

## **Adapting to Change: Facing the Challenges in Developing ESL Students' Communicative Competence Online**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Developing students' communicative competence during the pandemic is not an easy task, especially with the abrupt shift to remote learning. This study is intended to explore the challenges faced by English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors in developing students' communicative competence in an online classroom. This study involves three ESL instructors in a university, as well as three students from each instructor's class. The chosen data collection methods were in-depth interviews and stimulated recall for the ESL instructors and focus group discussions for the students. The findings show that among the challenges faced by ESL instructors include the lack of student engagement and socialisation, the fact that the course was designed for physical classes, and the lack of access to high-speed internet. The students also shared their experiences when faced with these issues. It is hoped that ESL teachers, course developers and administrators can understand the issues faced by ESL instructors with remote learning to develop students' communicative competence.

*Keywords:* Communicative competence, English as a second language, online learning, second language acquisition

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 16 May 2023

Accepted: 16 October 2023

Published: 01 March 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.32.1.01>

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Developing communication competence is really important, especially for those learning a language as a second or a foreign language. The concept of communicative competence was developed by Hymes (1972), who defines it as the language learners' ability to use the language appropriately in different communicative situations or contexts. According to Canale and Swain (1980),

and later extended by Canale (1983), the dimensions of communicative competence include grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Language learners with grammatical competence have knowledge of the form and structure of the language, while those with sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence have knowledge and ability to use the language appropriately in a variety of contexts.

Communicative competence emphasises appropriateness, not just accuracy, in communicating with others (Savignon, 2018). Communicative competence allows language learners to communicate effectively and accurately without causing misunderstandings and miscommunications (Hymes, 1972). However, for various reasons, second language learners sometimes do not get as many opportunities as native speakers to learn and practice the skills for developing their communicative competence. Being able to use the target language appropriately is especially difficult for ESL and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners because they are not commonly exposed to the language and how it is being used by communicatively competent speakers (Liu, 2008). Therefore, the ESL classroom is their main avenue for gaining knowledge and abilities, especially for the development of this competence, which requires them to be exposed to a variety of contexts.

However, with the recent COVID-19 pandemic, traditional face-to-face classes were brought to a halt, somewhat forcing

educators into something that had been significantly applied with distance learning or online classes (Bird et al., 2022). The teaching and learning of English in an online class come with its challenges, which are more in developing learners' speaking skills (Ying et al., 2021), specifically the teaching of skills related to the development of students' communicative competence. Due to the pandemic, the ESL classroom exists virtually, with instructors using computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as video conferencing software and social networking sites, to conduct class and communicate with their students. In terms of the development of communicative competence, this paper discusses the challenges ESL instructors and students face in developing communicative competence in an online classroom.

### **Developing ESL Students' Communicative Competence in Online Classes**

Though using the internet, software and applications, or computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is not unheard of in tertiary level institutions, especially having synchronous classes via video conferencing is not so common for most institutions until recent years with the COVID-19 pandemic. With the abrupt shift from traditional physical classes to online learning, instructors have had to familiarise themselves with synchronous class sessions and personalise learning more towards individual students' needs (Bird et al., 2022). The need for personalised connections with students is especially highlighted in research

since it was found that remote learning has affected the teacher-student relationship significantly, as casual interaction between the instructor and the students has been reduced (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

The connection between students and their instructor can also influence their learning, specifically as it may affect student engagement. Lukas and Md Yunus (2021) highlighted that though students seemed initially interested in online learning, ESL instructors found it difficult to keep students engaged in the lesson or motivated to learn. It is only further inflated due to the issues with internet access that students face when attempting to attend online classes. Access to strong internet connections and good devices is not as common among poor families, demotivating students from participating in class and submitting tasks. Hence, it is vital that instructors are aware of their students' needs and current situation, especially when it can impact their language acquisition. Students need to be able to communicate in the language classroom to develop their communicative competence through practice.

