Contributing Stressors to Online Language Learning Difficulties at King Saud University: Basis for Adaptive Teaching Methodologies

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Abstract

The application of technology in education has become a trend in teaching and the focus of interest in multiple studies because of its various means of implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic has even amplified the need to adapt to different digital-related modalities, one of which is online learning. Although online learning has many benefits for teachers and students, it still poses numerous challenges for education stakeholders. The current study aims to analyze the stressors contributing to difficulties induced by online language learning as experienced by both the students and teachers at King Saud University (KSU). The study also aims to serve as a basis for developing adaptive teaching modalities. This study uses a mixed-descriptive quantitative and qualitative research method, with an open-ended question and a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The findings suggest that both the teachers and students frequently felt stressed by the identified contributing stressors and felt that online language learning was difficult for both clusters of respondents. Furthermore, the study concludes with the suggestion that the administrators should consider the needs of the teachers and students and offer them the necessary support to help alleviate the stress and difficulties they are experiencing with online language learning.

Keywords: online language learning, stress, contributing stressors, difficulty, adaptive

1. Introduction

Myriads of nations continue to adapt to online learning, which is growing into a trend that is associated with technological progress worldwide. Online learning is often regarded as an opportunity for future advancement of teaching and learning modalities or approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified the need to adopt different digital-related modalities, one of which is online learning. However, as Orlando and Attard (2015) emphasized, "Teaching with technology is not a one size fits all approach as it depends on the types of technology in use at the time and also the curriculum content being taught." (p. 119). This statement implies that difficulties can be experienced in online language learning as in any teaching–learning modality because it considers other factors such as the kind of technology, the present curriculum, and the needs of the time. In this sense, the pandemic period.

Teachers and students are the two core groups in education that are affected by these difficulties. In this regard, Kuama and Intharaksa (2016) found that low English proficiency students lacked online learning skills and experiences in self-directed learning. These findings suggest that students are not ready for online language learning because of the problems encountered in their online language learning. Furthermore, recent studies have pointed out that during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have suffered stress from adapting themselves (in record time) to providing online classes (Besser et al., 2020). Thus, one of the main aims of this study was to investigate further the language teaching and learning experiences of teachers and students during this pandemic.

Although some studies have shown positive effects of online learning, there are also various studies that have indicated that students have been disfavored or experienced difficulties in online language learning. For example, students felt barriers in collaborative participation such as anxiety to cooperate in online learning (Davidson, 2015). In another study, Alhamami (2019) suggested that students have more positive behavioral control beliefs toward learning language in face-to-face settings than in online settings. Furthermore, in a more recent study,

although students feel motivated to learn online, they feel that they have not improved their language skills by studying purely online and revealed that the face-to-face classes should not be replaced (Klimova, 2021).

Conversely, there are a number of studies that have shown the positive effects of online teaching for teachers; however, there are also a number of researchers who have stated otherwise. For example, Koehler stated that teaching with technology can be a complicated and difficult task for some teachers under the influence of social and contextual factors (as cited in Gao & Zhang, 2020). Also, in their study, Barbour and Harrision (2016) stated that in the United States, there is still a scarcity of teacher development programs that support teachers who deliver the lessons online. Ulla and Perales (2021) concurred that because of this, teachers may be unprepared for and may lack the skills to do online teaching. They further asserted that teachers in most Southeast Asian classrooms may face not only difficulty moving to online and remote teaching due to their lack of experience in online pedagogy but also other technical issues. Consequently, there is a growing need to further investigate if these issues are also being experienced in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the locale.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Online Language Learning and Teaching

Because of the pandemic, many educational institutions adopted online learning. According to Singh and Thurman (2019), online learning is a learning experience in synchronous or asynchronous environments with the use of different gadgets or devices with internet access. In relation to this current study, online learning is implemented in the locale, which is a response not only to digital learning but also to the call for continuance of education despite the pandemic.

Various theories can be used to further understand online language learning and teaching.. One of the most common is connectivism. Connectivism refers to a learning theory that elucidates how internet technologies have created new opportunities for people to learn and share information across the World Wide Web and among themselves (Siemens, 2005). The theory is in accordance with the learning trends of the 21st century when technologies became a vital part of daily life (Wichadee, 2018).

Moreover, in terms of the English language, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is one of the most famous digital strategies being used, and it refers to a general term used for the range of processes and activities that employ computers in the teaching and learning of a new language (Stevie, 2020). Moreover, as technology progressed, various means in teaching online learning also popped up. For instance, different learning management systems (LMS) have emerged, such as Moodle, Canvas, Google Classroom, and Blackboard. For emphasis, in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the locale of the study, the LMS used is Blackboard, which in turn bridges education to the students in these times of pandemic. However, in the online teaching and learning, it is inevitable to come across difficulties in the implementation of this modality.

1.2.2 Difficulties in Online Language Learning and Teaching

As with all modalities in teaching and learning, teachers and students will face difficulties in online language learning and teaching.

As academic institutions started to adapt to online language learning, various advantages have been observed. However, difficulties were also encountered since stress is inevitable in online language learning. Rout and Rout (1993, as cited in Bahumair et al., 2015) defined stress as a situation where environmental demands exceed the capacity for effective response by the individual and can potentially have physical and psychological consequences. Accordingly, the study of stress is required for facilitating and overcoming difficulties encountered in online learning. In response to that demand, various stressors related to online language learning have sparked researchers' interest in the topic. According to Kuama and Intharaksa (2016), low English proficiency students lacked online learning skills and experiences in self-directed learning.

In addition, Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) conducted a study in which they explored the issue of whether the use of technology in virtual or online classrooms can heal sources of anxiety or add more pressure to them. They found that students at times feel isolated and uncomfortable in their online classes, which contributes to the stress they experience in online learning. They then suggested that teachers should show more care for students and create more interaction with them so that they do not feel isolated and bored. Furthermore, according to Song et al., students feel that the lack of community and the technical problems and difficulties in understanding instructional goals are the major barriers to online learning (as cited in Dhawan, 2020). In another study that focused on teachers, it was also a challenge for them to move from traditional to online modality, change their methodologies, and manage their time. It is even a challenge for the teachers to develop content that not only covers the curriculum but also engages the students (Kebritchi et al., 2017). In yet another study, MacIntyre et al.

(2020) stated that as teachers convert to online language teaching, they experience many stressors, such as workload, loss of control over work, and family health.

In a more localized setting in Saudi Arabia, most universities have also adopted different language teaching–learning modalities, especially online language learning. Online language learning in Saudi Arabia has also resulted in both positive and negative outcomes. For instance, Alsowayegh et al. (2019) found that using online activities instruction improved university EFL learners' listening and speaking skills. However, Rahman (2020) indicated that lack of motivation was a significant result of and a difficulty experienced in online language learning. In line with Rahman's findings, other literature cited numerous causes for students' demotivation, such as being socially isolated, having a weak internet connection, enduring distractions at home, and not being able to achieve class objectives (Hernández & Flórez, 2020). In relation to teachers, online language learning has also yielded positive and negative perceptions. For example, Algethami (2022) revealed that English language teachers from several Saudi universities demonstrated online readiness. Conversely, online learning has yielded negative results for the teachers, students, and parents who have all experienced sudden unpreparedness in using online technologies, which is a matter that impeded effective learning worldwide (Al Salman et al., 2021). Furthermore, Daraghmeh et al. (2021) found the need to leverage virtual technology and acquired knowledge and skills of Khbrat English teacher graduates to deliver EFL professional development with a more pedagogical focus and to build coalitions among EFL educators to sustain the forward movement of innovation in English education in post-pandemic Saudi Arabia.

1.3 Importance of the Problem

The aforementioned details indicate that online language teaching and learning still need further studies to elucidate the pros and cons of this topic, especially because most countries' educational systems are still affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, in Saudi Arabia, this topic needs to be profoundly investigated to provide a more in-depth view. In addition, there are still a limited number of studies conducted on the difficulties posed by online language learning for both teachers and students in Saudi Arabia. In this study, these variables have been considered and contributing stressors that add to online language learning difficulties have been focused on. In a more contextualized setting, this study investigated the stressors contributing to online language learning difficulties to serve as a basis for adapting to modern technological methodologies to further improve online language learning, and it will eventually be of great assistance to the students, teachers, and administrators at King Saud University (KSU).

1.4 Study Aim

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze the stressors contributing to online language learning difficulties as experienced by both the students and teachers. The study also aimed to provide, through its results, a basis for developing adaptive teaching modalities in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in general and at KSU in particular.

