

The effectiveness of learning process of Arabic language via online in Sri Lanka: An analytical study among the students of Department of Arabic, Eastern University, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The universities have a huge role to play in creating the human resources needed for the development of the country and streamlining research-related activities. Sri Lanka has been hit hardest by the recent global COVID 19 pandemic. In this context, nowadays, all educational institutes have teaching and learning process through online. Department of Arabic attached to Eastern University, Sri Lanka is implementing e-learning activities. Although online learning and teaching activities was an unavoidable feature in the COVID 19 Pandemic period, the research question is whether it is found to be effective in student learning and to what extent its directory level exists. This study tries to introduce the higher education sector in Sri Lanka, especially Eastern University, Sri Lanka and to find out the possible ways to build up and promote online teaching and learning system in Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The researcher has used the questionnaires through distributing the Google form to the students in primary data as well as he brings the library survey in the secondary sources. The study has concluded that, the online teaching and learning process in the Department of Arabic, is particularly successful. The students had advance instructions issued on organizing lectures and the lecturers have followed best culture in teaching. The lecturers could understand students' learning need and followed good approach to ensure students participation.

Key Words: Online, Arabic Language, Effectiveness, Eastern University

Introduction

Sri Lanka is a South Asian country with a high literacy rate of 92% of the population. It is worrying that the impact of this figure on getting a university degree is low. Higher education places more emphasis on acquiring operational knowledge as the curriculum is fully focused on curriculum knowledge. It is also considered to be one of the most essential for gaining career opportunities in the private sector. Government universities do not have an all-encompassing system that qualifies for university education. In fact, only about 25,000 students can afford it. As a result, about 30,000 students are unable to get admission in qualified government universities. As a result, many talented students are motivated to choose private

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universities or vocational training courses. Without adequate funding, many are unable to pursue education at private universities. That is, it affects the entire human resource due to the lack of employers that can serve the country with quality and high value capabilities. Higher education comprises all post-secondary education, training and research guidance at education institutions such as universities that are authorized as institutions of higher education by state authorities. It includes all the activities a given country deems to be higher education - not only those that take place within ordinary universities and graduate schools, but shorter term education and training courses (polytechnics, junior colleges, and various forms of technical specialty schools) that are 2-3 years in length, and even correspondence courses that make use of information technology and are targeted at a broad population of students. (JICA, 2003, p: 1)

In this context, we have to understand Sri Lankan historical higher educational system. Because, Sri Lanka has a higher education from its ancient period; “Higher education in Sri Lanka has been based on the several prominent Pirivenas (Ancient Buddhist Monks Training Centers) during the local Kingdoms. The origins of the modern university system in Sri Lanka dates back to 1921 when a University College, the Ceylon University College was established at the former premises of Royal College Colombo affiliated to the University of London. However, the begin of modern higher education in Ceylon was in 1870 when the Ceylon Medical School was established followed by Colombo Law College (1875), School of Agriculture (1884) and the Government Technical College (1893). The University of Ceylon was established on 1 July 1942 by the Ceylon University Ordinance No.20 of 1942 which was to be unitary, residential and autonomous. The University was located in Colombo and several years later a second campus was built in Peradeniya. University of Ceylon became the University of Sri Lanka follow in the University of Ceylon Act No. 1 of 1972 resulting in a more centralized administration and more direct government control, this gave way for creation of separate universities after the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978. Even though new universities of independent identities were created government maintained its direct control and centralized administration though the University Grants Commission. Late Hon. Lalith

Athulathmudali as Minister of Education developed an initiative to develop the higher education of the country in the 1980s, the Mahapola Fund established by him provided scholarship and much needed founding to higher educational institution to this day. Until amendments to the University Act were made in 1999 only state universities were allowed to grant undergraduate degrees, however this has since changed. There are currently only 15 state universities in Sri Lanka. The prominent ones are University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna, University of Kelaniya, University of Sri Jayawardhenapura and University of Moratuwa. In recent years with changes to the University Act a few institutes have been given permission to grant their own degrees, the most prominent is the government owned Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology.” (Ministry of Education, 2021)

The students for Departments of Arabic Language are being selected to the national universities such as South Eastern University Sri Lanka, Eastern University Sri Lanka, University of Peradeniya; University of Colombo in every academic year to learn the Arabic language, especially in SEUSL has a separate Faculty which is a unique faculty in Sri Lanka for Islamic and Arabic studies. There are very short percentages students are coming to EUSL every academic year, and they are need several things to learn more, but in the pandemic situation, the students have faced many problems in learning Arabic and achieving the top grade. Through this research bring out these challenges and problems.