Anugrah (2021) conducted a study involving three English language instructors, exploring the challenges faced by these instructors, along with the way that they overcame these challenges. One of the most prominent challenges that the instructors faced was the lack of classroom interaction. The instructors reported feeling distant from the learners because they sometimes could not see the students' gestures and body language due to the remote learning.

They felt this could be the reason for students' lack of engagement. To overcome this issue, the instructors used different online platforms and teaching strategies to engage their students in the lesson. The instructors also deduced that the lack of engagement could be due to the unstable internet connection, but this is an issue that the instructors themselves could not directly solve, so they could only attempt to use different online platforms to accommodate their students' situation.

In their study involving 20 Indonesian English language instructors, Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2021) found that instructors in Indonesia have had to be creative with their use of technology in navigating remote learning due to the sudden COVID-19 pandemic. Lesson plans designed for traditional physical classrooms must be adapted and improvised for online classes. Besides that, it was revealed that the lack of a strong internet connection significantly impacted students' learning, specifically due to the inequality that students might face due to geographical and economic factors. Some English language instructors in this study had to resort to personally visiting students at their homes to provide the notes and tasks to them. Therefore, the researchers concluded that it is vital for a stable internet connection to be made available for students in the whole country to ensure that all students receive the same opportunities to learn.

In another study set in Indonesia, Syafrayani et al. (2022) focused on 45 college students, investigating the challenges

they faced and the benefits they gained from learning the English language through online classes. Among the issues they raised were the distractions at home, the information overload from instructors, technical and connectivity issues, as well as limited interaction among classmates and with the instructor. At the same time, the students also cited several benefits they found from remote learning, such as the convenience of having classes at home, which reduced the need for transport or much preparation, and their improved motivation to learn and use the English language due to the virtual environment. In light of the advantages that can be gained from online learning, the researchers recommend that instructors use a variety of online learning platforms to engage students and identify which platform would be most appropriate for their students' internet connection.

Similar to the previous study, Tackie (2022) also found some benefits from online learning. The instructors revealed that online learning had improved how some students communicate in the classroom. Some students who were often disruptive in the traditional physical classroom were less disruptive and would be more willing to communicate with their instructors. Even students who commonly avoided participating in class activities were more involved in lessons. It could be due to the instructors' efforts in using different platforms to communicate with their students, personalised to the different needs of the students. It is important that instructors understand their role as surrounding

interlocutors in a student's life. Though some might view casual conversations as inappropriate in the language classroom, other instructors feel that communicating casually with students can improve their communicative abilities because they view the classroom as a community, and learning can happen through socialisation.

There are many challenges faced by ESL instructors in developing students' communicative competencies, ranging from technical and logistic disruptions to engagement and interactivity issues. Literature has shown that it is vital to identify the challenges to facilitate ESL instructors in managing them. Hence, this study intends to further explore the challenges faced in developing ESL students' communicative competence, specifically in Malaysian English language classrooms.

## **METHOD**

This study has chosen a qualitative approach, with ESL instructors as the main participants, to explore their experiences developing students' communicative competence in the language classroom. Their students were also interviewed to support and further explain the instances and situations described by the ESL instructors to triangulate this data. To ensure that the development of communicative competence would occur in the classroom, the researchers had chosen ESL instructors who were qualified and capable, as verified by the gatekeepers, and those teaching the course that included aspects of communicative competence in the course content.

For this case study, three ESL instructors were chosen for an in-depth interview, and three stimulated recalls were used to gain an understanding of the challenges they faced in developing students' communicative competence online. Stimulated recalls were chosen for this study because they provide the instructors with an opportunity to watch the recording of what they had done in the class so that they can reflect on the specific choices that they had made (Zainil, 2018) in their teaching instructions. As for the students, three students each instructor taught were chosen for focus group discussions. Three focus group discussions were conducted, one group for the students of each instructor. During the focus group discussion, the students were asked about their experience developing their communicative competence in online classes.

