



Examining students' reading anxiety and reading motivation in online reading classes during global crisis

Omid Tajik^{1*}, Kew Si Na²

¹ Department of English, Herat University, Herat, Afghanistan

² Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

Abstract

As the COVID-19 became a pandemic, online reading sessions were replaced by face-to-face reading classes. Online learning especially reading classes faced some problems; these problems in online reading classes include motivation and anxiety; therefore, this study aimed to investigate the level of motivation and anxiety among students in an online reading class. This study included thirty-five sophomore students from Herat University's English department. Two questionnaires were designed to collect data on reading anxiety and motivation. The impact of online reading classes on sophomore students' reading anxiety and motivation during the covid-19 epidemic was measured using SPSS software. The relationship between reading motivation and reading anxiety was investigated using Pearson correlation. The study's findings reveal that participants had a high level of reading anxiety although they were strongly motivated to engage in the online reading class. However, there was a modest relationship between reading anxiety and reading motivation, suggesting that while students were eager to engage in online classes, COVID-19 and other online class-related characteristics made them anxious.

Keywords: anxiety, motivation, reading, online class, EFL

Introduction

English language learning, according to Grabe and Stoller (2002) ^[13], is a critical factor that influences international communication. Many individuals want to study English for a variety of reasons; however, some students have difficulty reading and comprehending English literature. When we refer to the previous studies (Phajane, 2014; Cimmiyotti, 2013; Inderjit, 2014; Tran, 2012) ^[14, 10, 17, 30], we can list some common problems among the learners relating to reading skills such as reading anxiety, lack of vocabulary, and grammar knowledge. Reading in a foreign language, according to some studies such as Saito *et al.* (1999) ^[27] and Brantmeier (2005) ^[5], increases anxiety among learners. On the other hand, it's critical to determine whether motivation has anything to do with this anxiety. Because several studies (Carreira, 2006; Cheng, 2006; Yang, 2006) ^[7, 9, 32] revealed a relationship between students' motivation and their anxiety in class, the researchers undertook this study to see if the same conclusions could be derived in an online reading class during the epidemic.

Since English is taught as a foreign language in Afghanistan (Alamyar, 2015) ^[2], Afghan English students do not have adequate opportunities to practice the language outside of the classroom (Barbee, 2013) ^[4]. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many educational institutions have remained closed in order to restrict the virus's spread and fatality rate. Therefore, all of the courses were provided online for the first time in Afghanistan. The country's education system has been beset with shortages and obstacles, including a lack of funding, promising educational programs, and LMS (Learning Education Systems). The demand for English increased like never before as a result of the pandemic; the source of information, the World Health Organization (WHO), provided all critical updates regarding virus prevention and control in English, resulting in the urgent recruitment of English language speakers in various news, healthcare, media, and other organizations in Afghanistan.

The researchers wanted to investigate the effects of an online reading class on sophomore students' reading anxiety and motivation during the covid-19 pandemic at Herat University, Afghanistan, for two reasons: first, because reading is considered a crucial way to connect with people, and second, because there is no study investigating the relationship between anxiety and motivation in an online reading class.

Research Questions

This research aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the students' reading anxiety level in online reading class during COVID-19?
2. What are the students' reading motivation level in online reading class during COVID-19?
3. What is the relationship between students' reading anxiety and motivation in online reading class during COVID-19?

Hypothesis of Research

The hypothesis is shown as below:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between reading motivation and reading anxiety

H₁: There is a significant relationship between reading motivation and reading anxiety

Literature Review

Education took a step back as the COVID-19 grew internationally and became a pandemic, and all educational institutions were shut down. Because the pandemic's anxiety and stress impacted learning in general, online instruction became the most popular mode of instruction. According to Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova (2020) ^[12], online instruction is challenging because of problems such as accessibility, copyright for instructional materials, and "technology sophistication." However, preparation and planning for online teaching can give teachers with a road map to success. Russell (2020) ^[26] carried out a study during COVID-19 pandemic; the results show that participants were stressed, and there was general anxiety among the foreign language learners. For students in general, the global crisis and the virus struggle proved to be overpowering. This was also true for students learning a foreign language. The study's findings show that when students participated in the online format, they were nervous and agitated.