2. Research Questions

The current study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1) What is the level of frequency of the identified stressors contributing to online language learning difficulties by the faculty members?

2) What is the level of frequency of the identified stressors contributing to online language learning difficulties by the students?

3) What is the level of difficulties encountered by teachers and students in online language learning?

4) What improvements can be made to alleviate online language learning difficulties?

3. Methods

3.1 Methodology of the Study

To attain its goal, the study adopted a mixed-methods research because the exploration of stressors contributing to online language difficulties will be conducted through descriptive quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The results of the analysis may serve as a basis for developing adaptive teaching modalities.

3.2 Participant Characteristics and Ethical Considerations

For the population and locale, 30 faculty members (ranging in age from 27 to 49 years, 50% of which were women and 50% men) and 81 students (ranging in age from 19 to 29 years, 35.8% of which were women and 64.2 men) from KSU in Saudi Arabia responded to the request to participate in this study. This study followed,

but was not limited to, proper ethical considerations, such as voluntary participation, informing the participants about the details of the study, and securing their privacy and confidential information.

3.3 Study Instruments and Procedure

Pre-survey and literature reviews were conducted to identify the contributing stressors that formed part of the questionnaire. Data were collected through an online Google Form, and a 5-point frequency Likert scale questionnaire was used to answer the first two research questions (see Table 1).

Table 1. 5-Point Frequency Likert Scale

5	Always ("Yes, I am always being stressed by this stressor.")
4	Frequently
3	Sometimes
2	Seldom
1	Never ("No, I am never stressed about this stressor.")

As for the level of difficulty, a 5-point difficulty Likert scale was used, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. 5-Point Difficulty Likert Scale

5	Very Difficult
4	Difficult
3	Neutral
2	Easy
1	Not Difficult/Very Easy

In addition, the data were gathered and interpreted through simple statistics, specifically using frequency count and percentage. The data were then synthesized and interpreted. The questionnaire also included an open-ended question to gather recommendations and suggestions for improving online language learning. Thematic analysis was used in this area. Themes and categories were identified to describe and interpret their recommendations and suggestions to serve as part of the basis for adapting to teaching methodologies in online language learning.

4. Results

This section provides the study's findings, which are subdivided into four parts.

4.1 Stressors Contributing to Online Language Learning Difficulties Encountered by Faculty Members

This section shows the results of the level of frequency of identified stressors contributing to online language learning difficulties encountered by the faculty members, including academic stressors and non-academic stressors.

4.1.1 Academic Stressors

The following figures are in reference to Table 1: the 5-point frequency Likert scale indicates the results related to 10 academic stressors. These stressors are subject loading/scheduling, standards set by the university, overloaded subject requirements as per curriculum, lesson content, students' attitudes toward the teachers, students' attitudes toward learning, difficulty to understand and use new technology-related methodologies in teaching, lack of instructional/educational resources being used to support teaching, online platforms/apps being used, and other scholarly/professional pursuits.
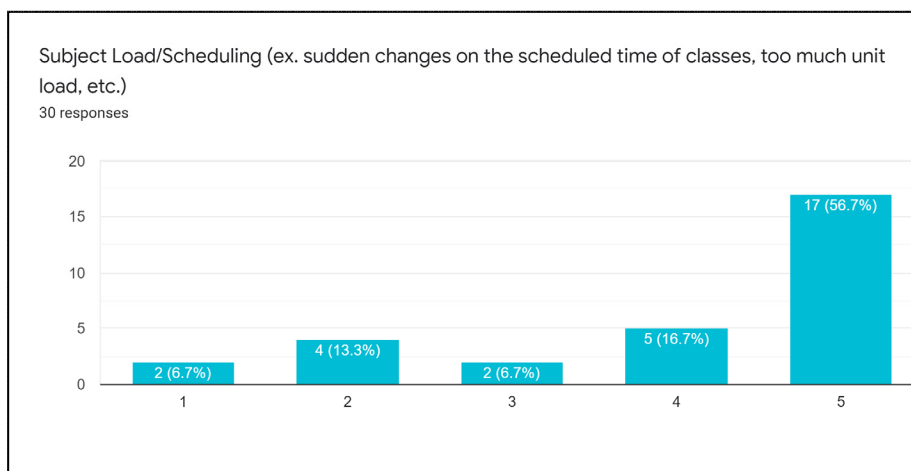
Figure 1. Subject Loading/Scheduling

Figure 1 shows that in terms of subject loading/scheduling, the results revealed that 56.7% of the teachers always feel stressed, followed by 16.7% of the teachers who frequently feel stressed. Subsequently, 13.3% of the teachers seldom feel stressed, whereas 6.7% seldom and sometimes feel stressed.
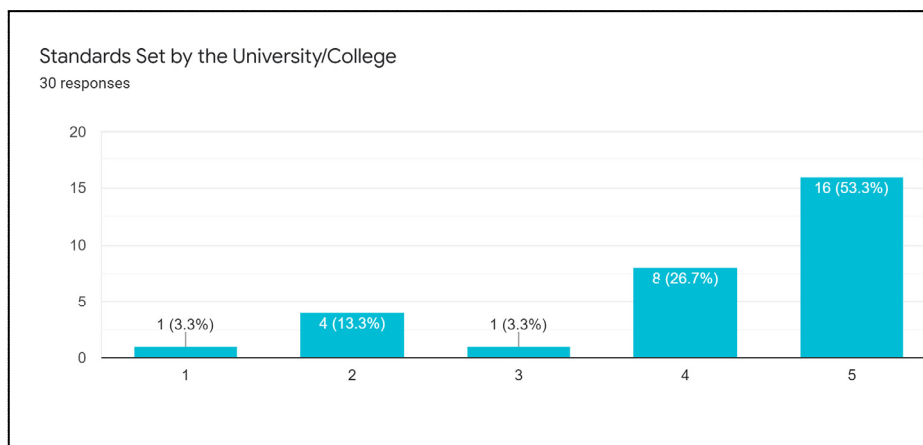

Figure 2. Standards Set by the University

Figure 2 shows that 53.3% of the teachers feel stressed in the standards set by the university, whereas 26.7% feel frequently stressed, and 13.3% seldom feel stressed, whereas 3.3% sometimes and never feel stressed.

Figure 3. Overloaded Subject Requirements as Per Curriculum

As indicated in Figure 3, 56.7% of the teachers always feel stressed by overloaded subject requirements as per the curriculum, as the indicator showed in relation to this stressor, whereas 33.3% of the teachers stated that they

are frequently stressed. Only 3.3% never feel stressed and 6.7% seldom feel stressed by this stressor, whereas none of the teachers indicated that this stressor sometimes causes them stress.

Figure 4. Lesson Content

As shown in Figure 4, another contributing stressor under the academic section is lesson content, with 46.7% of the teachers feeling frequently stressed by lesson content and 36.7% always feeling stressed by it. In addition, two equal groups of teachers, representing 6.7% each, stated that they sometimes or seldom feel stressed by it. Only 3.3% were never stressed by lesson content.

Figure 5. Students' Attitudes Toward the Teachers

Based on the results in Figure 5, relating to students' attitude toward the teachers as a contributing stressor, 46.7% of the teachers always feel stressed by it, whereas an equal number of teachers, representing 16.7% each, either never or frequently feel stressed by this stressor. In contrast, only 13.3% of the teachers sometimes feel stressed by it, and 6.7% seldom feel stressed by it.

Figure 6. Students' Attitude Toward Learning

In terms of another contributing stressor of online learning, which is students' attitude toward learning, the results, as shown in Figure 6, indicate that 43.3% of the teachers always feel stressed by it, followed by 30% frequently stressed, 13.3% sometimes stressed, 10% never stressed, and 3.3% seldom stressed.
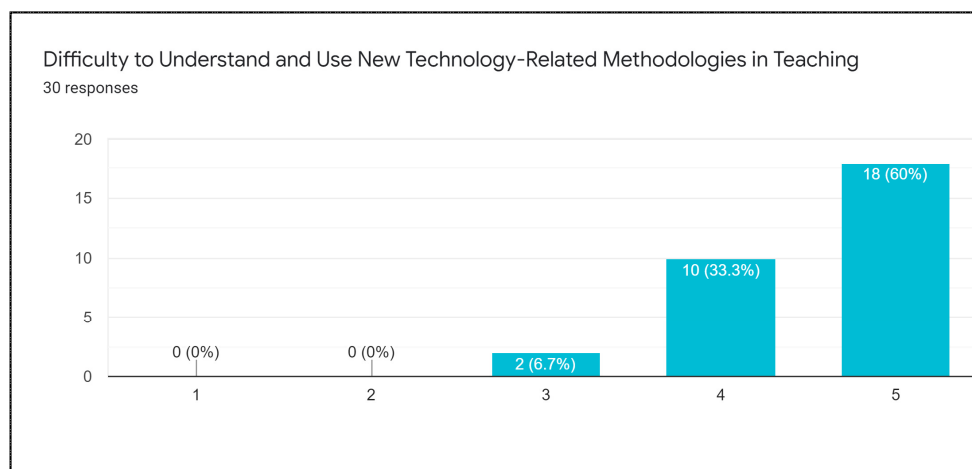

Figure 7. Difficulty Understanding and Using New Technology-Related Methodologies in Teaching

Figure 7 shows that teachers always feel stressed (60%), whereas others feel frequently stressed (33.3%) and sometimes stressed (6.7%), in terms of the difficulty of the use of technology-related methodologies in teaching. None of the teachers indicated that they seldom and never feel stressed by this stressor.