In order to conduct the stimulated recall, the researchers watched recordings of the ESL instructors' classes and adapted the existing interview protocol to the occurrences in the classroom, specifically related to the development of communicative competence. The ESL instructors' responses were transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis and constant comparison. Codes found from the data were categorised, and themes were identified. Next, the students were interviewed, and the data from their interviews were triangulated with the data from the ESL instructors' interviews. Categories and themes were adjusted and updated with constant comparison to ensure that the data from the ESL instructors'

interviews supported the findings from the students' responses. The findings were then discussed in relation to past studies in the area.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the data analysis, it was found that among the challenges faced by ESL instructors in developing students' communicative competence in the language classroom are engaging students in the language classroom, lack of socialisation among students, difficulty adapting to abrupt online learning, and lack of access to high-speed internet.

### **Lack of Engagement in the ESL Classroom**

The ESL instructors involved in this study found students to be less engaged in the language classroom when they had online classes as opposed to traditional face-to-face classes. With remote learning, students are in their own homes, placing them at a distance from their instructors. Due to the environment at home and the online learning environment, which allows students to switch off their cameras and possibly engage in other activities, students might not participate in the language classroom as much. For example, Instructor 3 mentions that students can switch off their cameras whenever they like, and instructors would not even realise whether the students are paying attention to the lesson. Though Instructor 3 admits that having students who are not engaged in the lesson is not uncommon, remote learning seems to

cause a lack of engagement in the language classroom.

“...online classes are actually very challenging. I like to call their names so that uh... just to make sure that they are there, during the class. You know... they can just turn off the camera and sign the attendance, but they are not actually in front of the laptop.” (Instructor 3, stimulated recall 1)

Similarly, ESL instructors in the study by Lukas and Md Yunus (2021) found that students are only interested in the initial stages and slowly lose the motivation to participate in online classes. This lack of engagement could be because the students were not physically in front of the instructor; rather, they could just switch off the camera and go elsewhere, just as Instructor 3 suggested. Encouraging participation in the second language classroom is already a challenging task, with students' language learning anxiety and low self-esteem hindering them from communicating in the actual classroom, and this is further heightened due to the class being conducted online. For example, Instructor 2 mentioned that their students are often unwilling to participate in the ESL classroom, and only the same students will respond. The instructor deduced that the lack of responses could be because students are unable to discuss their responses with their classmates, unlike in the physical classroom.

“And then sometimes you ask them,  
“Okay, I will give you five minutes

and then... after this, you can share your answer.” Sometimes you'd only get certain feedback from the same students... or all the time from the same students. But the rest just don't want to contribute.” (Instructor 2, in-depth interview)

Anugrah (2021) also discussed the need for face-to-face interaction with students to effectively develop their communicative competence. English language instructors in the study expressed their issues with the fact that they could not gauge student engagement because they could not see students' facial expressions and body language as they did not switch on their cameras. ESL instructors can encourage students to keep their cameras on, but it is not something they can enforce in the language classroom, especially since students might experience unstable internet connections.

Through the focus group discussion with the students, they also admitted that they were less participative in the language classroom in remote learning as compared to the traditional physical classes. Students B, E, F, and I mentioned that they felt uncomfortable communicating during the online classes due to background noises, seeing as they were at home and surrounded by other family members. Student G was on campus for the classes, but he also expressed discomfort because he did not feel comfortable participating in the English language classroom, knowing that his/her roommates could hear him. These situations

cause ESL students to avoid communicating in the language classroom.

In contrast, Tackie (2022) found English language instructors saying that students who were normally disruptive in their classrooms were less disruptive and more open to discussing their current situation with the instructor. It could be because the instructors were more flexible with the students and allowed students to contact them outside of class to communicate with them on personal matters. The students felt more comfortable expressing themselves during remote learning as compared to the traditional classroom, possibly due to the accessibility provided through the different platforms that the instructor uses to communicate with the students.

Participation in second language classrooms is vital, seeing as students do not get as many opportunities to use the language outside of the language classroom. Being able to practice using the language and being exposed to the language is especially important in developing students' spoken communication (Anugrah, 2021). As seen in the current and previous studies, the online classroom may pose some issues for students practising the target language. ESL instructors need to play their role in providing students with opportunities to practice the language and a comfortable and positive environment for students to do so. The ESL instructors in this study also highlight the need for instructors to be more open and approachable with students so that they feel comfortable communicating in class, as well as more innovative with the

use of different platforms, such as Padlet and Quizizz, which allow students to participate and contribute to the lesson other than through verbal responses.

