

EXAMINING THE LANDSCAPE OF ONLINE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN EXPLORATION OF CHALLENGES FACED BY THE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of this research is to explore the various types of challenges faced by the English Language Teachers working online in the Netherlands. Through a comprehensive examination, supplemented with collected research data and insights from teachers' perspectives, this paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the strengths and limitations of online English language teaching and explore potential areas for improvement.

Methods. The study was conducted in the Netherlands, where data was collected from 125 English language teachers, each with at least three years of online teaching experience. The survey method was used for data collection. A questionnaire created by the researcher which consisted of 12 questions was circulated via Google Forms. The data collected with the help of questionnaires was analysed thoroughly and the results were presented graphically to address the challenges faced by the online English language teachers in the areas of technical difficulties, content delivery and student engagement.

Results. The analysis revealed that most of the respondents (56.8%) rarely faced technical difficulties while conducting online lessons, however, 43.2% respondents had issues with the technical support provided by the English teaching platforms or institutions. The area of content delivery showed mixed response where on one hand the respondents stated that they never (28.8%) or rarely (40%) encountered difficulties in maintaining students' attention, but on the other hand, they did face issues with the organisation and structure of the lesson material available online (40.8%). Respondents also admitted that they faced student-related issues such as lack of participation (40.8%) and challenges related to students' technological proficiency or access to necessary devices/software (33.1%). 49.6% and 22.4% respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively that online English learning environments effectively accommodate diverse student needs and learning styles.

Keywords: online english language teaching, technical difficulties, content delivery, student engagement

INTRODUCTION

With about 1.4+ billion speakers, English is the most widely spoken language in the world. Proficiency in English enables individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds to communicate effectively, fostering understanding and collaboration across borders. Mastering this language not only increases career opportunities in the home country but also abroad.

The proliferation of digital technologies has profoundly transformed various aspects of contemporary society, including education. In particular, the field of Online English language teaching (OELT) has witnessed a paradigm shift with the emergence of online teaching platforms and tools.

The traditional classroom setting for language learning is no longer the sole domain. The digital age has ushered in a new era of OELT, offering a dynamic and geographically unrestricted platform for learners worldwide.

The availability of online learning through networked computers dates back to the early 1990s, aligning with the growing accessibility of hardware and the internet. In this era, pioneering institutions such as the Open University (OU) in the United Kingdom played a significant role, introducing their inaugural online language course in French in 1995. The OU's initiatives contributed significantly to the early research endeavours in the realm of online language education (White, 2003).

The rise of OELT can be attributed to several factors. The internet's ubiquity has removed geographical barriers, allowing students from any corner of the globe to connect with qualified English language instructors. The flexibility of online learning caters to busy schedules, enabling students to learn at their own pace and convenience. Additionally, OELT platforms provide a plethora of resources, including interactive exercises, multimedia tools, and opportunities for personalized learning experiences.

Simon (2012) defines online teaching as a method where the majority, if not all, of the course material is delivered via the internet. Typically, there are no in-person meetings, and at least eighty percent of the course is conducted online.

OBJECTIVES

- To Investigate the technical difficulties encountered by online English language teachers.
- To examine the hurdles encountered in content delivery by online English language instructors.
- To explore the issues surrounding student engagement encountered by online English language instructors.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What technical difficulties do online English language teachers encounter?
- What challenges do online English language teachers face during content delivery?
- What problems are experienced regarding student engagement by online English language teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Naidu (2006) highlights e-learning as the deliberate utilisation of networked information and communication technology in educational practices. Furthermore, online learning is a broad term encompassing e-learning, Internet-based learning, web-based instruction, virtual learning, or net-based learning (Urban & Weggen, 2000). Additionally, Scrivener (2011) characterises e-learning as a digital platform that consolidates various resources for course management.

A survey conducted by Simon (2012) among ten faculty members in the United States illustrated that while some aspects of online teaching, such as flexibility in time and location, were reportedly enjoyed by all participants, half of them (five out of ten) distinctly favoured traditional face-to-face classroom instruction, perceiving it as a superior learning environment. Meanwhile, three teachers expressed ambivalence towards selecting a preferred modality, one participant showed no inclination towards either mode of instruction, and the remaining individual stated a preference for online teaching.

Hew & Cheung (2014) explored the effectiveness of online English language teaching through a systematic review of literature. It found that online instruction can be as effective as traditional face-to-face instruction in enhancing language learning outcomes. Additionally, it highlighted the importance of interactive and communicative activities in online environments for promoting language acquisition.