Reading Anxiety

Reading comprehension goes beyond word recognition and understanding the reading text (Zhao, 2009) ^[34]. When reading in a foreign language, learners feel anxious when comprehension of the text becomes challenging, even though they understand the meaning of individual words and the text's structure (Rajab *et al.*, 2012) ^[25]. Anxiety is defined as feelings of uneasiness, frustration, apprehension, or worry that are considered to be affective in language learning (Brown, 2000) ^[6]. According to Lien (2011) ^[22], EFL learners lack reading comprehension strategies such as guessing and inferring, and as a result, they experience considerable anxiety when given a reading comprehension task. The language proficiency of the EFL learners positively correlates with the reading anxiety (Wu, 2011) ^[31]. According to Wu, the more proficient the EFL learners are, the less reading anxiety they have. When language learners experience reading anxiety and the learning environment is similarly unpleasant, they prefer to avoid reading tasks. To reduce reading anxiety, it is essential to provide learners with conditions that would motivate them to push themselves by taking on exceedingly challenging reading assignments and activities, resulting in language growth and a reduction in reading anxiety (Kirchhoff, 2013) ^[19].

The content of the reading material is also important in reducing reading anxiety among EFL language learners. "One important way to reduce reading anxiety is to expose language learners to comprehensible reading sources and culturally familiar texts, which develop learners' feeling of reassurance and self-confidence" (Mohammadpur and Ghafournia, 2015, p. 206) ^[23]. According to the study, when students are familiar with the content they are reading, they are more motivated and aware of the context, which reduces reading anxiety in even the least proficient language learners. As a result, while developing reading curricula, it is critical to evaluate the content of the reading materials. In a study by Jafarigohar and Behrooznia (2012) ^[18], reading classes were stressful for all participants when teaching was offered via an online platform. They claim that the online format influenced students' perceptions of their online reading classes. Their findings suggest that distance learning causes anxiety in language learners; however, this may be resolved if online classes are organized and conducted with the needs and factors that generate anxiety in language learners in mind.

Reading Motivation

Reading motivation has been extensively researched over the years, with various studies (Gridi, 2006; Hedges & Gable, 2016; Ahmadi, 2017; Dakhi & Damanik, 2018) ^[14, 16, 1, 11] emphasizing its relevance in the development of reading skills. Reading motivation is essential for improving comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2002) ^[13]. Therefore, EFL language learners must boost their reading motivation to improve their understanding of the written materials. Guthrie, *et al* (2000) ^[15] define reading motivation as the immense amount of motivation that learners demonstrate and record their positive or negative feelings about reading passages. Intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation, and integrative motivation are the four categories of motivation identified by Ahmadi (2017) ^[1]. Learners must build all four forms of reading motivation in order to improve their reading comprehension. However, extrinsic motivation (reading for external reward) and intrinsic motivation (reading for the sake of reading, not for grades or external reward) are believed to be the key sources of motivation for students to engage in reading tasks (Sani, Chik, Nik, & Raslee, 2011) ^[28]. Al Seghayer (2013) ^[3] looked at four reading motivational constructs (extrinsic, intrinsic, instrumental, and integrative motivation) to see if they might motivate EFL learners to read online English texts. The study's findings reveal that four motivational constructs impacted participants' reading habits and motivated them to read in English. As a result, it's critical to keep students interested in reading in English. It's also claimed that reading in English online was stress-free, motivating, and beneficial.