### **Lack of Socialisation Among Students**

Some instructors feel that online learning could cause a lack of socialisation among students. Socialisation here refers to the experience that students would normally get in physical classrooms, where they can talk to each other about non-academic topics before, during or after the class. With online learning, students lose this experience of physically meeting their classmates and the instructor before and after classes, which the ESL instructors feel affects their motivation and interest to participate in the classroom.

Instructor 2 feels that online classes can sometimes take away from the personal aspect of physical language classrooms, where instructors can talk to students individually to discuss any issues or constraints they might be facing at the time. Remote learning can be very isolating at times, especially with students far from their classmates experiencing similar issues. These issues can result in students being unfocused in class and not learning much despite attending every online class.

“I need to mention every time, “If you have any problem, do let me know, WhatsApp me personally.” Because that’s the only way that I can get to know what happened to them. So, I told them I would not know what are you experiencing behind the camera, okay.

You have to let me know. You need to keep the communication open, so that's when I detect students, when they have problems, they would not be able to understand... they are committed to the class, attend every time but they don't really understand the topic." (Instructor 2, stimulated recall 1)

As for Instructor 2, her method of handling this issue would be to encourage students to contact her via WhatsApp if they have any issues they would like to discuss. She also mentioned that she would sometimes just switch off her camera after class time to allow students to talk among themselves. Instructor 2 feels that students also need to be given the opportunity to communicate with each other about topics unrelated to class, and remote learning has taken away an avenue of that happening with students being unable to meet physically. In relation to this, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) also discuss a similar issue with online learning where students feel disconnected from the English language instructor due to remote learning. It especially affects the interactions between the instructor and the students, which supposedly come more naturally in a physical classroom setting.

The researchers feel that the lack of physical interaction can affect the language learning process, especially in developing communication skills. Tackie (2022) views the class as a community for the students to socialise among themselves and with the instructor, and this is disrupted by remote learning, where students are unable to physically gather with their classmates and

instructor. Instructors need to be more aware and sensitive to students' well-being and initiate more individualised sessions with students who seem to be facing academic and non-academic related issues.

Instructor 3 also feels that remote learning takes away certain important elements of teaching and learning, especially since students can switch off their cameras during the lesson. ESL instructors need to make connections with students and strengthen the bond between them and their students so that the teaching and learning process can be conducted effectively. When lessons are conducted online, students might not have their cameras on, so instructors are unable to gauge students' engagement as compared to physical classes. Hence, Instructor 3 tries to overcome this by encouraging students to switch on their cameras and discuss any topics unrelated to the course at the beginning of the lesson.

"We are not able to look at their, their facial expressions, their movements and all that because I think being teachers, you need to be more alert because when you see the students, their movement, their facial expressions and all that, you'll be able to tell whether they are with you or they are not. So, that is why in every class, I teach, I would make sure that the first 10-15 minutes, I would just talk with them casually. Have a small talk with them, asking them about things other than the course that I teach them" (Instructor 3, stimulated recall 2)



Besides engaging students, this activity at the beginning of the lesson allows ESL instructors to strengthen their bond with the students. It is important because not only do the students get to socialise, but they also get to improve their relationship with the instructor and their classmates and their communicative abilities through casual discourse. Bird et al. (2022) also highlight the importance of instructors managing the transition from physical to online classes by communicating more with their students during synchronous classes or with individual students. Remote learning reduces the opportunities for students and instructors to communicate casually, but ESL instructors can play their role by creating avenues for students to interact. It is especially vital in a second language classroom that focuses on developing students' abilities to communicate appropriately in a variety of contexts. Getting students to participate in class discussions or presentations in an academic context would be difficult if they do not feel comfortable practising the English language, even in casual situations.