Figure 8. Lack of Instructional/Educational Resources Being Used to Support Teaching

Regarding the lack of instructional/educational resources being used to support teaching, teachers expressed that they always feel stressed (56.7%), that they frequently feel stressed (36.7%), and that they sometimes and never feel stressed (3.3%) about this, as shown in Figure 8.

Another contributing sector that falls under academic stressors is the use of online platforms or applications. The results (see Figure 9) show that 53.3% of the teachers always feel stressed, whereas 33.3% frequently feel stressed. In comparison, 6.7% of the teachers sometimes feel stressed, and 3.3% seldom and never feel stressed.

Figure 9. Online Platforms/Apps Being Used

Figure 10. Other Scholarly/Professional Pursuits

The last item among the contributing academic stressors encountered by teachers—other scholarly/professional pursuits—was marked by 50% as always stressed, 30% frequently stressed, 6.7% sometimes stressed, 10% never stressed, and 3.3% seldom stressed.

4.1.2 Non-Academic Stressors

The non-academic stressors include gadget unavailability/problems, problems with internet connectivity, and financial and personal problems.

In addition to academic stressors contributing to online language learning difficulties, non-academic stressors were also considered. One stressor is gadget unavailability or problems, which resulted in teachers always feeling stressed (73.3%) and only frequently feeling stressed (16.7%). As such, the feeling of always being stressed due to this stressor gathered the highest percentage rate (see Figure 11).
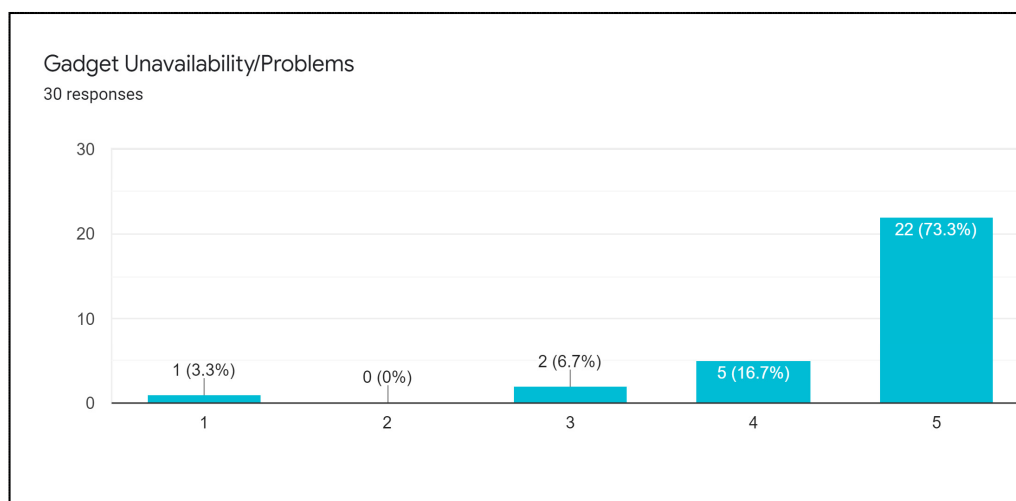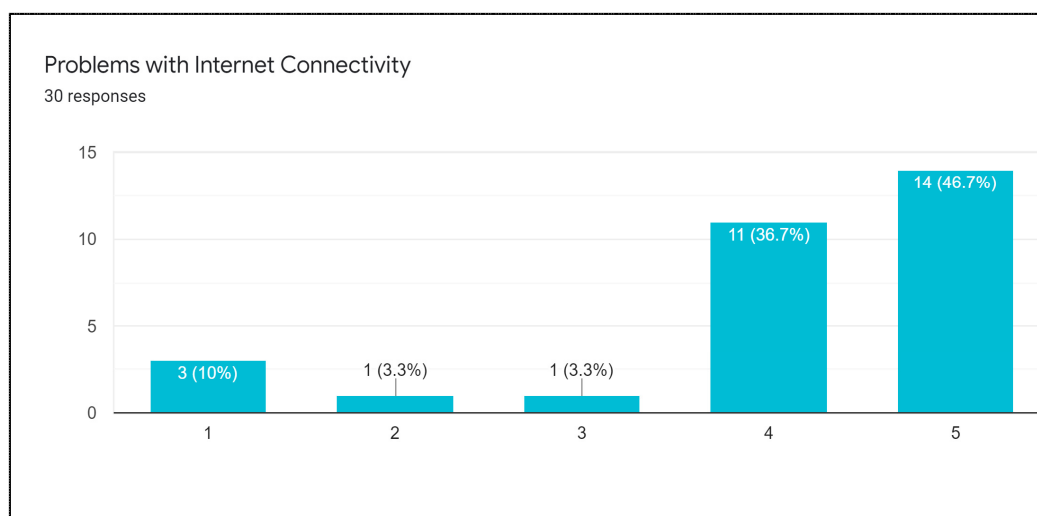
Figure 11. Gadget Unavailability/Problems

Figure 12. Problems With Internet Connectivity

As shown in Figure 12, teachers still feel stressed about problems with internet connectivity. The results indicated that the highest percentage was associated with always feeling stressed (46.7%) by problems of internet connectivity and 36.7% with feeling frequently stressed.

Financial problems also served as a contributing stressor for the teachers. Figure 13 reveals the significantly high percentage (73.3%) for the feeling of always being stressed by this stressor. Ten percent of the teachers expressed that they never felt stressed by this, whereas the other teachers felt frequently stressed and sometimes stressed by this, with a percentage of 6.7%. Moreover, 3.3% expressed that they seldom felt stressed brought on by financial problems.
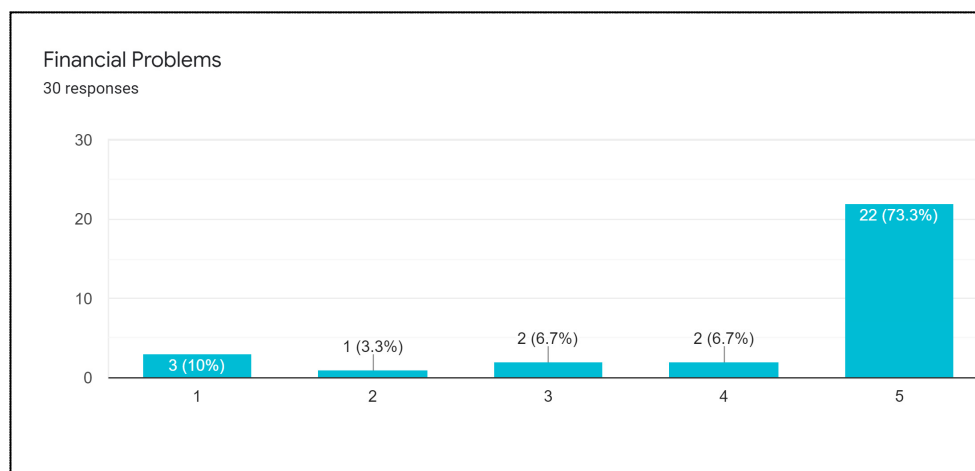
Figure 13. Financial Problems

