, many online platforms were introduced such as Google meeting, Whatsapp, Microsoft Teams, and EDmodo. But this research focuses on "Zoom" platform and it mainly provides a learning environment very much similar to interactive classroom providing opportunities to have synchronous interaction between the teacher and the students (Rahayu, 2020). First, "Zoom" video session was with 40 minutes limit, but due to Covid-19 pandemic, this time restriction was changed for schools (Zoom video communication, 2020).

In "Zoom" platform many facilities are included for both teachers and students. Some of them are lecturing, video and document sharing, group discussion, breakout rooms, white board, annotation etc (Rahayu, 2020). Moreover, chat box, downloading and uploading documents, screen sharing and uploading homework assignments too are included in "Zoom" (Rahayu, 2020). In addition, the teachers can record the lesson for students or students later can watch the recorded lesson (McClendon et al, 2017). The above mentioned facts are the strengths and facilities provided in learning with "Zoom".

On the other hand, there are several researches which depict the challenges that both students and teachers face when utilizing "Zoom". Thus, some of the reported challenges are students experiencing unreliable poor internet connection, lack of powerful speakers and microphones (Lowenthal, Dunlap, & Snelson, (2017). It is reported that as "Zoom" consists of multitasks, sometimes the sessions exceed the expected time by distracting the students (McClendon; Neugebauer & King, (2017).

In addition, there are some learning theories which will be useful to understand the behaviour of the learners. The theory of Behaviourism explains how learner's behaviour is changed or developed by conditioning. Under 'Behaviourism' two types of conditioning were presented and Operant conditioning theory (Willibey, 2019) is related to voluntary actions made by the learner. B.F. Skinner elaborates his experiment using a rat and promoted the significance of voluntary actions which are related with reward and punishment. Another useful learning theory is Cognitivism (Neisser,2014) which elaborates an information processing model. According to this theory a kind of brain process which transfers the knowledge from short term memory to long term memory is related to the learning procedure.

Some theories of motivation were considered to interpret certain behaviour of students who learn English via "Zoom". They are Maslow theory (Maslow, 2013) which presents the hierarchical order of the needs of the people and Cognitive Evaluation theory (Deci, 2012) which illustrates the extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Interactionism by socio cultural perspective (Stevens, P. 2020) is a language acquisition theory which highlights how social interactionism leads to language development. All these theories supported to interpret the analysed data.

C. Research Problem –

In the past, the interactive physical classroom has been popular in the field of English language teaching in Sri Lanka. However this context was replaced by distance education mode via online due to Covid 19 pandemic. In Sri Lanka, a poplar platform selected by both teachers and students is "Zoom". Moreover, this software has supported to optimize online learning procedure in the field of "English Language Teaching". Although there are many teaching learning facilities provided in "Zoom", students in Sri Lanka experience challenges when learning English via this platform. Therefore, it is anticipated to investigate the challenges face by students in Sri Lanka in learning English language via "Zoom" platform.

