

Challenges and Adaptations of EFL Teaching Amidst Global Crises

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Abstract: Global crises such as the public health crisis and political polarization have greatly affected the mode of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, such shifts have also created many challenges for teachers, such as becoming proficient in the use of online teaching tools and redesigning lessons to maintain student engagement. In addition, negative changes in global immigration policies in the context of growing anti-globalization sentiments have further exacerbated uncertainty in the career development of non-native English-speaking (NES) teachers, making it more difficult for them to obtain teaching qualifications and gain teaching experience. Through a literature review, this paper summarizes the main challenges for EFL teachers in terms of technology adaptation, pedagogy adaptation and public policy. The findings show that although teachers demonstrate a high level of adaptability, they still need ongoing support to cope with the complexities associated with technological change and policy change. This study argues that future pedagogical and policy reforms are essential to ensure the long-term professional development of EFL teachers.

Keywords: Global crisis, EFL teaching, online education, public policy.

1. Introduction

Globalization and the ensuing crises, especially the Covid-19 pandemic, have dramatically changed the context in which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is taught. In the face of such changes, EFL teachers have been forced to quickly adapt to the new paradigm of online teaching in order to maintain student progress and engagement. The rapid spread of online teaching has not entirely solved the problems of interactivity and teaching effectiveness that could not be achieved in the traditional classroom; instead, it has made it more challenging for teachers to adapt to the technology, manage student engagement, and design their lessons.

Current research on EFL teaching and learning suggests that teachers must be technologically and pedagogically flexible. With the popularity of distance learning platforms, students' learning patterns have changed, and teachers need to cope with the issue of how to maintain students' attention and interactivity in virtual environments [1]. In addition, when facing students in multicultural contexts, teachers need to teach language skills and integrate intercultural awareness into their teaching, which further adds to the complexity of teaching [2]. Changes in global public policies, especially immigration policies, have also directly impacted teachers' career development. The uncertainty of policies in different countries affects teachers' career planning, especially for non-native English-

speaking teachers, who face even more severe challenges in obtaining professional qualifications and gaining teaching experience [3].

This paper examines the impact of the global crisis on EFL teachers, focusing on the challenges of technology adaptation, pedagogical adjustments, and cultural sensitivity. The study is significant because it provides effective coping strategies for current and future EFL teaching and a theoretical basis for global education policy development.

2. Impact of Global Crisis on Education

The outbreak of global crisis, such as the corona epidemic, economic recession, and international political and faith-based conflicts, has had a tremendous impact on the global education system, especially second language learning. Yaccob et al.'s study shows that the practice of teaching and learning in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs has been gradually shifting from the traditional model to a more modern, state-of-the-art approach, especially in the current world where teachers are forced to adapt to a more uncertain, complex, and ambiguous teaching and learning environment in their teaching and learning process [4]. Taylor, on the other hand, points out that the worldwide epidemic has placed new demands on the adaptive capacity of teachers and students, especially in the transition to online and blended modes of teaching and learning, forcing fundamental changes in traditional classroom teaching styles, which corroborates with the arguments made in the previous section [5]. Although the Corona epidemic ended on a global scale, it objectively accelerated the digital transformation, with the global education system moving from face-to-face teaching to online platforms on a massive scale during the epidemic. This change has not only affected the way education is delivered, but has also dramatically altered the way students and teachers interact. This shift is particularly important in the context of English language learning, as language learning usually relies on face-to-face communication and practice [1].

3. Challenges in Second Language Teaching

3.1. Challenges for Teachers

In the context of the global crisis, EFL teachers face numerous challenges in adapting to online teaching. These challenges extend beyond technological adaptation and encompass various aspects of teaching styles, student characteristics, and content delivery.

Firstly, the shift in teaching styles has imposed new demands on EFL teachers. In traditional face-to-face classrooms, teachers can directly influence students' learning experiences through body language, eye contact, and the overall classroom atmosphere. However, the transition to online teaching has significantly reduced these interactions. Teachers must now rely on virtual classrooms and digital tools such as learning management systems (LMS) and videoconferencing platforms to engage with students, which places greater demands on their digital literacy. Instructors must be proficient with these tools and design more interactive online activities to maintain student motivation [6]. However, it is not sufficient to rely solely on existing tools; teachers must continuously update their technological skills to address emerging challenges.

