E-learning in English as second language (ESL) classroom amid covid-19: underprivileged students' perspectives

ABSTRACT

School closures due to Covid-19 have brought significant disruptions to education across the globe. An estimated 1.6 billion students experienced a dramatic shift to distance learning, with physical classrooms replaced by televisions, cellphones, and computers. However, children who were the least likely to have access to affordable and reliable connectivity adequate devices – those from low-income families, marginalized communities, or living in rural areas – were more likely to be at risk of falling behind, further widening the deep educational inequalities they already faced. This paper, therefore, attempts to shed light on the challenges that ESL students are currently facing in an online learning environment, especially underprivileged students. Nine pre-university students from the Foundation Programme of the Preparatory Centre for Science and Technology were involved in this case study. Through a qualitative approach, an in-depth interview was done to explore the students' experiences and challenges in learning English virtually. The structured interview questions were carefully designed based on the objective of eliciting the students' opinions on the topic of interest. The findings show that the most common challenges underprivileged students are facing with e-learning are technical issues and the availability of devices for online learning. Although it was considered a small-scale study, these early findings may hope to inspire the Ministry to bridge the gap in English proficiency between privileged and underprivileged students, by driving more in-depth studies or projects to increase the student's accessibility to resources and create more opportunities for them to improve their English.