D. Research Questions –

This research was mainly focused on studying the challenges that Grade 10 students of Mawanella educational zone in Sri Lanka experience in learning English via "Zoom" platform. Therefore the research questions can be interpreted as,
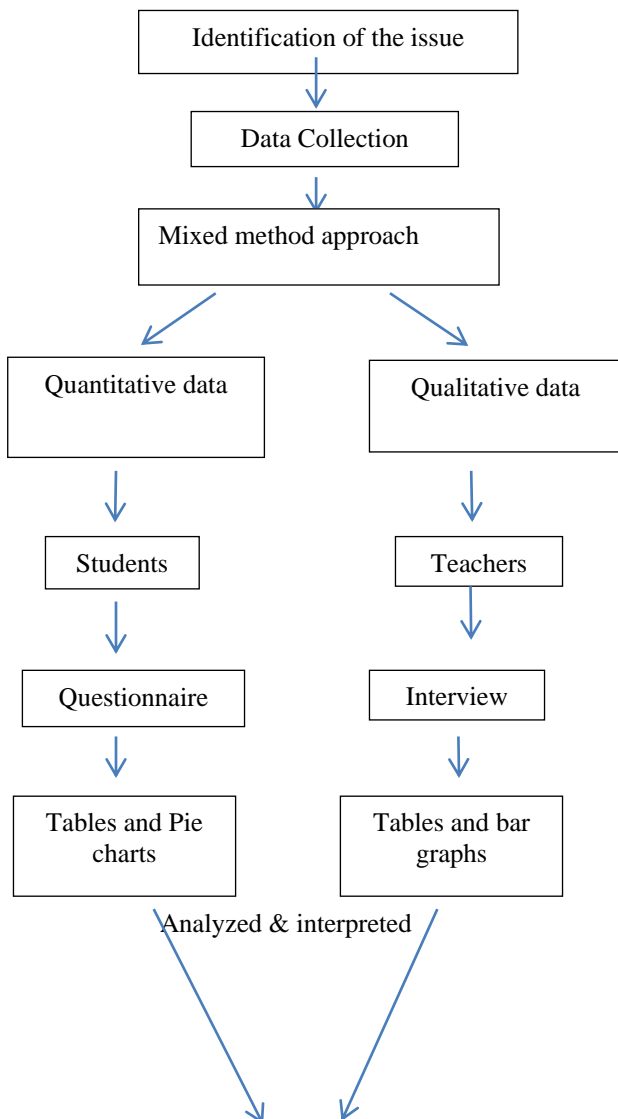
- What challenges do Grade 10 students experience in learning English via "Zoom"?

- What is students' perception regarding learning English via "Zoom"?

- What are the benefits of using "Zoom" in learning English?

- What are the problems teachers observe related to students learning English via zoom platform?

- What are teachers' suggestions and solutions for students' problems related to learning English via "Zoom"?

E. Methodology –

This study is a kind of exploration regarding the challenges face by students in learning English via "Zoom". A mixed method approach was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. A questionnaire was administered to the students to collect quantitative data. In addition, ten English teachers who teach Grade 10 classes were interviewed regarding the difficulties face by children while doing Zoom classes and qualitative data were collected by the interview. The interview was conducted in order to do a multiple case study. Further, the suggested solutions regarding children's difficulties too were taken into account. The collected data were presented in tables, bar graphs and pie charts to be analyzed.

The Diagram 1 presents the research framework which includes the approach, methods, data collection and the steps of the research which lead to derive the conclusion.

Diagram 1: The Research Framework

The questionnaire and the interview were based on research questions. Table 1 and Table 2 showcase the relationship between the research questions and the type of data collected.

Table 1: Type of data collected to each research question

Research Questions	Quantitative data	Qualitative data
1. Challenges that grade 10 students experience in learning English via "Zoom"	✓	
2. Students' perception regarding learning English via "Zoom"	✓	
3. Benefits of using "Zoom" in learning English	✓	
4. Problems teachers observe related to students learning English via "Zoom" platform		✓
5. Teachers' suggestions and solutions for students' problems related to learning English via "Zoom"		✓

F. Research sample –

In this research 100 Grade 10 students were randomly selected from 5 schools. From each school, 20 students were selected for the research sample. Therefore it was a random research sample. Mawanella educational zone in Sri Lanka was the targeted area for the investigation. Moreover, 10 English teachers who teach English via "Zoom" for Grade 10 classes from the same schools were included in the research sample.

III.   DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A. Data presentation and analysis

The Table 2 presents the percentages of positive and negative answers given by the students for binary type questions in the questionnaire.

Table 2- The percentages of positive and negative answers given by students for binary type questions in the questionnaire.