Sun & Cheng (2016) examined the impact of synchronous versus asynchronous online instruction in English language teaching. Their findings indicated that synchronous instruction, which involves real-time interaction between instructors and students, fosters greater opportunities for communication and collaboration, leading to higher levels of student engagement and satisfaction compared to asynchronous instruction.

Almekhlafi & Almeqdadi (2010) investigated the challenges faced by English language learners in online environments. It identified factors such as technological difficulties, lack of self-discipline, and limited opportunities for interaction and feedback as significant barriers to effective online language learning. The study emphasised the importance of addressing these challenges through targeted instructional strategies and support mechanisms to enhance learner success in online ELT programs.

Zhao (2019) investigated the use of multimedia technology in online English language teaching. It revealed that integrating multimedia resources such as videos, audio recordings, and interactive simulations can enhance student engagement and

motivation, leading to improved language learning outcomes. Furthermore, the study emphasised the need for educators to carefully select and design multimedia materials to align with learning objectives and cater to diverse learner needs.

Crawford-Ferre & Wurr (2019): This research explored the challenges encountered by English language teachers in delivering online courses. It highlighted issues such as maintaining student engagement, providing effective feedback, and adapting teaching strategies to the online environment. The study suggested that professional development programmes focusing on online pedagogy could help teachers overcome these challenges.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative research approach** using **survey methodology** to collect data from English language teachers who conduct online lessons. The **descriptive research design** allows for a comprehensive understanding of the common challenges faced by teachers in areas such as **technical difficulties, content delivery, and student engagement**.

Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted in the Netherlands, where a total of 125 English language teachers participated. The selection of participants was based on the following criteria:

- Teachers must have a **minimum of three years of experience** in online English teaching.
- Participants should be **actively teaching English** through online platforms at the time of the study.
- Teachers working with **various student demographics** (children, adults, business professionals) were included to ensure diverse perspectives.

The sampling technique used was **purposive sampling**, where participants were deliberately selected to match the research objectives. This ensures that only experienced teachers who are familiar with online teaching challenges contribute to the study.

Data Collection Method

The primary tool for data collection was a structured questionnaire created by the researcher. The questionnaire was circulated via Google Forms, ensuring ease of access and participation. It comprised 12 close-ended and Likert-scale questions, allowing for quantifiable data analysis. The questionnaire was designed to cover three major areas:

- **Technical difficulties** (internet issues, software glitches, lack of support).
- **Content delivery challenges** (structuring lessons, engaging students, using multimedia).
- **Student engagement issues** (participation, attention, motivation).

DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered through the questionnaires was meticulously analysed. The survey included the following questions:

Q1. Please rate the extent to which you experience technical issues such as internet connectivity problems or software glitches during online English teaching sessions.

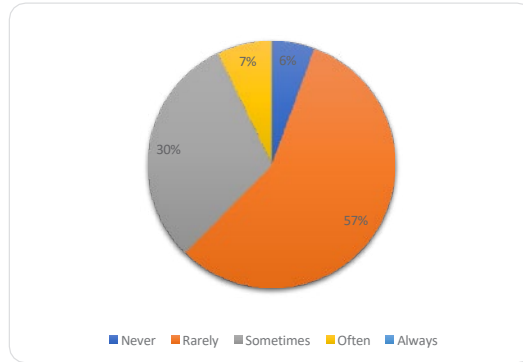


Fig. 1. Frequency of Technical Difficulties Encountered by Online Teachers.

The Netherlands demonstrates a very robust level of fixed broadband infrastructure. Its adoption rate of 97% notably exceeds the EU average of 78%. Therefore, most of the teachers (57%) rarely faced any technical issues related to internet connectivity. However, the teachers who were teaching the students from other countries where the internet connectivity was erratic did face issues (30% sometimes and 7% often).

Q2. To what extent do you encounter difficulties in navigating online teaching platforms or software tools while conducting English classes?

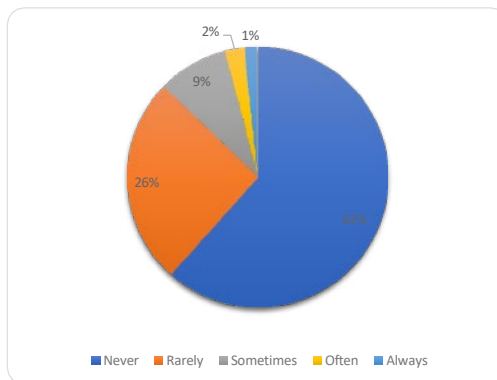


Fig. 2. Ease of Navigating Online Teaching Platforms and Software Tools.