Moreover, Figure 14 shows striking opposite results in relation to the stressor of family interference/lack of support with their profession. Only 36.7% of the teachers feel that they are always stressed due to this difficulty, whereas the same percentage of teachers stated that they never feel stressed about it. Other teachers felt frequently stressed (20%), whereas 6.7% of teachers felt seldom stressed by this stressor.
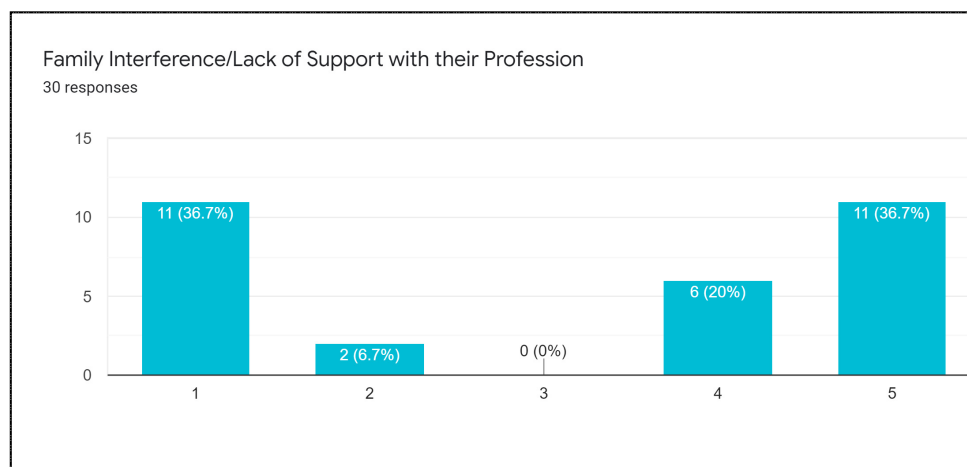

Figure 14. Family Interference/Lack of Support With Their Profession

The last contributing stressor falling under non-academic stressors is that of personal problems. Based on Figure 15, 60% of the teachers always feel stressed due to such problems, whereas 23.3% were never stressed by them. Conversely, only 13.3% of the teachers frequently felt stressed, and 3.3% sometimes felt stressed by this.
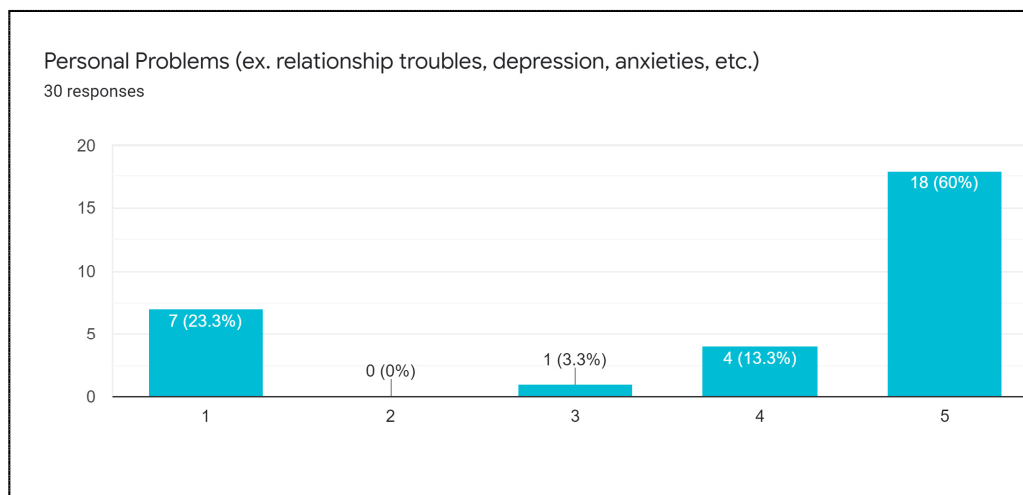

Figure 15. Personal Problems

4.2 Contributing Stressors of Online Language Learning Difficulties Encountered by the Students

4.2.1 Academic Stressors

These stressors include loading/scheduling, standards set by the university, overloaded subject requirements as per the curriculum, lesson content, students' attitudes toward the teachers, students' attitudes toward learning, difficulty understanding and using new technology-related methodologies in teaching, lack of instructional/educational resources being used to support teaching, online platforms/apps being used, and other scholarly/professional pursuits.
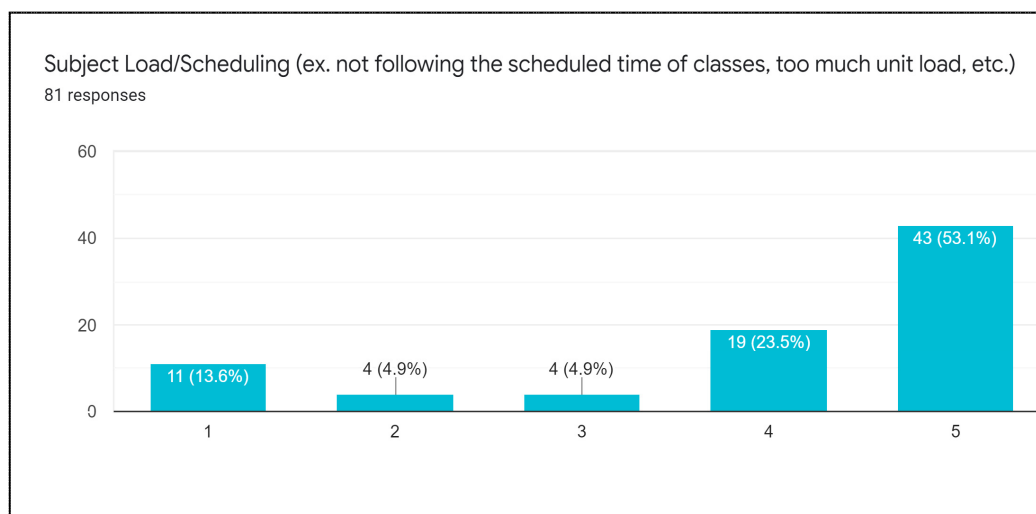

Figure 16. Subject Loading/Scheduling

Figure 16 shows that in terms of subject loading/scheduling, 53.1% of the students always feel stressed, followed by 23.5% who frequently feel stressed, and then 13.6% who never feel stressed and an equal rate of 4.49% who sometimes or seldom feel stressed.

Another stressor included in this study is the standards set by the university. In reference to Figure 17, students always feel stressed at a rate of 51.9% and frequently feel stressed at a rate of 27.2% by the standards set by the university. Lower percentages were distributed among other frequencies, such as never stressed, 9.9%; 7.4% seldom stressed; and 3.7% sometimes stressed due to the standards set by the university.
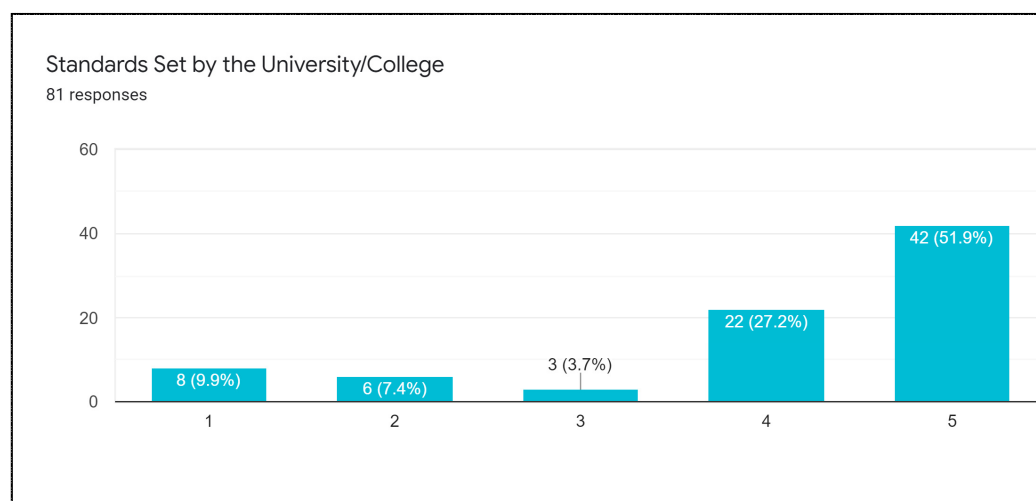

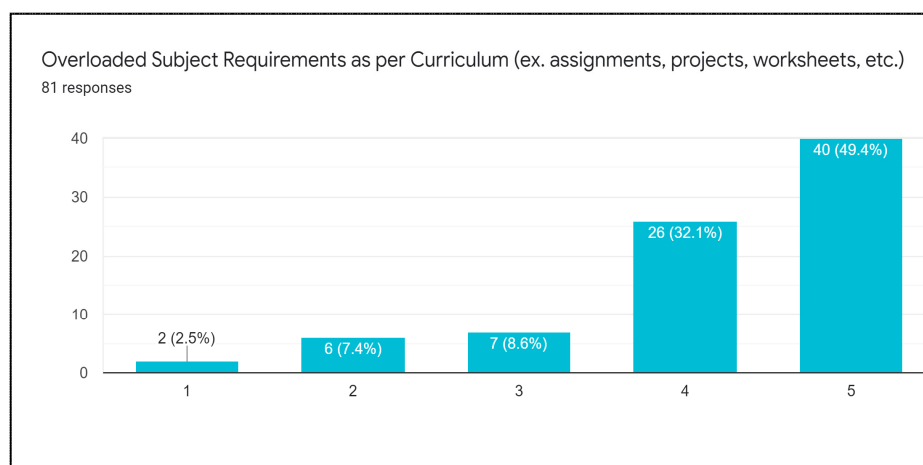Figure 17. Standards Set by the University/College

Figure 18. Subject Requirement Overload

Subject requirement overload is another stressor included in this study. Figure 18 indicates that 49.4% of the students always feel stressed and 32.1% frequently feel stressed by the overloaded subject requirements. In contrast, the lowest percentage, representing 2.5% of the students, never feel stressed about it, whereas 7.4% expressed that they seldom feel stressed, and 8.6% sometimes feel stressed by this stressor.