In contexts where there are many students in one class, it is ideal to use online platforms to provide students with sufficient reading opportunities. These online platforms also provide students self-assessment as well as other important resources such as online dictionaries, pronunciation, work knowledge, and other reading exercises, with a focus on young and beginner-level learners. Korat (2010) ^[21] believes that providing young learners books

as digital text with dictionaries or activities results in improvements in “phonological awareness, word-reading skills, and vocabulary knowledge for kindergarten and first-grade readers” (p. 27). Furthermore, online reading is not restricted to time and place; it can be done anywhere and at any time irrespective of the milieu (Sarangi, 2015) [29]. Zarei (2014) [33] investigated the relationship between reading motivation and reading anxiety. Three questionnaires were provided to 120 pre-university EFL students to determine the effects of motivation on reading anxiety. The study's findings imply that reading anxiety and motivation have a weak positive relationship. As a result, it's clear that, while motivation has an influence on reducing reading anxiety, the effect isn't particularly strong. Therefore, the researchers intended to study the impact of online reading on students' reading anxiety and reading motivation during COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used the quantitative research design and analyzed the data through SPSS software to determine its descriptive statistics. Since a quantitative study relies on numerical data, there is a higher possibility of objectivity and accuracy of the results of the study. The researchers used the experimental research design to collect data regarding online reading and its effects on reading comprehension and opted to use experimental research design to find out the level of reading anxiety and reading motivation and how these two factors are related to each other during COVID-19. Students from Sophomore classes of English Language and Literature Department at Herat University were the respondents. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all physical classes were canceled and held online at Herat University for the first time. Therefore, the researchers aimed to use online platforms and study reading anxiety and reading motivation in online reading class.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to collect data from students. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique for selecting participants. There were nine male and twenty-six female sophomore students of the English department, who were chosen to be the participants of the study. These students were selected because they have had three Reading Comprehension courses and are equipped with some reading strategies and skills they had learned in their previous Reading Comprehension courses. Participants of the study were both males and females in the second semester of their second year.

Table 1: Participants' Demographics

Category	Number	Percentage
Participants	35	100%
Male	9	25.71%
Female	26	74.29%

Research Instruments and Data Analysis

Students were given two questionnaires; to understand students' reading motivation in online reading class, they were given an opportunity to respond to the questions in the questionnaire adapted from Komiyama (2013). A 16-item questionnaire was used to determine the motivation of participants towards the online reading class. Moreover, the researchers also had another questionnaire to measure students' reading anxiety level in the online reading class adapted from Zoghi (2012). A 17-item questionnaire was adapted to get the reading anxiety participants faced in the online reading class.

Furthermore, the researchers were interested in finding out how reliable the questionnaire was; therefore, the reliability test was run on the data obtained from the questionnaire.

Table 2: Reliability Results

Sections	Items	Cronbach Alpha Value
Anxiety	17	0.80

The results of the reliability test for reading anxiety questionnaire shown in Table 1.2 indicate that the questionnaire was reliable for data gathering purposes. The Cronbach alpha value for the reading anxiety questionnaire is $\alpha=0.80$, which suggests that the statements in the questionnaire were internally consistent and the questionnaire was reliable.

The researchers itemized from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) to analyse the reading motivation and reading anxiety questionnaires. After gathering data, descriptive statistics for reading anxiety and reading motivation statements were analysed, the mean and maximum, and minimum scores of each item were found. This study adopted the methodology used by Casado and Dereshiwsy (2004) [8] to determine the students' anxiety level. Three levels of anxiety were identified: low, moderate, and high. The mean value between 1.00 to 2.50 indicates the low level of anxiety. The moderate level of anxiety ranged between 2.51 to 3.50, while the high level of anxiety was determined based on the mean value ranging between 3.51 to 5.00. The three levels of anxiety were used to identify the scope and the severity of reading anxiety.