62% of the respondents never and 26% rarely encountered any difficulties while navigating online teaching platforms or software tools to conduct their lessons.

Q3. How often do you face challenges related to audio or video quality, such as poor sound or blurry visuals, when delivering online English lessons?

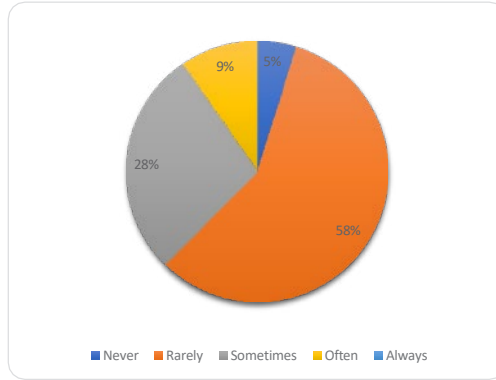


Fig. 3. Challenges in Audio and Video Quality During Online English Lessons.

Teachers rarely (58%) or sometimes (28%) faced challenges related to audio or video quality as with a good internet connectivity such issues are not common.

Q4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement: "Technical support resources provided by the online English teaching platform or institution effectively address my technical issues."

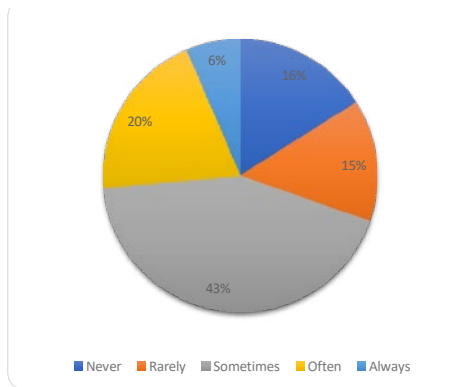


Fig. 4. Effectiveness of Technical Support Provided by Online Teaching Platforms.

It is very important to receive immediate technical support from the online teaching platforms or institutions to conduct lessons seamlessly. 43% respondents stated that they received such support sometimes, however, there were also

16% respondents who never received it.

Q5. Please rate the extent to which you encounter difficulties in maintaining students' attention during online English lessons.

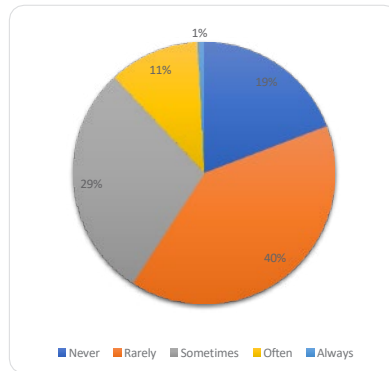


Fig. 5. Difficulties in Maintaining Students' Attention During Online English Lessons.

Approximately 29% of respondents reported never encountering difficulties in maintaining students' attention, while 11% indicated rarely experiencing them. However, a significant portion of respondents (40%) reported often facing challenges in this regard, suggesting that maintaining student engagement is a common issue in online English instruction. Another 19% of respondents reported sometimes encountering difficulties, indicating a moderate level of challenge. Only a small minority (1%) reported always encountering difficulties, reflecting that consistent struggles with student attention are less common but still present among respondents.

Q6. How often do you experience challenges in adapting lesson content to suit the online learning environment, such as adjusting activities or materials for virtual delivery?

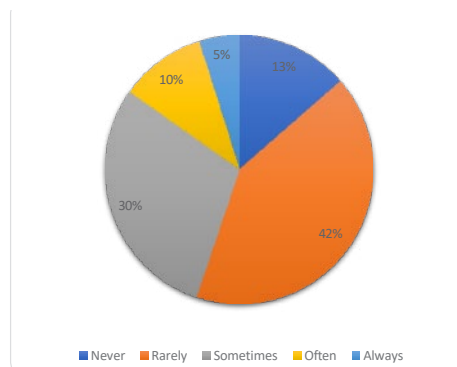


Fig. 6. Challenges in Adapting Lesson Content for Online Teaching.

Most respondents (42%) reported often experiencing challenges in adapting lesson content for online learning, indicating the widespread difficulties educators face in this aspect of virtual instruction. They may struggle with various aspects, such as finding suitable digital resources, redesigning activities for virtual engagement, or maintaining student interest in an online setting. While a significant portion (30%) reported never encountering such challenges, a smaller percentage (13%) reported occasional difficulties, and a minority (10% and 5%) reported encountering challenges rarely or always, respectively.