Based on the focus group discussion with the students, it was revealed that Students G, H, and I felt that the ESL instructor made them feel relaxed in the classroom. The students feel comfortable communicating with the instructor because they are allowed to also talk casually about topics unrelated to the course. It strengthens the bond between the instructor and the students, especially because they feel that the instructor is caring and nurturing, making

them feel comfortable in the language classroom. In the study by Tackie (2022), the instructors are found to pay special attention to students' mental well-being during the pandemic, showing concern for them so that they would feel less isolated. However, the researchers mentioned that there is no evidence of whether this affected students' learning and development of communication skills.

### **Difficulty Adapting to Abrupt Online Learning**

The course involved in this study was developed and planned for face-to-face classes and not online classes. The pandemic hit the world unexpectedly, and it also lasted for a longer time than expected. Hence, everyone was unprepared to be affected this badly for an extended period. All three ESL instructors expressed their preference for physical classes as opposed to remote learning. They felt that online learning has especially affected language learning, specifically the development of students' spoken communication. Instructor 1 mentioned that he would sometimes ask students to give impromptu speeches in front of the classroom to prepare them for the presentation they would have to give at the end of the semester. However, this activity has lost part of its impact on the online learning situation, where students might not have the same experience when speaking through a video conferencing software as opposed to standing in front of a class full of students.

“...that is one of the methods that I usually do during face-to-face classes. it would be, I would say, it would be more fun, more interactive, hands-on approach ... it would be fun rather than.... I mean even in the assessment, when you sit in front of the computer, it’s different when they present in front of people.” (Instructor 1, stimulated recall 3)

Due to the sudden implementation of online learning, many English language instructors have become uncertain about how best to approach their students, which stems from the lack of experience in conducting classes fully online (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Though online learning has been introduced, and some instructors have dabbled with certain online platforms and websites in their lessons, not many ESL instructors have had the opportunity to completely immerse themselves in an online teaching and learning experience. Instructors need to be ready in terms of technical know-how and preparing the lesson to suit online learning needs. It was revealed that instructors spent more time planning lessons after the implementation of online learning as compared to prior to the pandemic, i.e., from 18% to 33% of their work time (Jones et al., 2022).

The ESL instructors found that they needed to adjust the materials provided by the course coordinators to suit the online learning experience. For instance, Instructor 2 discussed the issue that some instructors faced with the lack of activities that were

provided for students. Instructor 2 reflected that it might not be an issue with a lack of activities but that students in physical classes usually take more time to respond to in-class activities because they would perhaps take more time to discuss with their friends and volunteer to contribute their responses. The course materials were developed for physical classes, and in this situation, Instructor 2 feels that ESL instructors need to be flexible and innovative in using different online platforms to support the provided activities. Not only would it allow learners to take their time responding during the activities, but it would also allow instructors to gauge individual students’ understanding, especially since the whole class can provide their responses without disrupting the class.

“But if you ask them, to write their answers... you know like using Padlet, or if you want to use Jamboard, or you want to use other approach then maybe it can... I would say take more time ... also to ensure that it’s going to be interactive and engaging the students, you want to see whether they have understood the task or not.” (Instructor 2, stimulated recall 2)

Instructor 3 found that ESL instructors do not necessarily need to introduce new online platforms to their students when trying to accommodate the needs of the lesson, but they can fully utilise the video conferencing software they are using for synchronous online classes. Besides using

the chat function so that students can share their ideas and responses in written form, Instructor 3 used the Zoom Breakout Rooms available in the Zoom software to allow students to discuss the topic in smaller groups. This function on Zoom allows the students to discuss in small groups, which improves their engagement and motivation to communicate in English, but it also allows instructors to join each small group and see how the students are doing.

