
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Investigation of E-Learning Stress, Anxiety, and Depression on ESL Students' Performance at Speaking Skills in the Gulf Region

Marium Bushra¹ ✉ Shabina Tabassum², Abida Bibi Yousaf³ and Sabiha Khatoon⁴

¹²³⁴Lecturer Jazan University, department of foreign language

Corresponding Author: Marium Bushra, **E-mail:** mhanif@jazanu.edu.sa

| ABSTRACT

This paper will investigate the stress of e-learning on ESL students' mental health and their performance in speaking skill exams. This prolonged pandemic has put people at risk of developing mental illness and physical disease. The mental distress caused by the covid 19 has adversely affected the education sector significantly higher education students. The objective of this research paper will also review the relationship between prolonged exposure to digital learning stress, mental well-being, and student's performance. A cross-sectional descriptive study will be (survey)designed to assess the level of Anxiety, Stress, and depression in graduate students undergoing online classes in KSA. The population of this research will be ESL students studying for a graduate degree at Qasim University KSA and Kuwait University in GULF after the COVID-19 pandemic. A random stratified sample will be collected. The research tool will consist of a questionnaire based on DASS 21. Data will be collected and analyzed by SPSS (version 27). Results will be drawn, and remedial coping strategies will be recommended to help university students cope with the psychological burden affecting their speaking skill performance.

| KEYWORDS

ESL, E-learning in endemic, mental wellbeing, stress, outcome based approach.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 September 2024

PUBLISHED: 29 September 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijels.2024.6.4.1

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Traditional educational practices have been significantly disrupted by social distancing and restrictive movement policies over the past two years due to COVID-19 and its variants. Educational institutions shifted from face-to-face on-campus learning to virtual, off-campus e-learning to deliver quality education. These asynchronous/ synchronous learning management systems use one digital platform to provide a virtual class environment. These customizable cloud-based LMS like Moodle, Canvas, and Blackboard are more frequently used in KSA. Also, videoconferencing platforms like WebEx and Zoom Microsoft Teams were used by instructors and students to engage in scholarly communication. However, it has been reported that exclusive e-learning methods have resulted in mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression symptoms among many students due to the stressful workload required. *This study aims to investigate the impact of COVID-19-induced e-learning on the stress perceptions of university students.*

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to the UN, since 2020, shutting down" of educational institutions all around the world" in 188 countries has disrupted the studies of more than 1.5 billion children, teenagers, and university students, relinquishing years of sustainable development in education. One negative impact of this inevitable fast transition multiplied the stress, anxiety, and depression in university students who are already under immense pressure to achieve good grades for their future success. Students face various technical problems since e-learning is dependent on the internet, which is vulnerable to d dos attacks. Another problem arose from the fear

of losing health, grades, family issues, lack of effective communication with peers, and student-teacher support. These psychological, physiological, social, and emotional challenges led to mental health issues among students during online education. These affected the students' ability of L2 Speaking Skills. Academic stress arose primarily from a prevalent mental health concern among university students. It is caused primarily by a fear of poor performance, bad grades, and delays in completing their studies. The inability to study or understand the context, as some other fellows, leads to incompetency in coping with the online system and the burden of failure. Especially in KSA, there is a lack of social support, and students are expected to perform without considering their mental well-being. Thus, this study aims to highlight strategic strategies that need to be implemented by the university to reduce the stress of e-learning on their performance.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To investigate the impact of Covid -19 on e-learning experiences related to the mental health and well-being of university students, especially in the context of L2 English Speaking Skills
- To provide remedial pedagogical strategies to overcome related stress, anxiety, and depression in students to reduce the long-term consequences of the pandemic on students' lives.
- To make higher education institutions in KSA prioritize student engagement and provide social support practices.

1.4 Research Questions:

- What is the impact of e-learning stress on university students' mental health?
- How can stress, anxiety and depression negatively impact students' performance with regard to speaking skills?
- How can universities in KSA incorporate feasible approaches to handling stress, anxiety, and depression among students?

1.5 Significance of the Study

There is a clear connection between mental health and academic performance. **Helping students** make the most of their education is everyone's goal. Students struggling with depression or other mental illnesses have a more challenging time feeling motivated, learning, concentrating, taking tests, etc.

The findings of this study will help higher education educators, administrators, and policymakers improve e-learning implementation while ensuring students' mental and psychological well-being. This study tends to fill the gap in the literature about studies related to evaluating the prevalence of e-learning stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms among students during Covid 19 attaining higher education in the Gulf area, especially in Saudi Arabia.

1.6 Limitations

This study is limited to preparatory year level 1 male and female students of university studying ELT undergoing stress, anxiety, and depression due to e-learning during one semester of the academic year 2021-2022

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mental wellbeing

The review of related literature highlights the various factors that impact students' mental health in a virtual learning setup. Mental health is significant at every stage of life. However, elements that can contribute to an adverse effect include trauma or, in this case, the pandemic, which has generated feelings of uncertainty, despair, anxiety, and loss of purpose, affecting students' cognitive, social, and personality development. A computer-based communicative environment may lead to mental issues if the students are unprepared for this change. Mental health can be defined as the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of an individual that determines how that person thinks, behaves, or responds to stress.