Q7. *To what extent do you face issues with the organization and structure of online lesson materials, such as unclear instructions or disorganized content?*

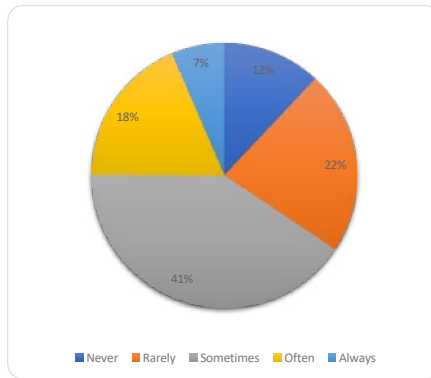


Fig. 7. Issues with Organization and Structure of Online Lesson Materials.

The data indicates that most respondents (41%) sometimes perceive issues with the organisation and structure of online lesson materials, citing problems such as unclear instructions and disorganised content. Unclear instructions can lead to confusion and hinder student engagement, while disorganised content makes it difficult for learners to navigate effectively and grasp key concepts. Additionally, 12% respondents strongly agree with this statement. Only 7% respondents never face any issues.

Q8. *How frequently do you encounter issues related to technological limitations impacting the sharing of multimedia content (e.g., videos, interactive activities) during online English lessons?*

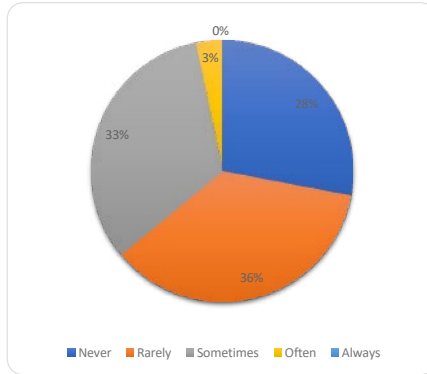


Fig. 8. Technological Limitations in Sharing Multimedia Content During Online Lessons.

Based on the responses provided, it appears that most respondents (36%) agree that they often encounter issues related to technological limitations impacting the sharing of multimedia content during online English lessons. Additionally, 33% respondents sometimes faced this challenge. However, 28% respondents shared that they never faced such issues.

Q9. Please rate the frequency with which you encounter student-related issues such as lack of participation or engagement during online English lessons.

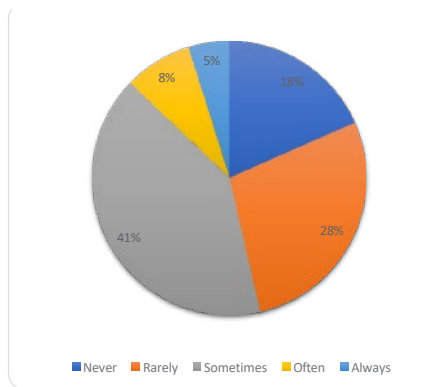


Fig. 9. Frequency of Student Participation and Engagement Issues in Online English Lessons.

This chart indicates that the majority of respondents encounter student-related issues such as lack of participation or engagement sometimes (41%) or rarely (28%), while fewer respondents experience these issues often (8) or always (5%). This suggests that while these issues are not uncommon, they are

not pervasive in every online English lesson. Possible reasons for these issues could include technical difficulties, distractions, lack of motivation, or mismatch between teaching methods and student preferences.

Q10. To what extent do you experience difficulties in managing student behaviour or maintaining discipline in the online English classroom?

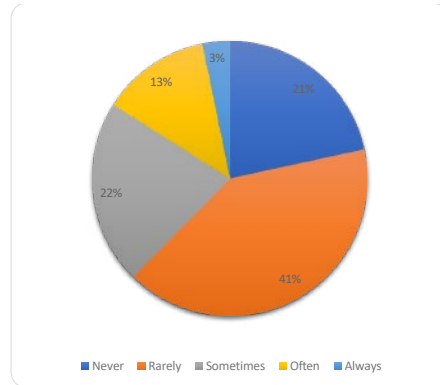


Fig. 10. Challenges in Managing Student Behaviour and Discipline in Online English Classes.

