| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cognitive Assets and Setbacks of a Recorded Online English Language Conversation Course Offered to Non-Native Speakers at The World Islamic Sciences and Education University (WISE)

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| ABSTRACT

The thought of preparing and delivering a recorded online English language conversation course consisting of fifteen lectures that are to be offered as an elective course to overseas students of the B.A. level in Arabic language and literature at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (WISE) at the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan seemed initially daunting. That is because the target students of this newly suggested program are not specializing in English and, therefore, may find this course extremely difficult to adequately benefit from in light of their varied proficiency levels. The nature of any conversation course obliges live interaction to achieve most, if not all, of its objectives. To explain, any conversation course, regardless of the target language and students, necessarily requires actual live interaction among the participants in that course in order to achieve satisfactory comprehension, fruitful communication, and adequate peer learning. In other words, the challenge behind the preparation and implementation of this conversation course lay in the entailed fundamental requirement of it being a recorded online one due to the target overseas students.

| KEYWORDS

Conversation, English, online, recorded

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

1. Introduction:

With the course of life, the traditional approach in dealing with matters at large has been amended to cope with the variables, requirements, and challenges that have risen during each phase of time. One important phase in the modern history of humanity is the Corona phase. With the arrival of the pandemic, the pattern of lives of humans of all walks of life has drastically changed to adapt to that novel condition, making it an imposed reality that humans had no other option except to adapt to. Coping mechanisms in a large scale of daily features and activities were rapidly thought of as life has to go on. That, in turn, had become an extraordinary phenomenon that presented an exceptional disruption of the long established routine in the execution of affairs in numerous aspects of all domains of life including education.

Blended education, both face-to-face and online, offered to higher education students of the B.A. level at universities in some parts of the world had relatively been long introduced, but that was not the exact case in the entire Middle East before the arrival of the Corona. But ever since that turning point had taken place, complete online education took over, making it somewhat disturbing to both involved parties; the instructors and the students alike. Face-to-face education has always been the norm in many Arab countries, including the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, where face-to-face interaction between instructors and students was the norm. However, shifting to online education became inevitable as there was no other way to somehow

normalize the process of learning in light of that internationally life threatening epidemic and consequent shutdown. Nonetheless, blended education became persistent from that point on in our part of the world.

2. Purpose

The purpose behind writing this article is quite interesting as it offers a realistic as well as neutral depiction of a hands-on experience of a course, the nature of which demands face-to-face encounters to reach its ultimate momentum. As the ultimate target of any language is to achieve primarily understanding leading eventually to meaningful communication, live encounter is necessarily required (whether face-to-face or through the diverse means of technology) to accomplish that in precise. Thus, the creation of an English conversation course like the one under discussion was relatively trying especially that it is to be offered to non-native speakers of the English language. Human mirror mechanisms in transmitting meaning are not only reached by verbal communication but also by emotional attitudes conveyed in conversation through manual, facial, and body signals (De Stefani and De Marco, 2019). That is why, in order to attain that, it is necessary to hold a live conversation, whether face-to-face or online.

As a result, creating a solid infrastructure for communication in the target language, i.e. English, was always kept in mind in order to equip the target students with the adequate communication tools, approaches, and means to allow them to conduct simple conversations about numerous common and interesting topics in a relatively satisfactory level. Consequently, the ultimate goal behind the preparation of such a course is to benefit students in terms of expanding their vocabulary, reinforcing their perception of proper grammar, and improving the proficiency level of their English at large. It is worth pointing out here, that a course like this one functions as a good basis for those students seeking to employ English for multiple uses. It provides them with further insights regarding the uses of English in different situations and occasions depending on the recipient's age, social background, financial status, educational level, and professional position in relation to the speaker.

3. The Target Audience:

The target audience of this recorded online English language conversation course is basically the students of the B.A. level in Arabic language and literature at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (WISE) in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. But it must be pointed out here, that because this course will be offered at the official website of the university, then it will become accessible to the entire students who are enrolled at WISE despite their major. Moreover, as this course will also be available on YouTube then the course will be beneficial to a much wider range than the entire students of WISE as whomever is interested exceeding the boundaries of age, educational qualifications, and professional level, will naturally have direct access to it.