“Because I’m trying to compare to physical classroom. In the previous semester, whenever I taught this course, I would divide them into small groups and then I would walk around the class. I would go to each group to listen to their discussion... so this breakout room actually applies the same method or the same technique. So you can simply join every group and listen to their discussion. You can talk to them and they would ask you questions. They feel free. Yeah, I think it’s a very useful function.” (Instructor 3, stimulated recall 2)

In relation to this issue, Lukas and Md Yunus (2021) also discuss that ESL instructors need to be prepared for online learning, especially in terms of technological readiness, to provide students with sufficient opportunities for communicating and learning in the language classroom most effectively. Seeing as courses or lessons might not be planned specifically for online classes, and course developers might not

have anticipated such a situation as the pandemic, ESL instructors need to step up and play their role in the development of students’ communicative abilities. Similarly, this is a conundrum faced by English language instructors in Indonesia, where online learning is uncommon, and instructors need to be creative in their lessons to adapt to remote learning conditions (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2021). Thus, instructors need to adapt quickly to any situation, such as the pandemic, which would significantly impact the teaching and learning process, as well as be willing to try different approaches and methods with students to overcome any issues that might arise. Only when ESL instructors are able to do so can they appropriately develop students’ communicative abilities and lead them towards communicative competence.

### **Lack of Access to High-speed Internet**

Prior to the pandemic, it was uncommon for students to need to be involved in synchronous online learning, even in higher education institutions, at least in Malaysia, where the study was conducted. Hence, issues with internet connection or other technical matters were not often raised. Synchronous online learning requires students and instructors to use video conferencing software with a strong internet connection. Anugrah (2021) reported that the lack of a strong internet connection disrupts the learning process, especially because not only do the instructors need access to high-speed internet, but all the students need to have it for the lesson to be conducted effectively.

Instructor 1 highlights that students who do not have access to high-speed internet might not be able to perform well in their presentation assessment. The instructors have to weigh whether to have the presentations during the synchronous online classes or ask the students to record and play the recordings in class. Though the use of recordings might be seen as the better option as students' focus and performance might be affected by the issues with their internet connection, it is also not ideal, seeing as the students would not have an audience to interact with and instructors would not be able to assess how they navigate the audience.

“Another problem is the internet connection, yeah, where it may not be good so that's why I'm contemplating whether I want to have it live or recorded because if the line is not good, people cannot hear them or they know that their line is not good, it can disrupt their flow, style and even the time management.” (Instructor 1, stimulated recall 2)

Instructor 2 also addressed the issue with their students, saying that students need to inform the instructor if they have internet connection issues. In order to provide students with the opportunity to learn despite their unstable internet, Instructor 2 offers to provide students with a recording of the lesson. Though synchronous sessions might be the best for a communicative class, Instructor 2 feels it is better to provide a recording rather than leave the student behind in the lesson.

“I would just tell them if you had connection problem, you just WhatsApp me. You need to tell me because I know... I notice they would come... join and leave, join and leave, you know? So, each time I would have to accept them in the Zoom, but it would be good if you can let me know so that at least, if you miss the lesson, you can ask your friends or perhaps I can provide you with recording.” (Instructor 2, stimulated recall 1)

Based on the focus group discussion, some students admitted that they faced issues participating in the language classroom due to the lack of strong internet connection they experienced at home. When asked about anything that made them feel uncomfortable communicating in the ESL classroom, Student E revealed that they were affected by the background noise in their house as well as the unstable internet connection.

“Sometimes, as I'm in my house... so, the noise, the background noise or my network connection. Most of the time, it would get unstable.” (Student E, focus group discussion)

Similarly, Syafrayani, Ginting, Hasnah and Saragih (2022) found that students would often face problems with the software used because of the poor connection, and then they would have to repeat the process of joining the class because they were logged out due to their lack of access to high-speed internet. It would cause more

issues for the students because it would especially affect students using their mobile internet quota to connect to the internet. The inequality in internet access is definitely an important issue to be discussed, not just in language learning but in general for the education of youths all over the world. Lukas and Md Yunus (2021) reported that inaccessibility to strong internet connection caused students to be left behind in lessons,

which is common in low-income families. Though ESL instructors may not be able to have such a significant impact in providing better internet connection for all students, they might be able to provide students with different avenues for learning, such as through asynchronous online platforms. Table 1 illustrates the themes and categories that were derived from the data in this study.

