Challenges in using ICT Gadgets to cope with effects of COVID-19 on Education: A short survey of online teaching Literature in English

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Abstract— *Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down progress in many sectors of human life worldwide and education has considerably been affected from pre-primary to tertiary levels. Coping with this pandemic resulted in the move to E-leaning from face - to- face teaching whereby a number of challenges are impeding the intended learning outcomes. In this study, Introduction to Literature in English is focused with specific interest in undergraduate students. While they should be taught Literature to be equipped not only with ethical values, critical thinking and analytical skills but also communication skills in English; online teaching challenges them hence jeopardizing the intended goal due to a number of factors such as limited or lack of ICT skills and resources which make online learning during the COVID-19 lockdowns not inclusive.*

Keywords— *COVID-19, education, challenge, literature in English, ICT gadgets, online teaching, effect*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, face - to - face and online teaching are the most conventional modes of course delivery. Face - to - face teaching has more advantages and is more inclusive than online learning because when students interact among themselves and with their instructor on the spot, they can learn from one another physically and understand better than it is done at distance. In learning context, feedback to students' difficulties is made along with factors such as learning environment, students' ability and interest in learning among other things. For teaching Literature in English effectively, the teacher must know students' background in English language - a medium of instruction, so that he/she will know where to put much more emphasis because literature is taught not only as a subject but also as a tool to enhance language skills. Among these skills, speaking and writing are more focused than the rest only that most students leave secondary to university having difficulties in each of the two. Such situation is more and more exacerbating where face- to- face teaching is impossible because today the advancement of technology has made it possible to rely heavily on ICT gadgets in education to carry

out remote teaching as a solution. The situation as it stands during COVID-19 pandemic period; these technological tools have been considerably used as a result of the school closure in a bid to cope with the spread of that pandemic. In this regard, this study aims cogently to throw light on challenges associated with this delivery mode.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Definitely, Literature in English is a tool to learning English skills viz speaking, listening, writing and reading. Literary courses are taught in higher education not only to enable University leavers be equipped with ethical values, critical thinking and analytical skills but also be equipped with communication skills in English; a global language which has become a multipurpose tool particularly in this century geared by Information Communication Technology (ICT) in many life domains worldwide (Bazimaziki, 2019). However, students' language skills are not being developed as intended in this course as a result of E-learning which, following Alharbi (2020), concentrates on the learning process to the detriment of other goals; and is difficulty in terms of

students- teacher interaction. While the COVID - 19 pandemic has caused a considerable disruption of education, having a near universal impact on learners and teachers around the world, from pre-primary to tertiary level (United Nations, 2020), there are a lot of challenges related with measures taken to cope with this situation which made students leave schools to continue learning from home. Online teaching has been more emphasized than usual to the expense of face - to- face teaching as confirmed in ILO (2020) that teachers have had to adapt to a distance education as nearly as 94 per cent. In so doing, ICT gadgets have been resorted to as a possible solution to cope with the situation.

After the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Rwanda, on 14th March 2020, schools closed but shortly after the technological means and ways were devised for courses to go on, in higher learning institutions in particular. However, all is not perfect as there are a number of challenges associated with this exercise only that technology-based teaching is not inclusive. Some students become victims of their situation related with few or lack of resources in need because not all areas worldwide, regionally or locally have access to internet. Particularly in developing countries, hundreds of students become victims of this responsive and innovative teaching. According to International Labour Organization (2020), the emphasis on virtual learning can exacerbate existing inequalities in education, particularly in developing contexts, marginalized communities and rural settings, where access to technology and reliable internet connections may be limited. Even within schools, inequalities such as those related to persons with disabilities or family income can hinder access to distance learning. Distance learning does not allow schools and teachers to carry out their important role in the socialization of learners and more importantly, Burgess & Sievertsen (2020) view it unlikely to replace on average the learning lost from school; and in addition, there will be disparities between families as to how they will support their children in that situation. In Rwandan higher education context, these challenges are inevitable and are related with the nature of the subject to be taught, learners' previous background and the medium of instruction - English in that case. In tandem with this background, this study intends to examine these challenges, with particular focus on Literature in English taught not only as subject but also as a tool to enhance language skills.

III. AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to examine challenges of using ICT gadgets to cope with the effects of Covid-19 on Education. The study bears qualitative analysis of data collected from undergraduate students in College of Education of University of Rwanda. Particular interest is directed to students' interest in online learning and challenges of technology- based learning. The study hinges on the belief that Literature is taught in higher education not only to equip learners with critical analysis skills but also as a tool to enhance learners' language skills. In tandem with this conception, the study seeks to find out answers to the following questions: (1) to what extent are university students interested in online learning literary subjects? (2) What are the challenges associated with this mode of delivery? (3) How can these challenges be addressed for effective online learning? From the stated questions stems an assumption that teaching literary subject online has been more disadvantageous than advantageous for learners without ICT gadgets.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this digital world, Information Communication Technology (ICT) gadgets are playing a significant part in many sectors without exception to education. These technology gadgets include, without limitation to, devices such as computers and smart phones connected with internet. Elsewhere, being equipped with ICT skills is among the advantages for learners in a world driven by Science and Technology; during the Covid-19 lockdowns especially where teaching and learning shifted from school to home places in many parts of the globe. In higher education, technological advances made online venue an essential mode of teaching hence ICT has been adopted for educational advantages (Carver et al., 2020; Alharbi, 2020). Cited in ILO (2020), UNESCO reports that nationwide school closures have been mandated in 192 countries, interrupting learning for close to 1.58 billion learners (91.4 per cent of total enrolled learners) and prompting almost all education systems to deploy distance learning solutions. In many countries, a number of effects are resulting from such school closure situation. Dawadi et al. (2020) opine that the repercussions of the school closures on the access to quality learning and learning resources have been significantly widening the gap further between the students who are

disadvantaged and reside in the outlying parts of the country and those from the urban areas.

Yakin et al. (2020) assessed the adoption of E-learning during Covid-19 lockdown in Nigeria and found that it is rendered ineffective by challenges such as unavailability of digital equipments, skills, internet and related resources. They suggested that for E-learning to be conducted holistically, teaching and learning material resources should be provided by responsible persons - the schools and government in particular. Actually, when one of the sides responsible for effective teaching and learning does not play their part, the process does not bear the intended results. When teachers are readily available while learners are not; or when both of them are there without required facilities, the result cannot be satisfactory. In their study, Gintings et al. (2020) examined the effectiveness of the implementation of Study From Home (SFH) policy for students of junior, senior and vocational high schools in Serang City – Indonesia and concluded that for this exercise to be successful, teachers should ensure that not only students but also parents should seriously be involved in the process, if not it is time wasting. In fact it is important that students engage their time and energy and feel responsible for their learning. Parents on the other hand are responsible to provide their children with necessary resources and have a keen eye on their children so that they cannot undermine the activity. On their sides, teachers must motivate and engage students to the most extent. In that context, a trio-cooperation is required for studying from home not only during Covid-19 lockdown but also in any case a face – to- face teaching is deemed impossible. Elsewhere, Carver et al. (2020) demonstrate that technological advancement has made online learning an essential component in higher education despite the challenge that not all learners are readily available to embrace it due to their different backgrounds and experiences. They add that providing technological resources is not enough for e-learning to be carried out effectively. Of course, the students' role matters as they are at the centre of effective learning. The knowledge they are equipped with in the subject, the resources provided to them coupled with their ICT experiences due to their backgrounds, and their will to embrace online learning, all are factors that influence online teaching in one way or another. In the view of Marwan & Padmarani (2013), technology is considered as an effective tool in the process of teaching and learning languages. They add that for the process to be effective,

learners and their teacher need be provided with required tools and elements such as personal computer and internet. Apostol (2020) critically examined students' perceptions on the impact of Covid -19 on learning process and found out that such pandemic made the E-learning prime over face-to-face as one of the measures taken by Romanian government to slow down the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. In the same vein, Dawadi et al. (2020) contend that the compulsory closure of schools and universities for a considerable period of time in Nepal led to a dramatic change of the education system, with the distinctive rise of e-learning whereby teaching and learning is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. They posit that many challenges are associated with the move to access to e-learning including, without limitation to, inequality of access to resources between the urban and rural learners.

V. METHOD

This study is a descriptive survey conducted during Covid - 19 pandemic. This situation dictates the public to respect social distancing, which does not allow face - to- face contact with participants. The study involved year one students of University of Rwanda-College of Education. These students were pursuing their undergraduate studies in languages, in Nyagatare Campus located in Eastern Province of the country. Data were collected using distant communication with students taking Introduction to Literature in English. To collect information, questionnaire was sent to students through their emails as availed on their registration on E-learning platform. Questionnaire comprised both closed and open questions such as a six For Likert Scale questions, nine Yes/No questions and three open questions. The study used 21 participants because not all those who were emailed gave feedback. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics besides qualitative approach. Additionally, the situation on the platform was examined with particular focus on learners' participation in the forum discussion. Students' various calls to be assisted when they are stuck during the learning process were another source of information. All the information was analysed qualitatively in tandem with the stated study questions.