Statement of Research Problem

Sri Lanka is one of the countries affected by covid-19 where normal life has flicker and all aspects of life have been forced. This influence has been exacerbated in the field of education because the government closed the doors of all schools, declared a state of emergency, noticed curfews, and ordered to implement self-isolation in homes. These steps were reflected in education, in particular preventing the learning and teaching processes carried out by universities students. This study looks at the COVID 19 pandemic and the problems faced by universities students in Sri Lanka.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are formulated as follows;

1. To identify the problems and challenges faced by the students in teaching and learning system in pandemic situation.
2. To present the suitable solutions and suggestions to build up and promote online teaching and learning system in Arabic online teaching in Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

Methodology

The researcher has used descriptive and analytical method to complete this study. The primary source has been used through collecting data from questionnaires which were distributed to the students with Google form and the 14 students out of 20 from the second and third level current students were sampled to the questionnaires. And also the researcher used the questionnaire as a tool for collecting information. A questionnaire was built targeting students who learn Arabic at Department of Arabic, Faculty of Arts & Culture, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, as the study sample. The answers were saved using a computer, copied and analyzed using appropriate qualitative data analysis techniques. All questionnaire answers were discussed and adapted to identify problems in online teaching and learning process.

And secondary data was collected from the research articles, books, journal and other electronic sources.

Finding and Results

1. COVID 19 and Sri Lankan National Universities:

The purpose of education is to mold a person to be perfect. Education provides the pathway to reach their destiny. Education helps in inculcating social responsibilities as well. The main core of education is to learn. Learning is a process of acquiring knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught. Any freak accident that happens in the world will always leave its impact on education. And so the epidemic of COVID 19 has its footprints on education. The outbreak of this dangerous virus across the globe has forced educational institutions to shut down to

control the spread of this virus. This happening made the teaching professionals think of alternative methods of teaching during this lockdown. And thus it paves the way towards web-based learning or e-learning or online learning. In today's scenario learning has stepped into the digital world. In which teaching professionals and students are virtually connected. E-learning is quite simple to understand and implement. The use of a desktop, laptop, or smartphones and the internet forms a major component of this learning methodology. E-learning provides rapid growth and proved to be the best in all sectors, especially in education during this lockdown. (Sathishkumar, Radha, Mahalakshmi & Saravanakumar, 2020, p: 1088)

In this context, the Sri Lankan government closed all the universities in the country on 12th March 2020 and suspended all academic activities. The government also imposed a nationwide curfew on 20th March 2020. During this period, Sri Lanka's higher education sector faced various challenges. The closure of fifteen national universities and other higher education institutions ultimately affected the teaching and learning activities of students. University admission, assessment and examination, graduation ceremonies, recruitment and promotion activities were temporarily postponed. Employees working in higher education institutions also faced severe challenges in receiving their salaries and other allowances on time because of the continuous curfew. In this situation, the government announced a strategy called Work from Home, and this move forced university teachers and other staff to carry out their academic and administrative work from their respective homes. (Rameez, Fowsar & Noohu, 2020)

2. Introduction to online teaching and learning process

Online learning is education that takes place over the Internet. It is often referred to as “elearning” among other terms. However, online learning is just one type of “distance learning” - the umbrella term for any learning that takes place across distance and not in a traditional classroom. (Stern, n.d.)

The revolution of information and global based availability of technology has a major impact on contemporary education. It is playing a major role in all new pedagogical skills in education at all levels. There are many available sources online to learn from wherever you need it. Digital devices and gadgets do not only provide students to

engage in entertainment, but also make more opportunities for them to engage in learning activities. (Sathishkumar, Radha, Mahalakshmi & Saravanakumar, 2020, p: 1089)

The minimum requirement for students to participate in an online course is access to a computer, the Internet, and the motivation to succeed in a non-traditional classroom. Online courses provide an excellent method of course delivery unbound by time or location allowing for accessibility to instruction at anytime from anywhere. Learners find the online environment a convenient way to fit education into their busy lives. The ability to access a course from any computer with Internet access, 24 hours a day, seven days a week is a tremendous incentive for many of today's students. (Stern, n.d.)