Table 1  
*Themes and categories derived from the data*

Themes	Categories
Lack of engagement in the ESL classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' discomfort in using English due to the physical environment (home &amp; hostel)</li> <li>• Distractions from the physical environment (home &amp; hostel)</li> <li>• Cameras switched off, and microphones muted</li> <li>• Physically separated from classmates and lack opportunities to discuss before responding.</li> </ul>
Lack of socialisation among students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of socialisation affecting motivation and interest</li> <li>• Rapport and good instructor-student relationships are significant factors in learning</li> <li>• Balancing formal and informal communication in online classrooms to make students feel comfortable</li> <li>• The need for small talk before and after classes is often lost in online classrooms</li> </ul>
Difficulty adapting to abrupt online learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses were planned for physical classes, and instructors found it challenging to adapt.</li> <li>• ESL instructors' preference for physical classes affects the teaching and learning</li> <li>• Use of different platforms to create a medium for students to respond and communicate to replicate physical classroom situations</li> </ul>
Lack of access to high-speed internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing issues with online presentations</li> <li>• Video conferencing requires a greater bandwidth</li> <li>• Finding alternatives for sharing materials and information</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

The findings have revealed that remote learning has caused ESL instructors to face several challenges in developing students'

communicative competence, such as the lack of student engagement, the lack of socialisation among students, the difficulty of adapting to online classes, and the lack

of internet connection. Developing students' communicative competence can be difficult with remote learning, especially when students are not engaged or motivated to participate in class activities. In relation to the issues with engagement, the ESL instructors also noticed that the relationship they would normally have with students is affected by the lack of socialisation due to remote learning. Besides that, the course they teach was not initially developed for online classes; hence, some of the tasks and materials planned for the class were not applicable. The ESL instructors also found that the lack of a strong internet connection had an impact on students' involvement in class activities.

These challenges have caused challenges in the teaching and learning process, and in some instances, the ESL instructors needed to adapt and improvise their lessons to manage and overcome them. The instructors planned their lessons to cater to their students' needs to ensure the effective development of communicative competence. It is hoped that from these findings, other ESL instructors can gain a better understanding of the issues of teaching a communicative course online. Perhaps the findings of the study can also inspire others in terms of actions that can be taken to improve their students' online learning experience. The findings of the study reveal that ESL instructors are adaptable and driven in creating a conducive learning environment for their students. Based on the findings, other ESL instructors could see the issues they have faced in others'

eyes and the possible solutions to overcome any issues they faced. Being isolated due to the pandemic affected not only students' learning but also ESL instructors' teaching experience. With this study, it is hoped that other ESL instructors would gain some insight and vision in developing students' communicative competence, specifically seeing the impact of the context and environment of the learning, be it online or physical, on students' learning and interaction.

Some issues, such as the lack of access to high-speed internet for many students, especially due to financial and geographical factors, cannot be directly solved by ESL instructors. They can provide different avenues of conveying knowledge to students, but this is definitely an issue that should be given more attention by learning institution administrators. The pandemic caused an abrupt shift in learning from traditional physical classes to online classes, and administrators were unprepared, but this should serve as a learning opportunity for administrators and course developers as well in improving the teaching and learning of communicative competence for any future situations where remote learning might be applied.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This particular study focuses on the instructors as the main participants to be investigated, while data from the students play a role in triangulating and supporting the data from the instructors. In the future,

studies could be done on the discourse of students to compare how they communicate in physical and online classes. The data could be supported by data from interviews where the students are asked to discuss and explain any similarities or differences between how they communicate online and physical situations to strengthen the study's findings. Having a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between how the students communicate and why they occur from the student's point of view would benefit instructors when developing and planning their courses and lessons.

As the instructors in this study have mentioned using certain online platforms, an experimental study could also be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of using certain online platforms for teaching and learning a communicative course. As communicative courses require students to practice the target language significantly, it would be helpful to understand if using specific online platforms would improve students' performance in communicating in English. Other than assessing their performance, the researchers can also do a focus group discussion with some students to understand their experiences using online platforms. The researchers can also interview some students from the control group to discuss their experiences as well.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers acknowledge the support given by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in the completion of this research paper.

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