Another contributing stressor that falls under the academics section is the lesson content. As shown in Figure 19, the rate of 50.6% of the students always feel stressed, whereas a lower number (38.3%) frequently feel stressed by lesson content. The other students sometimes felt stressed (4.9%), seldom felt stressed (3.7%), and never felt stressed (2.5%) due to lesson content.
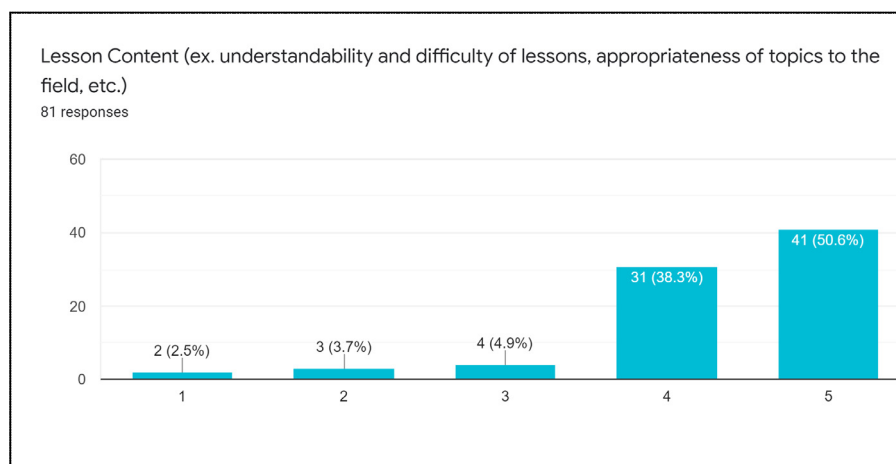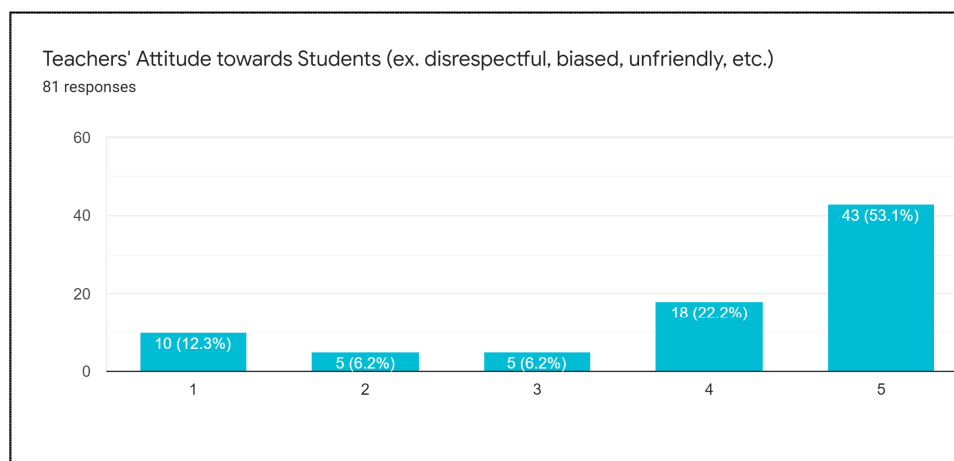

Figure 19. Lesson Content

Figure 20. Teachers' Attitude Toward Students

Teachers' attitude toward students is another contributing stressor for students. As reflected in Figure 20, the highest percentage for this stressor (53.1%) was detected among those students who always feel stressed by it. Conversely, 22.2% frequently felt stressed and 12.3% never felt stressed by this, whereas an equal rate of 6.2% seldom felt and sometimes felt stressed by their teachers' attitude toward them.

Students also felt stressed in terms of what they perceive their teachers' attitude toward teaching to be. As detailed in Figure 21, 61.7% always feel stressed about this stressor, whereas only 19.8% of the students frequently feel stressed by it. Moreover, students who sometimes and seldom felt stressed by this garnered the same percentage of 4.9%, whereas 8.6% expressed never feeling stressed by this stressor.
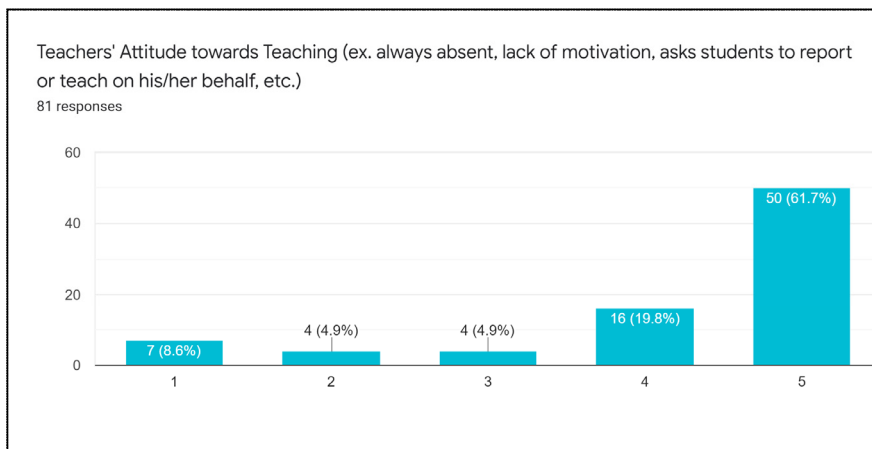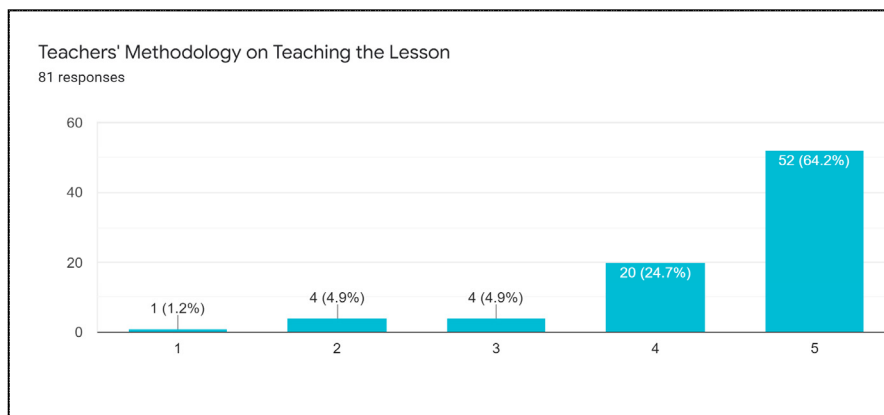