Eastern University, Sri Lanka

The Eastern University, Sri Lanka, was established on the 01st of October 1986 by a University Order dated 26th September 1986 issued under Section 2 of the Universities Act No: 16 of 1978. The University was preceded by the Batticaloa University College established on 01st August 1981 which was started in the buildings of the Vantharumoolai Madya Maha Vidyalayam. In addition, over 100 acres of land have been added to the original Campus. Student hostels and staff quarters have been constructed on this land and many new buildings are planned. The Batticaloa University College began with two faculties: The Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Agriculture and both these faculties were affiliated to the University of Peradeniya. Two new faculties viz. the Faculty of Commerce & Management with the Departments of Economics, Commerce & Management, and the Faculty of Cultural Studies with the Departments of Arabic, Islamic Studies and Fine Arts were established in 1988. The Faculty of Cultural Studies was then expanded to include the Department of Languages and the Department of Social Science and renamed the Faculty of Arts & Culture in 1991. The Faculty of Health -Care Sciences was established in November 2005 by the Gazette Notification. The initial programme conducted by EUSL in Human Health Sciences was the Post Basic Diploma in Nursing. The year 2006 was significant year to Faculty of Health-Care Sciences. (EUSL, 2021)

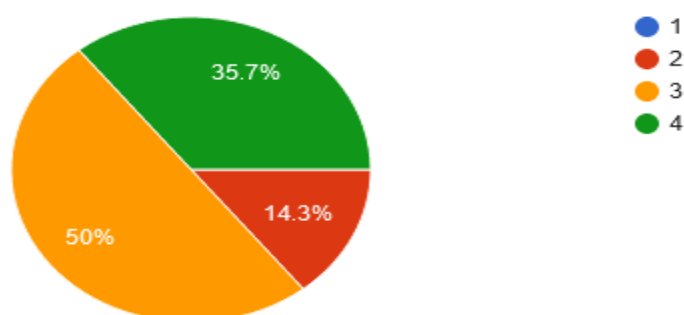
3. Department of Arabic

The department of Arabic is the oldest one in the FAC, EUSL. This department has been offering B.A. degree programme since it has established in 1982. This programme includes the main aspects of language (Linguistics, Literature and Translation). The course of this programme is designed to develop competency in the Arabic language which possesses a long history and literary tradition in addition to it has a huge place in the business world. It is designed to learn the aspects of the existing languages as well as the dead languages and relationships between languages and other disciplines. Indeed, this course will help the students with enhancing the employment opportunity both locally and internationally. (FAC, 2016, p: 50)

Data Analysis

The questionnaire included 30 items. 14 students out of 36 from all levels of academic years, answered. It is a 41.17% of total population as the following figure -1 show;

Figure - 1 Population of study



Source: Author via questionnaire

Table: 1

Implementation of online teaching

QUESTION	More	Mostly	To some extent	No
Have you been encouraged in online learning?	42.9	14.3	42.9	
Advance instructions were issued on organizing lesson?	42.3	50	7.1	
Is there any instruction given on the	35.7	42.9	14.3	7.1

subject to be taught in a particular online class?				
Were groups formed using social media for communication?	35.7	14.3	28.6	21.4
Was a best culture followed in teaching?	35.7	57.1	7.1	
Was an approach followed to ensure students participation?	42.9	42.9	14.3	
Was the lecturer able to understand your learning need?	28.6	50	21.4	
Do you think the teacher is able to understand students' participation in the learning process?	14.3	57.1	21.4	7.1
Did the lecturer focus his attention on the student psychological need and carry out his learning process?	28.6	57.1	7.1	7.1

Source: Author via questionnaire

Various factors play an important role in making online teaching and learning process an effective activity. The teacher's personality has an impact on this. According to the table 1, it is observable that the online teaching and learning process in Department of Arabic, is particularly successful. Here, the students pointed out that, they had advance instructions issued on organizing lectures and the lecturers have followed best culture in teaching. Because, due to the statement carried out by the table - 1, the lecturers could understand students' learning need and followed good approach to ensure students participation. Some students say that, the communication process via formed groups using social media such as Whatsapp, is very poor and mostly not effective.

Table: 2 *Usage of technology*

QUESTION	More	Mostly	To some extent	No
Were flexible tools used for?	7.1	35.7	50	7.1
Has enough digital technology been used?	28.6	21.4	42.9	7.1

Were the lectures recorded?	14.3	35.7	42.9	7.1
Were recorded videos used for teaching process?	21.4	14.3	57.1	7.1
Were the video lessons clear?	42.9		50	7.1
Were you able to get the video or audio recorded at the end of the lecture?	21.4	35.7	21.4	21.4
Did you get the notes at the end of the lecture in Word, Power point, PDF format?	35.7	35.7	21.4	7.1

Source: Author via questionnaire

“The role of technology in the field of education is four-fold: it is included as a part of the curriculum, as an instructional delivery system, as a means of aiding instructions and also as a tool to enhance the entire learning process. Thanks to technology; education has gone from passive and reactive to interactive and aggressive.” (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018, p: S34) Due to this, Department of Arabic, Eastern University highly uses digital technology to ensure its online teaching and learning process. But, there is a poor context in getting and using digital forms as stated by some students as Table - 2 shows. Specially, using flexible tools and recorded videos for teaching process and ensuring to get the video or audio recorded at the end of the lecture, must be most considerable.