The analysis of responses regarding difficulties in managing student behaviour or maintaining discipline in the online English classroom reveals that most respondents (41%) encounter these challenges rarely, followed by 22% who experience them sometimes. About 21% respondents never face such difficulties, while a minority (12%) encounter them often or always (3%). This suggests that while managing student behaviour is generally manageable for most respondents, a notable portion encounters occasional or frequent challenges in maintaining discipline in the online learning environment.

Q11. How often do you encounter challenges related to students' technological proficiency or access to necessary devices/software for participating in online English lessons?

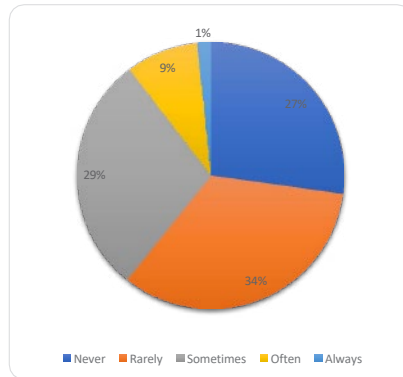


Fig. 11. Challenges in Students' Technological Proficiency or Access to Necessary Devices/ Software.

Most respondents (34%) rarely or never (27%) encounter challenges related to students' technological proficiency or access to necessary devices/software for online English lessons, likely due to a combination of factors such as sufficient access to technology and high levels of student technological proficiency. Additionally, 29% of respondents encounter these challenges sometimes, which may be attributed to occasional technical issues or varying levels of technological familiarity among students. However, only 9% experience these challenges often, potentially influenced by factors like disparities in access to technology or occasional technical difficulties. Only 2% always encounter them, suggesting persistent issues such as inadequate access to technology or ongoing technical challenges for a small minority of online educators.

Q12. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement: "Online English learning environments effectively accommodate diverse student needs and learning styles."

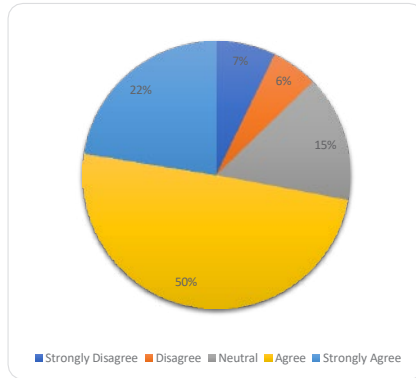


Fig. 12. Effectiveness of Online Learning Environments in Accommodating Diverse Student Needs.

The pie chart reveals a predominantly positive perception among respondents. Nearly half of the respondents (50%) agreed, while over a fifth (22%) strongly agreed that these environments effectively accommodate diverse student needs and learning styles. This favorable view could be attributed to several factors, including the flexibility and accessibility offered by online platforms, the availability of various resources catering to different learning preferences, the potential for personalised learning experiences, and the adaptability of online tools to accommodate a wide range of learning styles. Despite some respondents expressing neutrality (15%) and a minority expressing disagreement (7% strongly disagree, 6% disagree), the overall trend suggests a widespread recognition of the benefits of online English learning environments in meeting diverse educational needs.

CROSS TABULATION ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Below are some key cross-tabulations based on the data from the research:

Table 1
Technical Issues vs. Teaching Platform Satisfaction

Technical Issues Faced	Satisfied with Online Teaching Platforms (%)	Dissatisfied with Online Teaching Platforms (%)
Rarely/Never (56.8%)	80%	20%
Sometimes/Often (43.2%)	50%	50%

Interpretation: Teachers who rarely or never face technical issues tend to be more satisfied with the online teaching platforms. Those who experience tech-

nical difficulties frequently are evenly split between satisfaction and dissatisfaction, indicating that resolving technical challenges could improve platform satisfaction.

Table 2
Student Engagement vs. Technical Support Received

Student Engagement Level	Received Effective Technical Support (%)	Did Not Receive Effective Technical Support (%)
High (Never/Rarely face engagement issues)	75%	25%
Moderate (Sometimes face engagement issues)	50%	50%
Low (Often/Always face engagement issues)	30%	70%

Interpretation: A lack of effective technical support correlates with lower student engagement. Teachers who receive adequate technical assistance report higher engagement, possibly because smooth-running platforms allow for better lesson delivery and interaction.

Table 3
Content Adaptation vs. Student Engagement

Challenges in Adapting Lesson Content (%)	High Student Engagement (%)	Low Student Engagement (%)
Rarely/Never (43%)	70%	30%
Sometimes (13%)	50%	50%
Often/Always (42%)	35%	65%

Interpretation: Teachers who struggle with adapting lesson content for online teaching tend to report lower student engagement. This suggests that well-structured, engaging materials play a crucial role in keeping students active during lessons.