Figure 21. Teachers' Attitude Toward Teaching

Figure 22. Teachers' Methodology on Teaching the Lesson

Figure 22 shows that a high percentage of 64.2% of students always feel stressed about the methodologies used by their teachers in the delivery of their lessons. The second-highest stressor in frequency percentage (24.7%) was that of the teachers feeling frequently stressed, whereas seldom and sometimes stressed garnered both 4.9%. The least percentage was never felt stressed by it, with only 1.2% of the students.
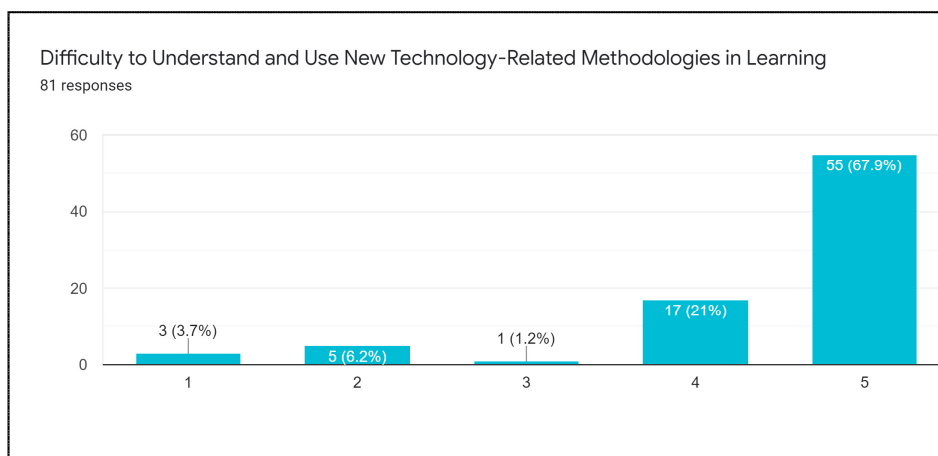
Figure 23. Difficulty Understanding and Using New Technology-Related Methodologies in Learning

Another stressor was difficulty understanding and using new technology-related methodologies in learning. As shown in Figure 23, 67.9% of the students always feel stressed, whereas 21% frequently feel stressed due to the difficulty posed by using technology-related methodologies in learning. Fewer percentages were gathered for students who seldom felt stressed by it, with 6.2%; never felt stressed by it, with 3.7%; and sometimes felt stressed by it, with 1.2%.

Figure 24. Lack of Instructional/Educational Resources Being Used to Support Learning

Regarding lack of instructional/educational resources being used to support learning, as reflected in Figure 24, 60.5% of the students always feel stressed about it, whereas 24.7% indicated that they frequently feel stressed by it. The other 8.6% of the students expressed that they are never stressed by this, whereas 3.7% of them sometimes felt stressed and 2.5% seldom felt stressed by this.

Figure 25. Online Platforms or Applications Being Used

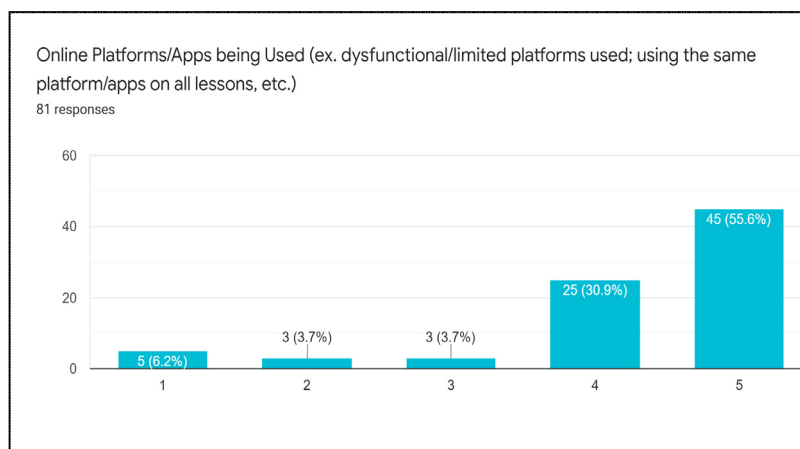Another stressor is the online platforms or applications being used. As indicated in Figure 25, 55.6% always feel stressed, and 30.9% frequently feel stressed by online platforms or applications being used, which is another contributing stressor for the students who are learning language online. There were also a few students (6.2%) who never considered this as a stressor, whereas others expressed they seldom and sometimes felt stressed, with the same percentage of 3.7%.
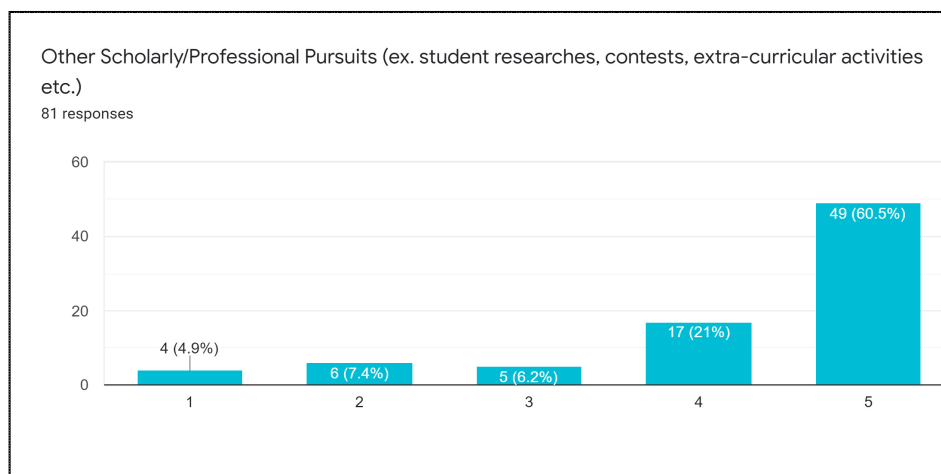

Figure 26. Other Scholarly/Professional Pursuits

As shown in Figure 26, the last of the academic stressors contributing to difficulties faced by students studying language online is that of the pursuit of other scholarly/professional goals. The highest percentage among the students, representing 60.5%, always feel stressed by this factor, and 21% of them frequently felt stressed by this. However, only 7.4% expressed that they are seldom stressed, 6.2% sometimes stressed, and 4.9% never stressed by this factor.

4.2.2 Non-Academic Stressors

As in the case of teachers, the non-academic stressors explored in the study are related to gadgets, internet connectivity, and financial and personal problems as well as lack of family support or their interference.

Figure 27. Gadget Unavailability/Problems

Aside from academic stressors contributing to online language learning difficulties, non-academic stressors as perceived by the students were also considered. One stressor is gadget unavailability or gadget problems, which causes 58% of the students to always feel stressed, 22.2% to be frequently stressed, and 9.9% to never be stressed by this, whereas 6.2% expressed that they are seldom stressed by it, and only 3.7% sometimes felt stressed by this stressor (see Figure 27).

Another stress contributor is problems with internet connectivity. Figure 28 shows that students feel stressed about problems with internet connectivity, indicating that the two highest results were related to always feeling stressed (65.4%) and frequently being stressed (18.5%) by this factor. Moreover, 7.4% of the students expressed

never feeling stressed by it and 6.2% as sometimes feeling stressed by it. Only 2.5% expressed that they are seldom stressed by problems with internet connectivity.
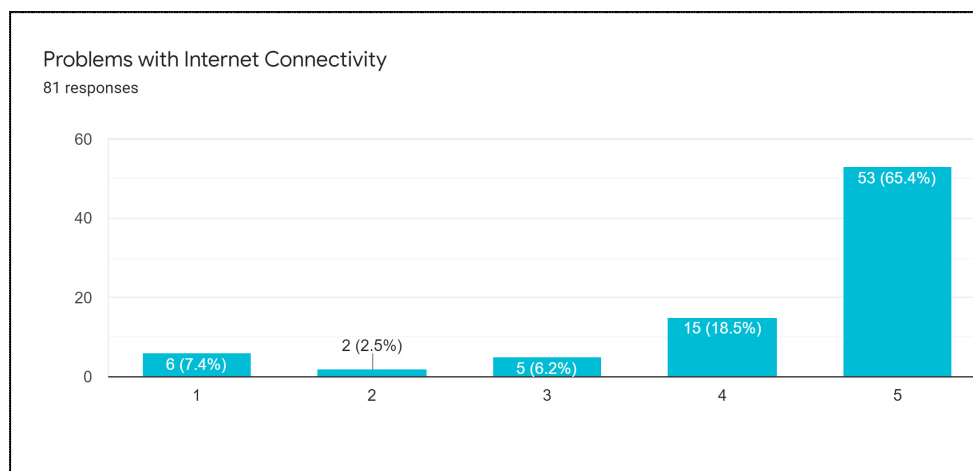

Figure 28. Problems With Internet Connectivity

In addition, even for students, financial problems also served as a contributing stressor to their online language learning difficulties, with the results showing that a significantly high percentage of students (69.1%) are always stressed by this factor and 21% are frequently stressed by this, as shown in Figure 29. Only 6.2% of the students never felt stressed by this, and 2.5% and 1.2% seldom and sometimes felt stressed by financial problems, respectively.