"Adopting new technologies generally is not easy. Users of videoconferencing technologies for synchronous online learning activities have found it mentally exhausting (Bailenson, 2021)."

2.2 E-Learning and Stress/depression/Anxiety

a) Depression: This subscale evaluates symptoms like depressed mood, loss of enjoyment or interest, and worthlessness sentiments.

b) Anxiety: This subscale gauges nervous arousal symptoms such as tenseness, restlessness, and panic attacks.

c) Stress: The stress subscale assesses signs of ongoing stress, such as restlessness, impatience, and a feeling of being overburdened

E-learning relies on the internet and computers to provide a learning management system that can cater to many students and deliver education in a virtual environment. Managing student fears and expectations is the biggest challenge, as student learning

preferences are different. Some students are Visual learners or Auditory (aural) learners, while some are Kinesthetic (hands-on) learners.

Many university students who are studying at university live in far-off areas with poor, unstable internet connections. These connectivity errors lead these students to lag during videoconferencing, accessing their LMS live session, asking their instructor about a concept they don't understand, or not attending online exams adequately, which results in high stress levels and poor mental health. Also, the lack of English fluency compared to other students makes some students depressed and shy about voicing their opinions.

Also, students belonging to lower socioeconomic backgrounds feel the ever-widening digital divide since they fall short of obtaining the latest gadgets or fast internet access. "socioeconomic inequalities can result in mental health disparities among students during the pandemic (Cleofas and Rocha, 2021)."

2.3 Covid 19 and mental health research in the Gulf

Management of the online working processes can lead to stress. Also, students might suffer from anxiety, showing symptoms like fear or constant worry. They may be suffering from depression, which is represented by a lack of interest in life, disappointment, lack of motivation, hopelessness, irritability, anger, and nervousness. Leaving this condition can lead to the inability to do work or maintain relationships, follow a daily routine, or have personal interactions.

From May to June 2020, a study was done in the United Arab Emirates to learn more about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university faculty, staff, and students, as well as the coping strategies used during the lockdown. "' Miskry, Hamid, and Darweesh (2020)' The Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ-16) was used to assess worry, while the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS-48) was utilized to determine individuals' coping techniques during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown."

COVID-19 hurt the mental health and welfare of university students, according to a study conducted at the University of Nizwa, Oman (2021) by Malik and Javid and published in Middle East Current Psychiatry. Furthermore, if public emergencies are combined with home confinement, the adverse psychological effects are amplified. Al Hadi and Alhuwaydi (2021) wrote a research paper, "The Mental Health Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 Crisis on university students in Saudi Arabia and associated factors". The resulting statistic consisting of male and female students showed that 40.8% had significant symptoms of anxiety, 48.8% had significant symptoms of depression, and 86.7% had moderate to high perceived stress.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design:

Descriptive research based on the survey method.

3.2 Population of the study:

The **study population is** Respondents from universities in KSA and the Gulf studying ELT in the prep year of bachelor's degree.

3.3 Sampling:

Random stratified sampling

3.4. Instrumentation

Digital questionnaire-Self-report questionnaire

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1 Data collection

University students will be sent a questionnaire regarding their satisfaction with e-learning and the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms using a psychometric scale of DASS 21. DASS 21 measures the symptoms of all three problems simultaneously. A self-report questionnaire called the DASS-21) is used to gauge how severe common mental health symptoms are. This is a condensed version of the 42-item original DASS. Three subscales make up the DASS-21, and each one assesses a distinct facet of mental health: Respondents score the degree to which they have encountered each symptom throughout the previous week on each of the seven items in each subscale. Based on mild, moderate, severe, and highly severe scores, DASS 21 is interpreted as given in the table below based on the work of Lovibond, S.H. & Lovibond, P.F. (1995)

DASS scale score	Level of psychological distress		
	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Normal	0-9	0-7	0-14
Mild	10-13	8-9	15-18
moderate	14-20	10-14	19-25
Extremely Severe	21-27	15-19	26-33

4.2 Data analysis

Data will be analyzed using IBM SPSS. 78% of the students were found to be suffering from moderate to severe speech impairment due to depression, stress, and anxiety. 10% of the respondents were suffering from mild anxiety, while 12% were normal. So, the majority of students felt a negative barrier in speaking a foreign language due to the speaking exam stress, anxiety to face their peers, and depression at underperformance. Since these conditions can impair language competency and communication. Especially the ability to talk was undermined affect during COVID-19 when speaking exams were mostly online through platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, increasing the fear of poor performance.