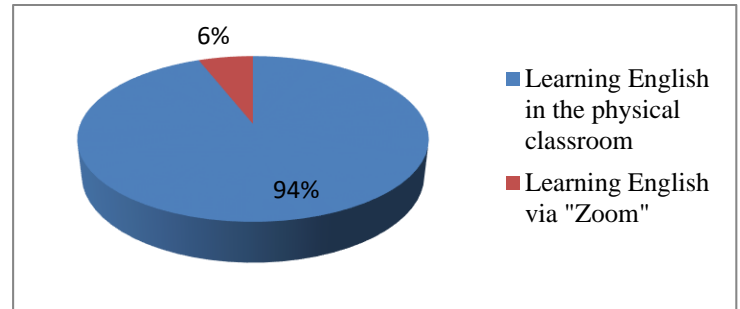| Data collected from students	Yes	No
1. Have you learnt English via "Zoom"?	100%	-
2. Do you like to learn English via "Zoom"?	26%	74%
3. Did your parents face economic difficulties in buying equipment to learn English via "Zoom"?	76%	24%
4. If so, couldn't you buy that equipment?	20%	80%
5. Do you keep the video opened when you learn English via "Zoom"?	32%	68%
6. Do you get any opportunity to ask questions when you learn via "Zoom"?	84%	16%
7. Have you engaged in other work while learning English via "Zoom"?	24%	76%

In accordance with qualitative data 100% of the student sample have learnt English by "Zoom" app. In addition, 72% have been learning English via "Zoom" for one year while 16% and 12% have been learning for two and three years respectively. Moreover smart phones were used by 96% and laptops and desktops were used by 16% and 12% respectively. In considering network facilities 36% mentioned that they get it through wifi connection but 58% and 30% reported that they get network facilities by data packages and data cards respectively.

Table 3 indicates the facilities provided in "Zoom" app and percentage of each facility used by teachers.

Table 3 -The facilities provided in "Zoom" app and percentage of each facility used by teachers.

Facilities in "Zoom" app	Percentage of each facility used by teachers.
1. Video sharing	74%
2. Document sharing	50%
3. Breakout rooms	-
4. Annotation	-
5. White board	-
6. None of these	-

Out of all the students 26% stated that they like to learn English by "Zoom" whereas 74% was with the negative answer. Moreover, 94% students mentioned that they prefer to learn English in the physical classroom and the 6% showed their preference on "Zoom" sessions.

Pie Chart 1 - Students' preference on "Zoom" sessions over the physical classroom –

The students rationalized their answer by stating certain challenges they experienced in learning English by "Zoom" platform. The Table 4 displays those challenges and the percentage of students who declared them.
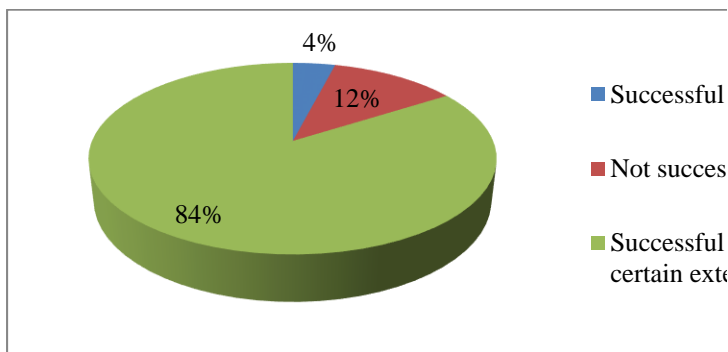
Table 4 – Challenges experience by students in learning English by "Zoom"

Challenges experience by students in learning English by "Zoom"	Percentage
1. Signal problems/ network issues	100%
2. Disturbed by power cut	78%
3. Less face to face interaction	85%
4. Lack of attention	82%
5. Technical issues	28%
6. Tired for eyes/ Small screen	71%
7. Teacher cannot notice the weak points of students easily	57%
8. Family has one equipment	60%
9. No way of getting clarified what students did not understand	64%

According to quantitative data 76% students mentioned that their parents faced economical difficulties in purchasing equipment for "Zoom" session while 24% stated the negative answer. In addition 20% reported that they were not able to purchase it whereas 80% mentioned that they could buy it. Out of the student sample, 6% reported that their parents want them to learn English via "Zoom" while 94% reported that their parents prefer the physical classroom.