4. Review of Related Literature:

The focus normally in any conversation is on the dialogue conducted between participants; this paves the way to responding to hypothetical situations and making evaluations of carefully chosen topics. These approaches suggest generative ways to study conversations especially when conversation technology is relatively nascent (Yeomans *et al*, 2023). Thus, the first thing that came to mind upon the suggestion of such a recorded online English language conversation course was how this can be a useful course in light of the lack of face-to-face or live online instruction as it is to be recorded before its deliverance to students. This was somewhat concerning as body language is viewed to be of paramount significance in delivering any successful face-to-face or live online conversational course to achieve communication and persuasion (Yulianti and Sulistyawati, 2021). To establish satisfactory communication with others in such a course, nonverbal-communication methods as posture, gesture, eye contact and facial expressions as smiling or nodding are indeed vital to eventually attain overall rapport (Grayson and Napthine-Hodgkinson, 2020). This, in turn, creates a more personal connection with students and makes the offered topics more useful, relatable, and interactive (Courtney and Smallwood, 2020).

Another grave issue that was thoroughly thought of was the topics that are to be delivered in such a recorded online English language conversation course to non-native speakers of the language. Another interesting and persisting idea is that the course is to be presented gradually in regard to its level of progress and thoroughness since the intention of benefitting students in terms of their perception as well as fluency in English has always existed. Consequently, a rich content of the material that would elevate the lingual ability of students was strongly aspired and eventually conducted.

Before embarking on the actual implementation of the course, the major topic of each lecture of the fifteen ones was carefully thought of so as to present a somewhat comprehensive material that is sufficient to achieve satisfactory communication. What was also taken into consideration is the chronology of the presentation of each topic in the sense that topics were to be presented gradually in regard to both difficulty and thoroughness, allowing students adequate time to learn and practice the offered material in each given lecture. A non-native speaker is expected to look forward to initially employing what he / she has learned in introducing himself / herself to others. He / she is expected to be familiar with the various forms of greetings, different titles of address, and the ongoing occasion that requires one to speak in a particular situation. This served as the jump start topic of the first lecture.

As a result, each lecture was divided into an introductory part, a discussion part, and a closing part. As expected, the topic of the first lecture, which is to be the easiest among the topics of the other forthcoming lectures, seemed to branch off to relevant and demanding sub-topics that could not be avoided. Consequently, a unified framework had to be observed for each lecture, and after proper preplanning; the framework turned out to be as follows: After stating the topic of the lecture, students are introduced to at least five terminologies that are thought to be relevant, useful, and new; followed by an abstract of the topic of the lecture, leading to the core of the topic of the lecture itself. As the topic is dealt with in depth here, this major part was divided into three subsections that are connected with one another, after which a summary and a couple of exercises about the topic of the lecture follow in order to reinforce adequate comprehension and individual practice.

5. Feedback and Outcomes:

As any educational approach has a number of pros and cons, let us first delve into the advantages of the preparation of a recorded online English language conversation course offered to non-native speakers:

- First. **Convenience**:
  As the world is heading towards strongly incorporating digital technology with education, institutions of higher education all around the world are relying more and more on online education. This is considered quite convenient for especially those students, who happen to reside faraway or even abroad. Education becomes accessible at the fingertips of students and even at the leisure of their own homes. This saves students both time and effort in being on time for any online lecture.

- Second. **Repetition**:
  Online education is accessible at all times as recorded materials are available for the use of students to visit and revisit whenever it is required. Repetition is extremely useful in education for the purpose of continuous studying, thorough comprehension, and proper memorization. With repetition, previous knowledge is reinforced; whereas new knowledge is given adequate time to be learnt. In addition, students have complete control over the offered online recorded materials as they are in a position to stop, replay, rewind, or move forward in accordance with the needs of each.

- Third. **The Limitation of Individual Differences:**
  By allowing the student the time to grasp the material in accordance with his / her pace, individual differences are somewhat limited. Since levels of comprehension and perception vary from one student to another, the available online recorded materials can be understood at both different times and levels in light of each student's cognitive capacity as well as ability. In other words, the didactic process is implemented in relation to the pace of each individual student allowing information to sink in according to the understanding of that particular student. In this respect, the offered online recorded materials are unfolded according to the student himself / herself, who happen to be in command of the flow of his / her progress and advancement.

6. The Selected Topics:

The presentation of any academic material needs proper preparation ahead of time as every material has its own distinctive features, specifications, and requirements. A conversational material at large is in need of face-to-face interaction with actual students in a unified location in order to achieve its ultimate objective of interactive meaning. This, in turn, makes a tailor-made recorded online English language conversation course as this one; targeting non-native speakers of the language specializing in a field other than the English language, a most challenging one. One initial reason behind that is that the instructor cannot evaluate the level of proficiency of his / her students exactly of. This is indeed required to set a concrete ground to build upon.