Table 4
Organisation of Online Materials vs. Student Participation

Lesson Material Well-Organised (%)	High Student Participation (%)	Low Student Participation (%)
Yes (Rarely/Never face content issues)	75%	25%
No (Often/Sometimes face content issues)	45%	55%

Interpretation: Students participate more when lesson materials are well-organised and easy to navigate. Teachers who struggle with structuring their

online content report lower student engagement, indicating a need for better-organised resources.

Table 5

Student Technological Proficiency vs. Online Learning Effectiveness

Student Technological Proficiency (%)	Find Online Learning Effective (%)	Find Online Learning Ineffective (%)
High (Never/Rarely face tech access issues)	85%	15%
Moderate (Sometimes face tech access issues)	60%	40%
Low (Often/Always face tech access issues)	35%	65%

Interpretation: Teachers who report that their students have high technological proficiency are more likely to find online learning effective. Conversely, when students struggle with technology access or skills, teachers find online learning less effective.

Key Takeaways from Cross-Tabulation Analysis:

- Technical issues impact overall satisfaction – Teachers who experience fewer technical difficulties tend to be more satisfied with online platforms.
- Technical support improves student engagement – Adequate tech support allows for smoother classes, leading to better student participation.
- Lesson structure matters – Well-adapted and well-organised lesson materials contribute significantly to student engagement.
- Technology proficiency enhances effectiveness – When students are comfortable with technology, online learning is perceived as more effective.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study shed light on the realities of online English language teaching, presenting both strengths and areas that require attention. The findings indicate that while online teaching offers flexibility and accessibility, it also comes with unique challenges that affect teachers' ability to deliver lessons effectively.

Technical Challenges: A Manageable Concern

The study suggests that technical difficulties are not a major barrier for most teachers in the Netherlands due to the country's strong internet infrastructure. However, the fact that 43.2% of teachers reported issues with technical support highlights a gap in institutional readiness. While internet connectivity is generally stable, teachers require immediate assistance in case of platform malfunctions or software-related issues. A lack of prompt technical support could disrupt lessons and affect teaching quality.

Content Delivery: The Struggle with Organisation and Adaptation

While teachers generally find it easy to maintain students' attention, issues related to content organisation (40.8%) and adapting materials for virtual delivery (42%) suggest that online teaching resources may not always be structured optimally. This implies that while there is an abundance of digital content available, not all of it is well-organised or tailored for online education. Educators may need additional training or resources to streamline their lesson planning and enhance the effectiveness of their teaching materials.

Student Engagement: A Key Challenge

One of the most significant concerns highlighted in the study is student engagement. While discipline is not a major issue, ensuring active participation remains a challenge. This suggests that online learning environments, despite their advantages, may not always provide the same level of interaction and motivation as traditional face-to-face classrooms. Factors such as distractions at home, lack of peer interaction, and passive learning experiences could contribute to lower student participation. Teachers may need to incorporate more interactive elements such as gamified learning, breakout room discussions, and real-world applications to boost engagement.

Technological Proficiency: A Mixed Scenario

The findings suggest that most students are comfortable using digital tools, but certain groups (young learners or older students) may require occasional assistance. This highlights the need for age-appropriate technology training and support mechanisms. Institutions and educators should consider integrating short digital literacy workshops at the beginning of courses to ensure all students are well-equipped to navigate the learning platform.

Effectiveness of Online Learning Environments

A majority of respondents (49.6% agreed, 22.4% strongly agreed) believe that online learning environments effectively accommodate diverse student needs and learning styles. This reflects the adaptability of digital platforms, which allow students to learn at their own pace, access a variety of resources, and receive personalised feedback. However, the presence of neutral and negative responses suggests that some aspects, such as accessibility to engaging content, need improvement. Institutions could address this by providing more structured lesson plans, adaptive learning technologies, and enhanced teacher training programmes.

SUGGESTIONS

- Online English Language Teachers must regularly participate in training and professional development programmes to upgrade their skills and knowledge about the latest platforms and software tools available for teaching.

- A clear dialogue with the institution/organisation must be made to resolve the technical difficulties faced while handling the online resources.
- Age and level specific content should be extracted carefully from the unlimited online pool to encourage participation of students.
- Clear instructions should be given to students regarding the online material provided.
- Activity based material keeps the students more engaged, hence, active learning is more productive than passive.

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