Pie Chart 2 displays the students' perception of learning via 'Zoom'

Pie Chart 2 - Students' perception of learning English via "Zoom"-

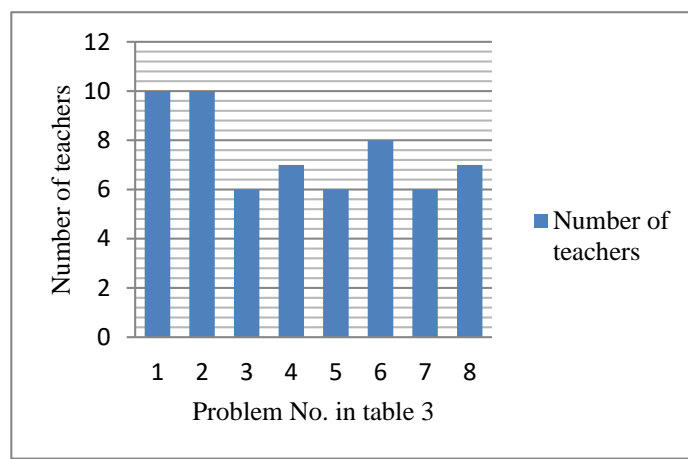|	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	Total	Percentage
lesson												
8. Students request teachers to repeat the lesson in the physical classroom.	*	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	*	07	70%
Number of problems found by each teacher	7	6	5	7	5	4	7	7	6	6		

T = Teacher   % = Percentage

The Table 5 displays the challenges experienced by students when they learn English via "Zoom". The list of problems was found according to teachers' observation on students learning English via "Zoom" app.

Table 5: The number of teachers who found each problem of students related to learning English via "Zoom"

Teachers' findings through observation (The challenges experience by students in learning English language via Zoom platform)	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	Total	Percentage
1. Students face network failure and signal issues	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10	100%
2. Students do not have the equipment	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10	100%
3. Students lack technical knowledge	*	-	-	*	*	-	*	-	*	*	06	60%
4. Family has one smart phone/ computer	*	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	*	-	07	70%
5. Power cut	-	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	*	06	60%
6. Students do not open the video	*	*	-	-	*	*	*	*	*	*	08	80%
7. Students are bored with "Zoom"	*	-	-	*	*	*	-	*	*	-	06	60%

Bar chart 1: The number of teachers who found each problem of students related to learning English via "Zoom"

B. Discussion and Findings

When the list of challenges that teachers observed in Table 5 are considered, it is very clear why students are bored with the "Zoom" lessons and why they ask teachers to repeat the same lesson in the physical classroom. This fact can be elaborated by relating it to the Maslow theory. According to Maslow, first the basic needs have to be fulfilled in order to reach the secondary needs. When the Table 5 is observed, these primary needs have not been fulfilled by the students and they were demotivated to learn English by "Zoom". In addition, students are not extrinsically motivated by providing equipment, electricity and necessary learning environment. Therefore in return the students were not led to motivate intrinsically. B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory illustrates how punishment decreases the behaviour. Similarly, when the students experience barriers like signal issues, network failure, power cut and lack of equipment repetitively they lose the interest towards learning via "Zoom". As a result these students are reluctant in participating in the lesson.

Although 100% of the sample have learnt English via 'Zoom", only 26% of them like it while 74% indicate the negative response. As 76% of students stated that they faced economic difficulties in buying equipment, it might be one reason for their negative response. When Table 3 is observed it is evident that the

teachers have not utilized the facilities provided in "Zoom" app which are Breakout rooms, Annotation, Whiteboard etc. Therefore students too are not much aware of these facilities and due to that the students have become demotivated. Therefore it is clear why only 6% of the student sample like "Zoom" sessions. With reference to Table 4, the students stated problems such as less face to face interaction (85%), technical issues (28%), teachers' inability to notice students' weak points (57%), lack of opportunities to make clarifications on what students did not understand (64%), but there are facilities provided in 'Zoom" app for these problems. Therefore it is clear that students are not aware of these facilities as teachers do not utilize them in teaching. According to Pie Chart 2, 84% of student sample decide that "Zoom" sessions are successful to a certain extent due to the problems they experience. Those who state that it is not totally successful (12%), do not have a clear perception of "Zoom" while those who remark that it is successful (41%) are with somewhat clear perception of "Zoom".