As a result, in the process of the selection of topics, three main points were constantly taken into consideration. First, the gradual ascending level of development and sophistication of the selected topics. Second, the usefulness and pragmatism of the selected topics. Third, the major theme of the selected topics, which was of a social rather than an economic, political, or religious nature.

Now as the exact proficiency level is not known in relation to all the members of the target audience, the best thing to do in regard to the selection of the presented topics was to start from the simple and common topics and gradually move on to the more complex yet convenient ones. Thus, the selected topics were divided into three basic themes in relation to the personal, social, and general contexts.

Upon the meticulous selection of the topics, the idea of pragmatism has always been persistent in order to allow the target audience to use these thematic conversational modules in their daily lives. Each topic was delivered in a separate lecture presented in around forty minutes along with demo conversations and relevant exercises for further reinforcement. Here are the selected topics offered in each consecutive lecture as follows:
- How to Introduce Yourself to others.

- How to talk about yourself: Your Marital Status.
- How to talk about your hobbies and talents.
- How to talk about your family.
- How to talk about your feelings and emotions.
- How to talk about the weather.
- How to talk about transportation.
- How to talk about technology.
- How to talk about food.
- How to talk about shopping.
- How to talk about your city.
- How to talk about planning for a vacation.
- How to talk about culture.
- How to talk about a complaint.
- How to talk about your goals.

7. The Challenges:

Despite educational efforts that have been made to improve proficiency in English, proficiency in English communication abilities is still wanted among the non-native speakers of the language (Fidele, 2024). So for any instructor to be successful, he / she is to attempt improving the performance of his / her students in that particular disciple that he / she offers. This is secured through the interaction between him / her and the students themselves by controlling the different variables involved in the didactic process as the instructor, the students, the curriculum, and the setting; the components of which are the time and the place of the deliverance of a course.

A recorded online English language conversation course offered to non-native speakers like this one happens to secure only the instructor and the curriculum (to an extent); having no control over either the students or the setting consisting of the time and place that the student wishes to attend any of the offered lectures. To explain, even as beginners, the proficiency level of students may vary, ranging from, for instance, the A 1.1 or the A 1.2 levels. This limitation adds a new challenge in the preparation of the concerned material or curriculum. One major advantage of face-to-face education is that it allows the instructor to implicitly understand whether students are following or not and eventually whether they are generally understanding or not through eye contact, body language, and direct interaction. Therefore, to enhance language learning experiences in any face-to-face or online conversational course, students employ varied coping strategies that may be learnt from their peers to cope with particular obstacles that they may encounter regarding language barriers, hesitation in speaking, difficulty in language usage, and low self-confidence (Alba, 2023).

All of this is unfortunately lost in a *recorded* online English language conversation course offered to non-native speakers due to the lack of face-to-face or online interaction. Attending a recorded conversation course does not offer the instructor any kind of instant feedback pertaining to how much students are comprehending, practicing, or even benefitting from the given material. This in its turn, deprives the instructor from any kind of insight on the spot about the progress of his / her students. Consequently, this is considered to be a challenge in the sense that complications on the part of students cannot be dealt with punctually by the instructor and, therefore, this may create a negative impression on the part of students towards the entire recorded course as confusion may accumulate and within no time, students may get lost and eventually give up on the course as a whole. If this takes place, and most probably it will, then such a recorded conversation course would not have ultimately succeeded in benefiting students due to it being an online *recorded* one rather than being a live face-to-face or online one as ideally should be.

8. Recommendations:

As interaction lies in the core of any conversation, any conversation is in need of two poles: The speaker and the listener; whose roles constantly interchange. Whether a conversation is held face-to-face or online, this crucial and fundamental element of having a speaker and a listener is present. But once there is a lack of an interactive potential agent as a listener who will become a speaker to hold a conversation in the first place, as is the case in a *recorded* online conversation course as the one under discussion, then the ultimate objective of communication is definitely lost, which is reaching meaningful understanding between the two active poles in any conversation. So for any conversation course to be successful in benefiting the diverse segments of the target audience, then it ought to necessarily be conducted either face-to-face or online, but definitely not *recorded* beforehand as is the case.

9. Conclusion:

Attending a recorded online English language conversation course offered to

non-native speakers are indeed daunting to students due to the novelty of how the course is presented. The mere fact of it being *recorded* without any slight means of live contact between the presenter or lecturer on one hand and the recipient or student on the other makes it quite confusing and somewhat challenging. Thus, the paramount objective of the execution of such a course of an innovative nature is to benefit students in terms of strengthening their lexicon, improving their grammatical structures, and enhancing their proficiency level in English, which the course attempts to do.

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