1. **Reduced Fluency:** Stress and anxiety can cause a student's fluency to decline, making it difficult for them to speak clearly and concisely. They might pause, struggle to find the correct words or encounter disruptions in their speaking.
2. **Limited Vocabulary:** Cognitive issues, such as memory and concentration issues, can be exacerbated by depression in particular. This could lead to a decreased capacity for language retention and application during speaking exercises.
3. **Fear of Judgement:** Fear of being judged by others is a common side effect of anxiety. Students who experience this fear may find it difficult to speak honestly or participate in impromptu conversations because they are afraid of making mistakes or coming across as unworthy.
4. **Impaired speech:** Physical strain caused by stress and anxiety can have an impact on speech and articulation. Accurate sound production can be difficult for students, which might make it difficult for them to communicate.
5. **Avoidance of Communication:** People who are depressed, anxious, or stressed out may avoid social situations, including speaking in public. Their exposure to language exercise may be limited as a result of this avoidance, which could impede their ability to speak more clearly.
6. **Effect on Confidence:** Students' self-esteem and confidence can be negatively impacted by ongoing stress and despair. Students may find it more difficult to participate fully in conversations when given speaking assignments due to this lack of confidence.
7. **Difficulty Expressing Emotions:** Depression can cause a person to have trouble verbally expressing their feelings. Students may find it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings clearly, which might hinder their ability to have emotionally charged conversations.
8. **Effect on Non-Verbal Communication:** Mental health conditions may also have an impact on a person's ability to communicate nonverbally by affecting how they maintain eye contact, make appropriate gestures, and show their emotions through their facial expressions. This may lead to miscommunications in social situations.
9. **Inhibited Creativity:** Stress and anxiety can stifle original thought and expression. This may prevent a pupil from experimenting with various modes of expression, which could result in monotonous and unengaging speaking.

5. Conclusion

An analysis of online learning diaries, phone interviews, and questionnaires indicated that online collaboration could cause stress. This stress was linked to the dependency of the collaborators on each other and the level of their mutual trust. The focus could be designed out of online collaborative exercises by managing the online working processes. The trend in both education and management towards increased online working and collaboration indicates that further.

5.1 Recommendations

Teachers should avoid multitasking and intense deadlines, and students should be given regular breaks during lectures. The institution of higher education should provide students struggling with stress, anxiety, and depression with readily available online support and a counseling session on the phone or in the local area. Through mental health literacy campaigns, workshops, and seminars, teachers should foster a mentally healthy environment. Also, online instructors should promote self-care activities among students to reduce the risk factors of poor mental health. These effects can differ from person to person, and different pupils may have different difficulties. Furthermore, supportive interventions can assist in lessening the detrimental impacts of stress, anxiety, and depression on speaking abilities. These interventions include counseling, therapy, and the development of a welcoming and inclusive learning environment. Instructors and educational establishments must overcome this possible Obst

This research is limited to the Gulf area students. It is beneficial for both teachers and students to better understand the classroom learning outcomes and develop critical thinking through writing. This research has a lot of potential for future researchers; as the world becomes more digitalized more people are having mental health issues because of lack of human interaction. We need to study the effects and devise a strategy for future students so that they can overcome e-learning stress.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1] Alhad, A and Alhuwaydi.A (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on University Faculty, Staff, and Students: Coping Strategies Used During the lockdown in the UAE. ("TheImpactofCOVID-19Pandemic on University Faculty, Staff, and ...") <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2021.1947839>
- [2] Bailenson J.N (Feb 2021). Nonverbal overload: a theoretical argument for the causes of Zoom fatigue. *Technology, Mind, and Behaviour*. DOI: 10.1037/tmb0000030.
- [3] Cleofas and Rocha, (2021). Demographic, gadget and internet profiles as determinants of disease and consequence related COVID-19 anxiety among Filipino college students Education and information technology DOI: [10.1007/s10639-021-10529-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10529-9)
- [4] Dhawan S. (2020) Online learning: a panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *J. Educ. Technol. Syst*49(1):5–22. DOI: 10.1177/0047239520934018
- [5] Doucet, A., Netolicky, D., Timmers, K., & Tuscano, F. J. (2020). Thinking about pedagogy in an unfolding pandemic (An Independent Report on Approaches to Distance Learning during COVID-19 School Closure). Work of Education International and UNESCO.
- [6] Lovibond, S.H. & Lovibond, P.F. (1995). Manual for the Depression Anxiety & Stress Scales. (2nd Ed.)Sydney: Psychology Foundation.
- [7] Malik and Javed (2021). Perceived stress among university students in Oman during COVID-19-induced eLearning Middle East Current Psychiatry <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43045-021-00131-7>
- [8] Malolos G.Z.C., Baron M.B.C., Apat F.A.J., Sagsagat H.A.A., Bianca P., Pasco M., Aportadera E.T.C.L., Tan R.J.D., Gacutno-Evardone A.J., D.E L.P. (2021) III Mental health and well-being of children in the Philippine setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Health Promot.* 2021;11(3):2. doi: 10.34172/hpp.2021.
- [9] Rowlett A (2021). On online learning and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic: Elsevier Public Health Emergency collection Published online 2021 Sep 22. DOI: [10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102867](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102867)