VI. FINDINGS

Presented findings in this section are collected through questionnaire emailed to undergraduate one's students who

are taking Introduction to Literature in English. Data were collected basing on factors that can obstruct learners to use ICT during online learning. Besides, the teacher's analysis of the situation on E- leaning platform was another reliable source of information. Data collected from respondents are tabled and presented based on three themes reflecting the research questions such as students' interest in online learning literary subjects; challenges associated with this mode of course delivery; and how to address those issues for effective online learning. Information collected reflects the UNDP (2020) that the COVID-19 pandemic was superimposed on unsolved tensions between people and technology, between people and the planet, between the haves and the have – nots; the tensions already shaping a new generation of inequalities - pertaining to enhanced capabilities, and the new necessities of the 21st century […] as revealed in the following tables.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic information

Respondents' gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
M	18	85.7	85.7
F	3	14.3	100.0
Respondents' age			
Between 20-21	8	38.1	38.1
Between 22- 23	7	33.3	71.4
Between 24-25	3	14.3	85.7
Between 26-27	2	9.5	95.2
above 27	1	4.8	100.0
Combinations			
KEE	13	61.9	61.9
SEE	4	19.0	81.0
FEE	1	4.8	85.7
FDE	3	14.3	100.0
Total	**21**	**100.0**	

Table 2.Students' ICT skills and their interest in it.

STATEMENTS	STUDENTS' VIEWS									
	Strongly agree			Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		
	N	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Interpre tation
I have enough ICT skills to help me in on line learning	21	7	33.3	4	19.0	4	19.0	6	28.6	A
I was trained in ICT before joining University	21	1	4.8	6	28.6	8	38.1	6	28.6	D
I am interested in ICT	21	10	47.6	6	28.6	3	14.3	2	9.5	A
ICT does not interest me because it challenges me	21	1	4.8	3	14.3	7	33.3	10	47.6	D
I am not interested in ICT because it is not the core subject in my combination	21	0	0.00	1	4.8	6	28.6	14	66.7	D
I am not interested in ICT because it is expensive	21	3	14.3	4	19.0	11	52.4	3	14.3	D

Table 3. Challenge in learning Literature in English during COVID-19 lockdown

Challenge Statements	Students' situation					
	Yes			No		
	N	F	%	N	F	%
I have a problem of lack of ICT skills	21	12	57.1	21	9	42.9
I don't have any personal computer	21	16	76.2	21	5	23.8
I don't have a smart phone	21	8	38.1	21	13	61.9
I am unable to have any computer or smart phone with	21	10	47.6	21	11	52.4
It is difficult for me to find internet bundles	21	15	71.4	21	6	28.6
I am unable to get any internet bundles	21	11	52.4	21	10	47.6
It is difficult for me to learn without verbal interaction	21	9	42.9	21	12	57.1
My little interest in literary subjects affects me when I am learning online	21	9	42.9	21	12	57.1
My little English affects me when I am learning on	21	12	57.1	21	9	42.9
Learning Literature in English via e-learning platform helps me improve my English language skills	21	13	61.9	21	8	38.1

How to address these challenges for effective teaching online

What students should do

When asked about how these challenges can be addressed, participants identified what they should do, the teachers' part and the institution's role. Among the recurring suggestions, participants converge that they should not waste any time during the stay home period. Most of them posit that "*each student should have a smart phone or a personal computer and connect them with internet*", read a lot by doing research for additional information besides the lecturer's inputs; attend without fail, mobilize and encourage each other to use e-learning platform, pay close attention to the course and check regularly any update on the learning platform; get

engaged in forum discussion on the platform and feel free to ask questions where they don't understand; and "*present difficulties for a help and share information about E-learning via their whatsApp class groups*" about what they are learning. They added that they should "*increase their ICT skills and English language skills*" as two important means to adapt themselves be they in good or bad situations.

The role of the teacher

To What should be the role of the teacher, participants revealed that lecturers should regularly guide learners on how to access e-learning platform, supervise and work with their students on line; give course activities, assignment and quizzes; "*use and accept email attachment since not all students are able to access the material on the platform*", nor are they all able to upload their works. Besides, participants suggested that teachers should know that "*not all students are equipped with ICT gadgets*" since they are from different background; and "*know that some of them live in rural places without electricity*". They should upload audio-visual resources and recorded course explanations on the platform; regularly listen to their students' difficulties and challenges and assist them accordingly; keep reminding learners to submit their works in due time; make sure they have done it and give feedback without delay. They should by and large motivate learning on the platform.