Table: 3 *Efficiency of teaching and learning process*

QUESTION	More	Mostly	To some extent	No
Was interaction (Teacher - Student, Student - Student) maintained during online learning?	35.7	35.7	28.6	
Were the learning activities interesting?	21.4	42.9	35.7	
Is Continuous improvement of quality maintained in online classes?	7.1	57.1	35.7	
Are students given the opportunity to raise questions and send feedback?	42.9	50	7.1	
Are the lectures started on time?	35.7	57.1		7.1

Are students asked to switch on their videos?	14.3	14.3	35.7	35.7
During online lectures, are students encouraged for searching and responding on the Internet or using other resources?	28.6	28.6	35.7	7.1

Source: Author via questionnaire

Like interaction between teachers and students, continuous improvement of quality, lectures starting on time are very sincere approaches to make a teaching an effective and productivity process. As pointed out by the students as in the table - 3, Department of Arabic, EUSL, could ensure its teaching and learning process most useful. Thus, the there is a democratic approached followed by the lecturers during teaching process. It is notified here that, the lecturers didn't encourage the students to switch on the front camera due to some cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, it might influence the effectiveness in learning and teaching and proscribe the observation. Because the students may miss use the tool and time upon lecturing. This is confirmed by Raja and Nagasubramani, (2018) through their one of researches; "SMS or text messaging has become a favorite pastime of many students. Students are seen playing with their cell phone, iPhones day and night or driving and very often even between lectures. Being ever-connected to the online world has resulted in lack of focus and concentration in academics and to some extent, even in sports and extracurricular activities." (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018, p: S34)

Table: 4 *Support of university management*

QUESTION	More	Mostly	To some extent	No
Did the university administration organize digital resources?	14.3	14.3	14.3	57.1
Was training and awareness provided to students in relation to digital devices?	15	23.1	46.2	15.4
Does your university provide a management standard internet connection	7.1	35.7	14.3	42.9

and digital devices for student use?				
Are non-academic staff cooperating for you e-learning process?	14.3	14.3	28.6	42.9

Source: Author via questionnaire

“Advent of globalization the education system in most countries is in a state of continuous modernization and reform. Nowadays managing and leadership have become relatively recent field of study among academics, researchers. The first thing that needs to be said is before now managing and leadership were a theme of politics, traders, economics.” (ARTICLEKZ, n.d.) As stated by the respondents, the role of university management is not remarkable. It is pointed out by some respondents. The conceprising and planning must be created by the management. Specially, as curried out in the table - 4, the management has to fetch the support of non-academic staff for the success of the educational processes.

Table: 5 *Financial and technical sponsorship*

QUESTION	More	Mostly	To some extent	No
Have you received financial support for online learning?		21.6	14.3	64.3
Are you technically sponsored?	14.3	14.3	35.7	35.7

Source: Author via questionnaire

The needs heavily reflect on one’s goal. It may be a determining thing of every event in the world. “A child must be well fed, sleep well, feel healthy at home, and have confidence in themselves in order to become successful in school. Being a successful person is usually depending on the financial outcome of the family background is immense. According to Abraham Maslow, whose theory of Hierarchy of Needs is a well-known theory that focuses on a collection of conditions for performance? He was an American psychologist who created a hierarchy of needs to describe human motivation in 1943. (Mcleod, 2020). The table - 5, explains that, the respondents have received limited financial and technical sponsorship. In this context, the students shall face more difficulties to forward their education specially, learning process through online.

Conclusion

Higher education plays an important role in the development of a country. The universities have a huge role to play in creating the human resources needed for the development of the country and streamlining research-related activities. Sri Lanka has been hit hardest by the recent global pandemic, which has severely affected the political, economic and social education sectors. However, universities are engaged in learning and teaching activities with the aim of providing continuous academic activities. The survey confirmed that the 34 students studying in the department of Arabic, EUSL, are mostly involved in online learning and teaching activities, which are conducted by the department.

The study has concluded that, the online teaching and learning process in Department of Arabic, is particularly successful. The students had advance instructions issued on organizing lectures and the lecturers have followed best culture in teaching. The lecturers could understand students' learning need and followed good approach to ensure students participation. Eastern University highly uses digital technology to ensure its online teaching and learning process. Like interaction between teachers and students, continuous improvement of quality, lectures starting on time are very sincere approaches to make a teaching an effective and productivity process. The respondents have received limited financial and technical sponsorship. In this context, the students shall face more difficulties to forward their education specially, learning process through online. This study proposes to make necessary action to ensure using flexible tools by students and using recorded videos for teaching process by lecturers upon learning and teaching process and ensuring to get the video or audio recorded at the end of the lecture. The management has to fetch the support of non-academic staff for the success of the educational processes.

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