I. Advantages of 'Zoom" app in learning English-
This is a summary of the comments given by all the students. Accordingly, the students declared that they were able to achieve education in "New normal". Further, they were impressed by the visual impact made through video sharing. Since the students can get the recording, they can work with their own pace and in turn it enhances the learner autonomy. In addition they stated that "Zoom" sessions offer them an opportunity to link with any teacher they like. Other than the above mentioned facts, some other benefits such as 'dealing with new technology', 'time saving' and 'less transport expenses' were pointed out.

II. Findings made through the interviews done with Grade 10 English teachers
The findings made through qualitative data are summarized below and the thematic analysis of qualitative data is discussed related to the research questions.
Problems teachers observe related to students learning English via "Zoom" platform-
In accordance with the analysed data collected from the interview, it is evident that 100% teachers identified three major challenges that the students experience when learning English via "Zoom". They are network failure, signal issues and lack of equipment. When the challenges face by students are prioritized next major problem face by them is reluctance of students to open the video which indicates the percentage of 80%. Moreover, 70% teachers reported that family has one phone and students request them to repeat the lesson in the physical classroom. On the other hand, lack of technical knowledge is reported by 60% teachers. In addition, power cut and 'students bored with Zoom lessons' were reported by 60% teachers. When all these analysis are considered it is evident that **more than 55% teachers found that there are students who experience each problem mentioned in table 5.** On the other hand, when the number of students' problems found by each teacher is considered, nine teachers exceed 50% of the total number of problems given in the chart.

III. Teachers' suggestions and solutions for students' problems related to learning English via "Zoom"-

The English teachers who teach Grade 10 class requested to gain a proper training on "Zoom platform"; especially on how to use breakout rooms, annotation, and video and document sharing etc. In accordance with their suggestions it is worthy to provide practical sessions for both students and teachers on how to utilize "Zoom" in teaching learning procedure. The teachers further suggested launching welfare projects to purchase smart phones or laptops for the needy students. Moreover, according to their suggestions it is better if the teachers would check the time of power cut when they schedule the lessons. On the other hand, it is difficult to handle this matter as there are disparities of power cut time from area to area. The best solution is 'recording the lesson'. In addition, the teacher can tell the students to keep the videos on to check the students' actual participation in the lesson. Reasons the teachers identified for children's problems related to learning English via "Zoom"-
With reference to teachers' observations and reports, students' attendance for "Zoom classes is very low. It is about the half of the class. The main reason that they identified for this is lack of motivation towards utilizing "Zoom" due to economic and technological problems. Moreover as teachers too are not equipped with technological knowledge to use various facilities in "Zoom", they were not able to motivate the students by using these facilities. Further the learners are deprived of face to face interaction. Although two sided conversation is provided by Web 2.0, the students and the teachers very rarely engage in interaction in learning English via Zoom platform. Student – student interaction too is restricted and the worst situation is that there are children who desperately gave up learning English because of the problems they experience in using "Zoom".
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IV.   CONCLUSION

With reference to the collected data, the challenges that the students face in learning English via "Zoom" can be summarized as signal and network issues, power cut, less face to face interaction, lack of attention, technical issues, lack of equipment etc. In addition, eyes of the students get easily tired because of the small screen and letters. Lack of opportunities to make clarifications and inability to notice students' drawbacks are some other challenges found. In accordance with students' responses and teachers' observation it is evident that more than 55% of the sample experience all these problems. Therefore it is accentuated that more than 55% students in Mawanella zone experience above mentioned issues in learning English via "Zoom". Further, more than 50% of student sample does not have a clear perception of 'Zoom" app. In addition, all the students have identified some advantages of "Zoom" app. Teachers as well as students can be empowered with a proper training on "Zoom" to get eliminated from these problems. Furthermore, all the facts, findings and suggestions mentioned in the conclusion can be generalized to Mawanella educational zone and the research topic is opened to further researches.

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