Figure 29. Financial Problems

Figure 30 shows the results relating to family interference/lack of support with learning as a contributing stressor to students' online language learning difficulties. As shown in Figure 30, 44.4% of the students always feel stressed about this, whereas 23.5% frequently feel stressed; however, 18.5% stated that they never felt stressed about this factor. Then remaining percentage of 7.4% seldom felt stressed, and 6.2% sometimes felt stressed by this non-academic stressor.

Figure 30. Family Interference/Lack of Support With Learning

Lastly, a contributing stressor to their online language learning difficulty is their personal problems, in which Figure 31 shows that 55.6% of students always feel stressed, and 19.8% frequently feel stressed, whereas never stressed, garnered 16%. The least percentages were from those who seldom felt stressed, with 7.4%, and 1.2% sometimes felt stressed due to personal problems.

Figure 31. Personal Problems

4.3 Overall Level of Difficulty for Teachers and Students

Figure 32. Overall Level of Difficulty of KSU Online Language Learning as Indicated by Teachers

In reference to Table 2 of the 5-point difficulty Likert scale and as indicated in Figure 32, 60% of the teachers think that the KSU online language learning method is difficult, whereas 30% think it is very difficult, and 10% responded with average or neutral, whereas none chose the easy or very easy level.

Moreover, as indicated in Figure 33, the majority of the students (representing 45.7%) think that the KSU online language learning method is very difficult, where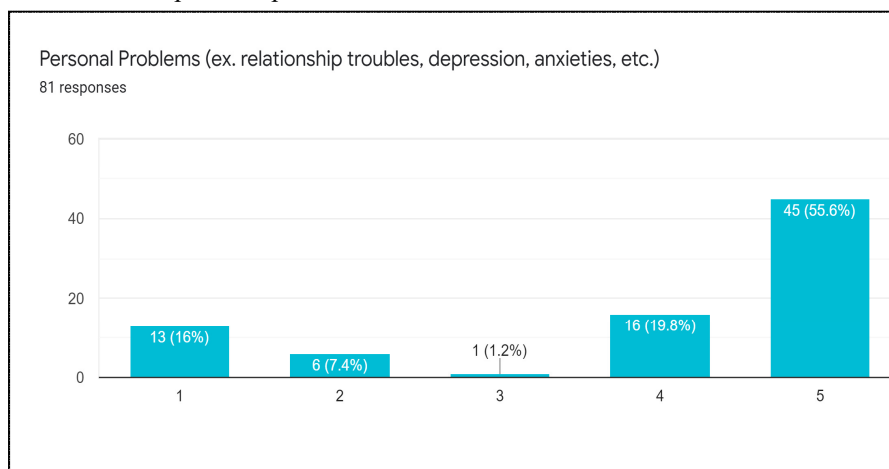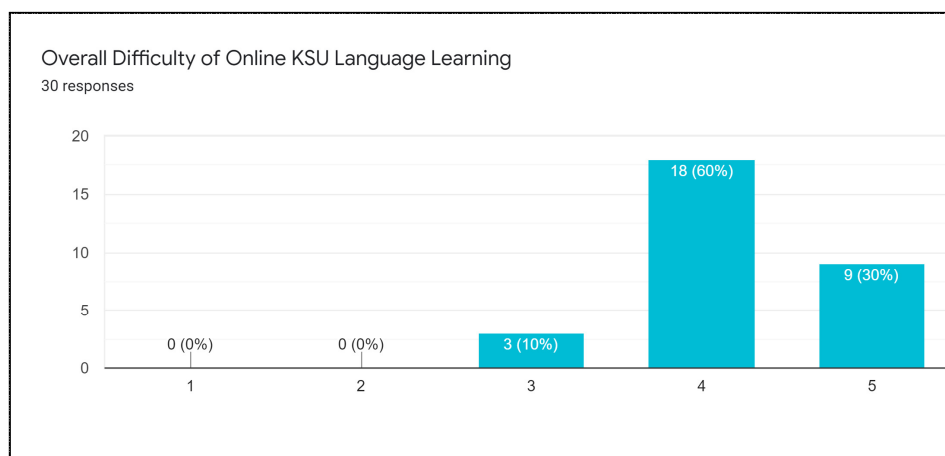as 35.8% think that it is difficult. Sixteen percent, 2.5%, and 0% of the students responded with average, neutral, or easy, respectively.
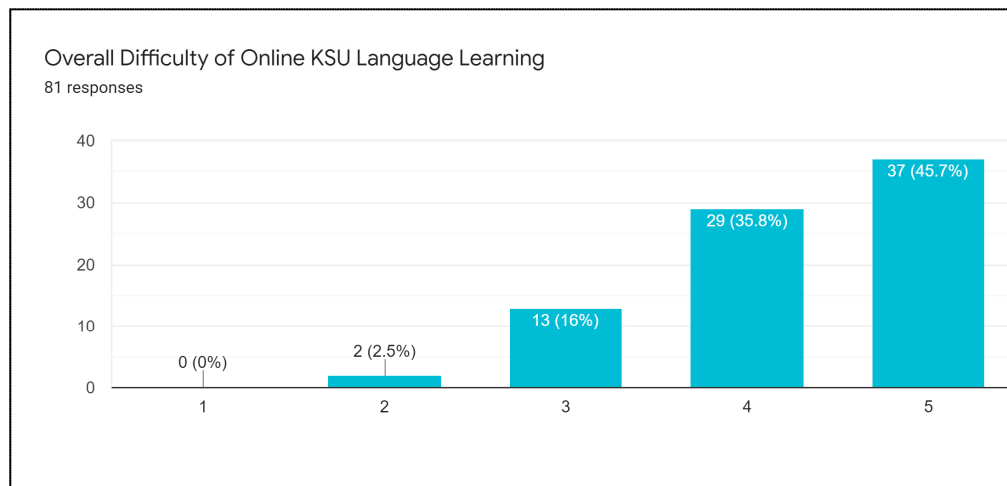

Figure 33. Overall Level of Difficulty of KSU Online Language Learning as Indicated by Students

4.4 Improvements Suggested for Alleviating Online Language Learning Difficulties

Both the teacher and student respondents answered the open-ended questions about their suggestions on how to improve the education provided by the locale, KSU, particularly their online learning methods. Answers covered a wide range of categories, including methodologies of teaching, as expressed in the following statements: "Address new methodologies of teaching like writing papers, competing in translation, encouraging discussions-based activities and lessons," and "motivating demotivated students." Another statement was about asking for a support system: "Ask the technical support team to give [a] presentation on how to use platform/apps effectively." One response was about giving support to the students' needs, as exemplified in the following advice: "Give time management/dealing with anxiety seminars." Finally, some of the students and teachers suggested upgrading the facilities, resources, and methodologies: "Design a flexible course plan so there is more room for creativity" and "Teachers should use technologies and modern ways of teaching," to name but a few suggestions.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess the contributing stressors to online language learning difficulties for both teachers and students. Language learning is challenging, primarily through an online modality, which in turn adds more challenges because there are contributing stressors that both teachers and students experience during the process of delivering or receiving online learning. As the study results suggest, academic and non-academic stressors scored significantly high rates of difficulty among both the faculty and student respondents because the majority of them either always or frequently felt those stressors were difficulties impeding the process of learning language online. For example, in Figure 1, under the subject of loading and scheduling as a stressor, teachers expressed that they are always stressed by this (56.7%) and often stressed by this (16.7%). Regarding the standards set by the university as a stressor, the teachers felt that they are always stressed by this (53.3%) and often stressed by this (26.7%). This is also mostly similar results in other stressors. As for the students, Figure 24 shows that 60.5% of the students expressed that they are always stressed by the lack of instructional materials/facilities, and 24.7% are often stressed by this. The same is true for other scholarly pursuits, with 60.5% considering this stressor as an always contributing stressor and 21% stating that they are frequently stressed by this. This is again true for most of the stressors mentioned in this study. Moreover, the level of the overall difficulty of online language learning indicated by both teachers and students mainly ranged from difficult to very difficult. Thus, the results imply that both the teachers and students are experiencing challenges and difficulties with online language learning and that the stressors in both academic and non-academic add up to these difficulties. These results are in agreement with those reached by various previous studies. For instance,

Meng and Wang (2018) found that factors such as scientific and professional development or scholarly pursuits influence the occupational stress of the teacher respondents. Turna (2014) revealed that teachers' workload, the implications of effective teaching, and policies/standards of the administration/school add up to their stress. As such, these studies support the findings of the current study regarding academic stressors contributing to their language learning difficulties. In their study, Aydin and Kaya (2016) revealed that the sources of stress affecting teachers originate from school facilities, lack of resources and technological facilities, lack of space, long working hours, and transformational difficulties, which also form part of the contributing stressors of the current study's teacher respondents. The present study has mentioned that contributing stressors highly affect the teachers because, as reflected in Figure 32, most of the participating teachers revealed they are experiencing difficulties in online language learning.