Secondly, changes in student characteristics are more pronounced in online teaching environments. In a traditional classroom, teachers can adjust their teaching pace by observing students' expressions and behaviors. In virtual settings, however, it is challenging for teachers to detect signs of distraction or disengagement in real time. Studies have indicated that students are more prone to distractions when engaging with screens, and the absence of physical peer presence in online environments reduces their willingness to interact [7]. Erlam notes that a lack of precise task definitions can lead to less effective student performance in distance learning [8]. Therefore, teachers must design engaging and well-structured tasks to facilitate effective participation in virtual classrooms.

Student questioning and interaction also pose challenges. In face-to-face classrooms, students can raise their hands and ask questions at any time, facilitating real-time interaction with instructors. In online classrooms, however, students may engage less actively due to shyness, unfamiliarity with the platform, or unstable internet connections. Kuo found that interaction, self-efficacy, and the ability to self-regulate learning significantly predict student satisfaction in online courses [1]. Therefore, instructors must create an open virtual environment that encourages active student participation by utilizing technological tools such as discussion forums and live chat features to enhance teacher-student interactions.

Another significant challenge in online teaching relates to assignments and assessments. In face-to-face settings, teachers can adjust their strategies based on students' immediate classroom performance and feedback. In online education, however, the submission and evaluation of assignments tend to be more procedural, making it difficult for teachers to obtain timely feedback on student learning [9]. Jiang highlights those technological barriers are particularly prevalent in developing countries, where inadequate equipment and unstable internet connections limit the effectiveness of distance learning [3]. Therefore, when designing online assignments, teachers must consider these technological constraints and provide flexible submission options to ensure equitable participation in assessments.

Furthermore, the design of instructional content is constrained in online teaching. While traditional classrooms allow teachers to enrich lessons with diverse resources such as textbooks, slides, and physical aids, online instruction relies heavily on digital materials. This requires teachers to possess adequate digital resource development skills and creatively use online tools, such as interactive quizzes, videos, and virtual simulations, to enhance the learning experience [6]. Moussou argues that when designing online instructional content, teachers must balance the needs of students with varying language proficiency levels to ensure that all learners benefit [10].

In summary, EFL teachers face several challenges in adapting to online teaching, including shifts in teaching styles, issues with student attention and interaction, assessment processes, and content design. To overcome these challenges, teachers must improve their digital literacy, remain flexible, and innovate their instructional design to ensure productive and effective distance learning experiences for students.

3.2. Challenges in the Area of Public Policies

In the context of the global crisis, EFL teachers face significant political challenges, especially the complexities associated with the uncertainty of public policy. Ren's study points out that changes in immigration and foreign policy in the United States have severely impacted intercultural language teaching [11]. Differing immigration policies across countries limit the international mobility of students and teachers, which leads to instability in the global education system. As students and teachers cannot move across borders, this undermines the effectiveness of language learning and makes intercultural communication more difficult.

The global crisis has adversely impacted teachers' qualifications, language identity, and accumulation of teaching experience. Faez and Karas highlight those non-native English-speaking teachers face heightened challenges in establishing a language identity, acquiring teaching qualifications, and gaining teaching experience, especially during times of global crisis when these issues become increasingly complex [2]. This predicament is particularly pronounced for non-native foreign EFL teachers. For instance, in Ontario, Canada, changes in teacher recruitment criteria and public policy have exacerbated these challenges, presenting numerous barriers to obtaining teaching qualifications and fulfilling professional development requirements [2]. Jiang further argues that such policy shifts have had significant implications for teachers' career trajectories and professional growth, especially in an era of intensified global uncertainty [3].

Public policy changes are also evident in the reform of examination and education systems. With the acceleration of globalization, many countries are re-evaluating the standards and requirements of their language examinations, particularly in response to stricter immigration policies and declining international student mobility [9]. Moreover, Zhang highlights that policy shifts have also impacted the field of physical education, indicating that these challenges are not limited to language education alone [12]. These changes have increased teachers' workloads, demanding advanced pedagogical skills and ongoing vigilance regarding policy developments to ensure that teaching remains aligned with current educational standards.

Consequently, the global crisis has not only introduced technical and pedagogical challenges but has also placed EFL teachers in a more complex political environment. Teachers must continually adjust to new recruitment criteria, policy shifts, and examination reforms, all of which significantly impact their professional confidence and sense of teaching efficacy. Non-native English-speaking teachers are particularly affected by these dynamics, as the unique characteristics of their linguistic identity and cultural background make them more susceptible to policy changes [2,13]. The heightened political uncertainty exacerbates professional stress among teachers during global crises and adversely affects their capacity to deliver high-quality instruction to their students.