How the institution can assist learners

The role of the institution should be the following as suggested by respondents: Provide bundles to both lecturers and students, provide students with ICT tools specifically laptops. They say, "*As students of level one don't have computers, university should speak on that issue to government, because it is a big issue we are addressing*" ; and by and large, "the university should train them on the use of E- learning tool before they start learning other courses" Moreover, participants suggested that the university should "*provide needed E-books*" and supervise lecturers to ensure that they are helping students; create a means that gives students opportunity to access the platform free of internet charge; or discuss with telecommunication companies to reduce internet costs for University students in particular.

In addition to the above suggested solutions, it is worth pointing out parents' role which should not be left out as they can support their children by providing resources to ease the activity.

VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

On line learning is greatly influenced by three important factors namely student, teacher and digital resources availed; all having a trio- relationship in the process of course delivery. Difficulties or gaps on one side affect the whole process. Rapid expansion of access to telecommunications technology gadgets in Rwanda has enabled the country to adopt distance learning to students despite the fact that not all of these technologies are equally available on the ground that students from the poor households are at disadvantage of this mode of course delivery.

As presented in table 1, the number of male participants (85.7%) is higher than female (14.3%). Majority of them are aged 20-21(33.3%). Only one of them (4.8%) is above 27 meaning they are too young enough to be attracted by ICT. Concerning their area of study, four combinations are identified such as Kinyarwanda-English with Education (KEE) which counts 33.3%; then 19.4% doing Swahili - English with Education(SEE), 14.3% from French Drama Education (FDE) and finally 4.8% from French-English with Education(FEE) combination.

Concerning students' ICT skills and how they are interested in it, table 2 shows that most of them 52.3% (that is 33.3% who strongly agree while 19% agree) do not have enough ICT skills to help them learn online, yet they are interested in it as revealed in the table, 73.2% confirming that they are interested in ICT. The reason is that most of them (66.7%) that is (38.1% and then 28.6%) reveal that they were not trained in ICT before they joined University. This means that they have difficulties in using ICT gadgets, a challenge which impedes their online learning in a way or another. This implies that joining a research based university without being well equipped with ICT skills results in getting lost to a great extent, especially when face-to-face teaching is impossible.

Regarding technological devices, table 3 shows that students faced a problem of lack of personal computers as confirmed by most respondents (76.2%). Although some posit that they have smart phones (61.9%), they are unable to get internet bundles (71.4%). This is like a situation of having a car without fuel to make it move and reach the destination. Actually, E-learning during the stay home period is hard, if not impossible, from home without internet. Parents' material support is therefore needed for children to carry it out effectively. Brom et al. (2020) emphasizes the point

made here. They say that parents' involvement into their children's home education during the COVID-19 lockdown is important especially the provision of technological devices. When parents are unable to provide these means, concluded the authors, learning in that context is greatly affected. Concerning tertiary education, it is important to state that University students are still dependent from their parents' financial support without which technological resources cannot be available during the stay home learning.

Related to the material resources during the stay home learning, participants face another problem which has become a rampant issue among students who use English as their L2 language. While English is a medium of instruction in Rwandan education system, little communication skills in that language greatly affects content understanding. To illustrate, majority of participants in this study (57.1%) confirmed that their "little English affects them" although they deny having difficulties when they are leaning in a context without verbal interaction [face to face]. One will conclude that English as a medium of instruction is still a rampant issue although no stone was left unturned to remedy the situation.   All these challenges are associated with previous backgrounds before learners join higher education.

Among the possible solutions to the existing challenges already discussed, one participant said, "*Students' role first is to visit and attend this E-learning platform more times as well as possible because having to many participation will helps to get successful* [sic]". This is true. When you look back into their participation and attendance in Introduction to Literature in English on the E- learning platform, it is important to point out that the rate is low in that out of 556 total students enrolled for the course, only 405 (72.8 %) attended. For the remaining 151 about (27. 2%), the platform reveals that they "never" visited the course for all the six elapsed months since school closure during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Rwanda. Mobilisation was attempted many times through those who attended regularly, but in vain. Such a situation leads to a conclusion that they face critical situation of lack of ICT resources. Hence, E-learning during the COVID -19 lockdowns is not inclusive in the sense that students are found in total different learning environments as Subrata (2020) asserts that not all these ICT gadgets are available to students from poor households. Put it another way, some are more affected than others as briefed in Astrid et al. (2020) that the COVID-19 effects in developing countries are harsher than in Europe; as amplified with the