The students have experienced the same plight as that of the teachers. As emphasized earlier, the results suggest that the contributing stressors to their online language learning were frequently and always considered as stressful for them, adding up to the difficulties of online language learning. As reflected in Figure 33, most of the students rated their online language learning difficulty as difficult to very difficult. This result is also supported by numerous studies that ensured that stressors such as financial problems, changes in the living atmosphere, and difficulties managing their personal and academic life added up to students' stress (Byron et al., 2008; Chernomas & Shapiro, 2013; Goff, 2011; Jimenez et al., 2010; Moscaritolo, 2009; Reddy et al., 2018). Moreover, Deb et al. (2015) reported that long hours of learning and expectations or rote learning increased their stress levels. In addition, Jain and Singhai (2017) indicated how daunting heavy academic workloads and even lack of support from parents and teachers add up to the students' stress levels.

Based on the findings of this current study, as supported by various previous literature, one can conclude that academic and non-academic contributing stressors need to be taken seriously because they may be detrimental to the overall success and well-being not only of the students and teachers but also of the entire academic institution. Thus, further strategies and/or methodologies need to be improved or adapted to alleviate the stress and difficulty experienced by both teachers and students.

Furthermore, as highlighted earlier, the concept of online language learning adds more challenges to the teachers' job. With the emergence of technology, and especially with the spread of COVID-19, general education, including language pedagogy, started to adapt to online learning methods. In fact, various theories explored the use of technology in the teaching–learning process, especially in relation to online learning. For example, the connectivism theory developed by Siemens (2005) emphasized the importance of technology and the internet in education. This view also applies to online language learning. However, this method also puts stress on the teachers because they may also experience challenges while implementing online language learning. In their research, Toto and Limone (2021) mentioned that teachers experienced online teaching as a demotivator and a source of stress. This view is also true for language learners. In the study conducted by Wang and Zhang (2021), they expressed how the internet age and, as such in this scenario, online learning with new teaching ideas and methods can bring new load and anxiety to students.

According to the findings of this study, there is a need for improvement in the teaching and learning practices to alleviate the stress and difficulties encountered by teachers and students in online language learning. In this regard, the study provided suggestions and recommendations for improving education and adaptive teaching methodologies, particularly in relation to an online teaching–learning modality.

Based on the answers of the teacher and student respondents, the researcher has created a qualitative descriptive categorization of improvement factors derived from the interpretation of the respondents' answers. The triangular categorization corresponds with the initials of King Saud University, KSU, which is the locale of this study. The initials KSU are best suited to synthesize the qualitative results and the categories of improvements based on them. This categorization is reflected in Figure 34.
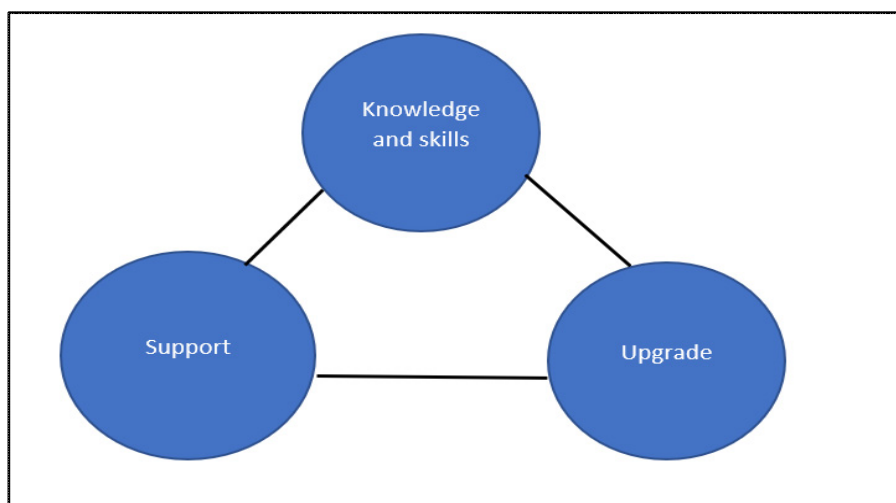
Figure 34. The KSU Descriptive Categorization of Improvement Factors of Adaptive Methodologies

As shown in Figure 34, K stands for *knowledge* and *skills* that the teachers and students need to acquire to overcome online language learning stressors. Knowledge and skills comprise content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge needed for online language teaching–learning. This classification is patterned on the basis of the famous TPACK model of Mishra and Koehler (2006), which simplifies the significance and model of a full understanding of how to teach with technology. A K that stands for *knowledge* and *skills* has been culled from the responses of teachers and students, including "providing students with Arabic resources, especially research papers and books to study"; "more student engagement"; "ensur[ing] that students understand topics taught before moving forward"; and "chang[ing] the way of teaching. These responses imply that there must be good ground for knowledge and skills to create a better online language learning process.

The initial S in the suggested categorization stands for *support*. Even if the teachers are equipped with the proper knowledge of and skills for adaptive methodologies in online language teaching, they still need different types of support. This conclusion is elicited from the results of the respondents' suggestions, among which were "ask the technical support team to give a presentation on how to use platform/apps effectively," "push for an active/communicative/good tech support department, since the one existing is not very much helpful," and "provide support to the faculty members with necessary access to hardware and software." As for the students, the needed support refers to more emotional and academic support, which may be concluded based on their prescriptive notes, including "professors should ask for students' opinions on the courses" and "the college should make a support program for disabled students and students with personal issues (depression, anxiety)." The suggestions for improving the forms of students' support may also be based on suggestions that ask for their feedback so that the teachers know their status and needs; for example, "provide timely feedback," "notify students when there is a change in sessions/exams/schedules in a timely manner," "give intensive feedback regularly to last-year students (each week)," and "ensure that students understand topics taught before moving forward." A similar suggestion was made by Rotar (2022), who emphasized the importance of support as a crucial element in online learning. Technical support, for example, is required to be provided by the educational institution for the teachers, whereas for students, support is needed not only from the institution but also, more importantly, from the teachers.

Lastly, improvement also requires a constant upgrade because online modality is indeed a response to digital advancement as well as a response to the challenge of adaptive modalities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a constant need for upgrade—knowledge and skills are not to be stagnant. If they are continuous and given enough support, then upgrade will follow. Upgrade in the curriculum encompasses all features of update needed to facilitate the online teaching–learning process. For example, upgrade is needed in terms of the content and assessments offered in online language learning, the update of resources, and the technological literacy of both teachers and students. This conclusion was also culled from the statements of the teachers and students, some of which focused on the "need for updates [of] all faculty's hardware and replacing it if necessary" or expressed direct requests such as "update the college standards for curriculums requirements, not all subjects require assignments, quizzes, homework! It limits students' creativity"; "design an active course syllabus especially for the difficult courses to provide multiple ways of teaching"; "change the way of teaching, since all classes are online so traditional PPT is not that good; teachers should work on making classes more

active and engaging"; "make sure teachers should update their curriculum if needed"; and "utilize a variety of technological options."

With this KSU descriptive improvement categorization, the university may consider improving adaptive methodologies that may help the teachers and students lessen the levels of stress and difficulty they experience, as suggested by the findings. The findings may be particularly true for other contexts; there are no distinctively different cultural or localized implications of this study; however, these findings are new to KSU because this is the only study conducted in the university specifically for this topic. Therefore, the findings of this study may have pedagogical implications for online language teaching. In addition, the findings, as well as the proposed KSU categorization, will serve as the feedback of online language learning and the starting point for adaptive measures at KSU.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, both teachers and students experience contributing stressors to their online language learning difficulties. Therefore, the administrators must consider the factors that may alleviate the stress and challenges that the educators and clients (students) experience. To minimize the effects of these factors, the administrators should support the teachers and students by providing training, webinars, and workshops on coping strategies for online learning (i.e., stress management and mental health concerns as well as upskilling them so that they can implement or cope better with adaptive online language learning methodologies). Furthermore, administrators need to revisit curricula and conduct needs analysis and environmental analysis considering the institution's standards, teachers, students, lesson content, assessments, and online learning requirements. Moreover, further studies related to the variables of this current study can also be explored with more depth to provide additional bases for the improvement of education during times of epidemics.

Acknowledgements

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