4. EFL Teachers' Response to Crisis

4.1. Adapting to Digitalization

The integration of technology has become an essential aspect of a teacher's role, especially in crisis contexts. According to research by Loewen, technology has transformed traditional classrooms by offering more diverse learning opportunities [6]. Online platforms such as learning management systems, virtual classrooms, and online discussion boards provide students with greater opportunities to engage and enhance their learning experiences. However, integrating technology extends beyond merely using existing tools; teachers must continuously update their technological skills to address new challenges that may arise in the future. This sensitivity and adaptability to technological advancements will enable teachers to maintain their pivotal role in education [6].

4.2. Involving Cultural Awareness

EFL teachers' responses to the global crisis require not only technological adaptability but also cultural awareness, flexible task design, and diverse teaching methods. Cultural adaptability is particularly crucial for educators, especially within the context of globalized education. Faez emphasizes that the native versus non-native teacher dichotomy can influence teachers' self-efficacy and classroom performance [13]. However, a teacher's effectiveness during a crisis is not solely dependent on their status as a native speaker, but rather on their ability to understand and respond to the needs of students from various cultural backgrounds. Research has shown that non-native teachers are uniquely equipped to help students overcome language barriers and comprehend complex linguistic structures, which is especially critical during crises when students require both emotional and cultural support to navigate changes in the learning environment [13].

4.3. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

In addition to cultural adaptation, TBLT is one of the key strategies for teachers to cope with the crisis. Erlam's study showed that teachers often face the problem of ill-defined tasks when designing language tasks [8]. However, task-based pedagogy enhances students' language proficiency through real-world language use, especially in distance learning, where it provides students with problem-solving opportunities and stimulates their interest in learning [8]. Faez & Tavakoli further support

this view by arguing that task-based pedagogy can help students realize the practical application of language during a crisis by designing authentic contextual tasks [14]. This pedagogical approach is particularly suited to the interaction of online platforms to ensure an effective learning experience for students in a remote environment through project-based learning and collaboration [14].

4.4. Teacher's Self-Efficacy

In addition, teachers' self-efficacy is particularly important in coping with crises. Moussu's study highlights the psychological and emotional challenges faced by both native and non-native teachers in complex teaching environments [10]. Teachers not only need to help students overcome barriers to learning, but they must also maintain their psychological well-being in complex teaching environments. Especially in the context of distance learning, teachers often face feelings of isolation and helplessness, making self-efficacy crucial [2]. Karas & Faez further state that teachers' self-efficacy directly affects their performance in the classroom and student learning outcomes [2]. Research has shown that teachers with higher self-efficacy are able to flexibly use instructional strategies to effectively cope with uncertain environments, thereby helping students achieve their learning goals [2].

The above discussion illustrates that EFL teachers' coping strategies during global crises are inherently multidimensional, requiring not only adaptability in technological domains but also flexibility in cultural and pedagogical approaches. By adjusting teaching strategies, designing culturally responsive tasks, and effectively leveraging online platforms, teachers can ensure that students continue to learn effectively in remote and uncertain environments. Looking ahead, as educational technology continues to advance, EFL teachers will remain integral to the global education system, responding to emerging challenges and opportunities through ongoing learning and professional development.

5. Conclusion

This paper explores the multidimensional challenges faced by English language teachers in the context of the global crisis, focusing on technological adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and policy uncertainty, while examining coping strategies through a literature review. In the modern era, the rapid shift to online teaching and learning requires educators to not only master digital tools but also to design programs that effectively engage students in remote environments. EFL teachers must develop both technological competencies and innovative teaching strategies to facilitate meaningful interactions in virtual classrooms, highlighting the growing importance of digital literacy in ensuring effective teaching practices. Furthermore, the global crisis has intensified the need for cultural sensitivity in language education. EFL teachers must address the diverse learning needs of students from various cultural backgrounds to create inclusive teaching and learning environments. As cross-cultural interactions decrease, adapting the curriculum to the needs of different cultural contexts becomes even more critical. Non-native English-speaking teachers are particularly affected due to their dual roles as language instructors and cultural mediators. Additionally, changes in international politics have heightened uncertainty in the EFL profession. Shifts in immigration policies that restrict international mobility and complicate cross-cultural language instruction pose unique challenges for English language teachers.

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