cessation of economic activity, threatening to push millions more people into poverty and other unintended adverse health hurdles. To illustrate, one of the respondents revealed that some students in rural areas "*have smart phones but it is difficult to charge them because there is no electricity in their homes*". If their tools are then affected by lack of power in their local places, it is hard if not impossible for them to learn. Of course, following the observation of the United Nations(2020), the crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth and adults, particularly those living in poor or rural areas[and of course the poor in some urban areas]. Related to this case, as a response to the emailed questionnaire, one participant said. "*Difficulty for me is that I don't have enter net even computer laptop [sic]*". This means that access to the course for her is harder due to lack of resources and (Soland et al.(2020 May, 27) asserts that if the pandemic subsides, students [in similar situation] will return to schools with lower achievements; and there will therefore be a larger gap between the higher achieving students and the lower ones. There are two possible interpretations of this situation: Either those who did not attend could not have access to internet or do not have any means to enable them learn on line due to their home places, rural areas in particular, whereby technological gadgets are not enough compared to urban areas. Another reason is connected with the situation of electricity which stands that to date only 55% Rwandan households have access to electricity. Thus, since the Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented educational drastic disruption affecting over 90% more students and youth across the planet (UNESCO, 2020), Rwandan higher education strives to put efforts in E-learning to cope with the situation despite a number of challenges most of them falling under the ICT gadgets related problems.

To remedy the situation, ICT gadgets need be provided to students because without those resources, E-leaning cannot run. In Covid-19 lockdowns, successful E-learning cannot be effective without parents' contribution and the institution's part. Tsairidis et al. (2020) report that parents   accept ICT gadgets as a teaching tool and as a new teaching method that will help their children to improve their knowledge, but they do not want their children to overuse new technologies especially when they are absent. In fact, when students are provided with the necessary resources including, without limitation to, personal

computers or smart phones, internet bundles and electricity, they are motivated because those tools are taken as the engine of E-learning. Students should first and foremost get engaged and engage more efforts to increase their ICT skills if not the situation will become rampant. During pandemics like COVID-19 where face- to- face teaching is impossible, students should take time and read a lot; particularly Literature in English which requires intensive reading for critical analysis. They should bear in their mind that learning on line is primarily beneficial to them only when they play their part without wasting any time. Should they regularly check what is happening on the platform, and do their part, by collaborating and exchanging information through any electronic means, the blame to them would have no room. When stuck, they should directly contact the facilitator electronically for assistance. Following closely, teachers' regular supervision is needed because without their motivation, learners are not interested (Alharbi, 2020). When lecturers keep on reminding learners about the activities to be done and submitted, and give feedbacks in due time; students will continue to be motivated and not feel that courses stopped at school.

VIII.   LIMITATIONS

This study was particularly limited by population sample determination that can affect results in this study not to be generalized for the whole targeted population. Following Morgan and Krejcie (1970), out of 556 total registered students, a sample of 220 would be representative. However, not all those who were emailed gave feedback as only 21 receivers replied in requested time and provided some information basing on questions into the questionnaire. Another limitation goes with the COVID-19 pandemic which could not allow observation and interview to be used in this study while they should be supplementary and complementary tools to questionnaire, a single instrument used in this study.

IX.   CONCLUSION

Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 percent in low and lower-middle income countries (UN, August 2020).The present study examined challenges related with the use of ICT gadgets in on line teaching during the COVID-19 lockdowns with specific interest in Introduction to Literature in English, a subject taught to undergraduate one students pursuing language education. While the teaching of literary subjects augurs language skills enhancement, the COVID-19 pandemic has considerably interfered and affected the online course delivery and its aims.   Based on the view that learning literary subjects engages learners and enables them to interact, think critically and develop various language skills(Bazimaziki, 2019), the study revealed that factors such as lack of necessary ICT skills and resources to access the course; have had a great impact on their learning. They should join university having good working skills of ICT and good communication skills in English. The university should train them about E-learning tool before they start learning other subjects. Should they also be equipped with necessary functional and modern ICT resources so that they can cope with challenges they face in E-learning during pandemics whatsoever. Elsewhere, results in this study are by no means exhaustive. The author declares that these results cannot be generalized for the whole institution, nor can they be applied to all literary courses as they concern the only one subject investigated in this short survey. Related studies involving other subjects, programmes and levels should be conducted using a considerable population sample to examine whether the situation is consistent or not.

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