Online Reading Class Format

The online reading class was conducted for six weeks, two sessions of 50 minutes per week. Students were assigned reading activities from North Star: Reading and Writing 4 and other supplementary materials targeting their reading comprehension such as synthesis activities, problem-solving activities, comprehension check activities, etc. Instruction and assignments were provided through Schoology (schoology.com), a free online platform. At the end of the six weeks' treatment, students were asked to complete reading anxiety and reading motivation questionnaires. Results of the data obtained from the questionnaires are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

Results and Findings

This research aimed to investigate the effects of online reading class on sophomore students' reading anxiety at English department of Herat University. Moreover, the researchers were also interested in finding out students' motivation in the online reading class and how it affects their reading anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- a. Analysis on the Students Reading Anxiety in Online Reading Class During COVID-19:** This 17-item questionnaire was divided into three levels of anxiety: low level, moderate level, and high-level anxiety in students. The following Table 1.3 presents the percentage of the reading anxiety of students in online reading class during COVID-19:

Table 3: Participants' Reading Anxiety Percentage

Reading Anxiety Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Low (1-2.50)	0	0%
Moderate (2.51-3.50)	6	17.1%
High (3.51-5)	29	82.9%
Total	35	100%

The results of the participants' reading anxiety suggest that there are no students with the low level of reading anxiety, 17.1% of participants with a moderate level of reading anxiety; thus, the majority of the participants (82.9%) are highly anxious in completing reading comprehension activities. To further analyse the data obtained from the reading anxiety questionnaire, the descriptive statistics for the reading anxiety are presented in the following Table 1.4:

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Anxiety Questionnaires

	M	SD	Median	Min	Max
Reading anxiety	68.17 (80.2%)	9.54	68	45 (52.94%)	85 (100%)

The mean for the reading anxiety was 68.17, the minimum score for the reading anxiety class is 45, the maximum score for the reading anxiety class is 85. The descriptive statistics of the variables indicate that overall, the level of anxiety was high among most of the participants of the study.

- b. Analysis on the Students Reading Motivation in Online Reading Class During COVID-19:** To further analyse the data obtained from the reading motivation questionnaire, the descriptive statistics for the reading motivation are presented in the following Table 1.5:

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Motivation Questionnaires

	M	SD	Median	Min	Max
Reading Motivation	52.34 (65.42%)	10.8	51	33 (41.25%)	79 (98.75%)

The mean for the reading motivation was 52.34, the minimum score for reading motivation was 33, and the maximum score for reading motivation was 79. The descriptive statistics of the variables indicate that, about 65.42% of the participants of the study were motivated to participate in the online reading class. Moreover, the researchers analysed the questionnaire based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The data show that students were intrinsically motivated to participate in the reading course. The following Table 1.6 presents the mean and standard deviation for the questions related to intrinsic motivation:

Table 6: Intrinsic Reading Motivation Analysis

No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1	I feel happy when I read about something interesting in English.	0 (0%)	3 (8.6%)	6 (17.14%)	12 (34.29%)	14 (40%)	4.03	0.94
2	When the topic is interesting, I am	0 (0%)	1 (2.85%)	4 (11.42%)	15 (42.86%)	15 (42.86%)	4.26	0.77

	willing to read difficult English materials.							
3	I am confident I can understand the most basic concepts taught in this course.	0 (0%)	1 (2.85%)	4 (11.42%)	15 (42.86%)	15 (42.86%)	4.26	0.77
4	I prefer course material that really challenges me so I can learn new things.	0 (0%)	1 (2.85%)	6 (17.14%)	13 (37.14%)	15 (42.86%)	4.20	0.82
5	I like it when the content in the book make me think.	0 (0%)	3 (8.6%)	0 (0%)	16 (42.86%)	16 (42.86%)	4.29	0.85
6	I prefer material that arouses my curiosity even if it is difficult to learn.	0 (0%)	3 (8.6%)	0 (0%)	16 (42.86%)	16 (42.86%)	4.29	0.85
7	It is important for me to learn the program materials.	0 (0%)	1 (2.85%)	7 (20%)	13 (37.14%)	14 (40%)	4.14	0.83
8	I am excited about online reading format.	2 (5.71%)	2 (5.71%)	3 (8.6%)	15 (42.86%)	13 (37.14%)	4.00	1.10

Data obtained from the reading motivation questionnaire suggest that students had a high intrinsic motivation. Their mean score of statements 1–9 was all higher than 4.00, which shows that participants of the study were highly motivated to participate in the online reading class. Moreover, the extrinsic motivation of the participants was also studied through the given questionnaire. The following Table 1.7 presents information regarding the extrinsic motivation of the students in the online reading class:

Table 7: Extrinsic Reading Motivation Analysis

No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
9	I like to get compliments for my reading.	0 (0%)	2 (5.71%)	5 (14.29%)	11 (35.42%)	17 (48.6%)	4.23	0.90
10	Getting good grades in reading is the most satisfying thing for me.	0 (0%)	5 (14.29%)	7 (20%)	12 (34.29%)	11 (35.42%)	3.83	1.03
11	I want to do well in this program because it is important to show my ability to my family, friends, and others.	1 (2.86%)	5 (14.29%)	6 (17.14)	13 (37%)	10 (28.57%)	3.74	1.10
12	I try to get more answers right than my friends.	0 (0%)	5 (14.3%)	3 (8.57%)	13 (37.14%)	14 (40%)	4.03	1.03

The statements in the given table 1.7 suggest that students were also extrinsically motivated to do well in the online reading class. The compliments, good grades, appreciation from family and friends, and out-performing their peers in the class drove students to work harder.

- c. Analysis on the relationship between students' reading anxiety and motivation in online reading class during COVID-19:** The percentage of participants' reading anxiety indicates that no one in the class had low anxiety whereas most participants (82.9%) demonstrated high anxiety levels. Next, the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was run on the data gathered from the questionnaires, which did not indicate any departures from normality. Table 1.8 presents normality test scores of the anxiety questionnaire:

Table 8: Normality Test Scores from Anxiety and Reading Motivation Questionnaires

Questionnaire	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Reading anxiety	.978	34	.697
Reading Motivation	.952	34	.126

To further study the interaction between the reading anxiety and the students' reading motivation, the researchers ran Pearson correlation test. The following Table 1.9 provides information about interpreting Pearson correlation data:

Table 9: Interpreting Correlation

Range	Interpretation
-1.0 - -0.7	Strong negative correlation
-0.7 to -0.3	Weak negative correlation
-0.3 to +0.3	Little or no correlation
+0.3 to +0.7	Weak positive correlation
+0.7 to +1.0	Strong positive correlation

The information in the table indicates the different levels of correlation. The correlation coefficient is always between -1 and +1. The closer the correlation is to +/-1, the closer to a perfect linear relationship. Table 1.8 provides information regarding the interpretation of correlations. The following Table 1.10 presents the results of the Pearson correlation test:

Table 10: Results of the Pearson Correlation between Reading Anxiety and Reading Motivation

	Reading anxiety		Reading Motivation
Reading Anxiety	Pearson correlation	1	.300
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.080
	N	35	35
Reading Motivation	Pearson correlation	.300	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.080	
	N	35	35

The results of the Pearson correlation suggest that there was a positive correlation between two variables (reading anxiety and reading motivation), $r=.300$, $n=35$; however, the relationship was not significant ($p=.080$). Therefore, according to the results obtained from this class, there is a weak positive relationship between reading anxiety and reading motivation ($r=.300$). Therefore, although the level of motivation was high among participants of the study, the level of anxiety was significantly high in them; thus, there was little or very weak correlation between the two variables.

Discussion

This study was conducted under the stressful circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic. The anxiety and apprehension of the situations disturbed the lives of people all around the world. The higher education system of the developing countries was affected adversely; similarly, in Afghanistan, universities and higher education institutes were closed for months. However, attempts were made to conduct students through online platforms and social media to engage students in the learning process. This study was carried out through Schoology (Schoology.com) free of cost online platform to conduct online reading classes and study its effects on reading anxiety and reading motivation and explore the relationship between the two variables during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the study show that students had a high level of anxiety in completing the online reading class. About 80% ($M=68.18$) of the participants demonstrated some level of anxiety in completing the online reading class. There were three levels of reading anxiety recorded in them, low, moderate, and high. In a study by Jafarigohar and Behrooznia (2012)^[18], reading classes were anxious for all the participants of the study when the instruction was provided via online platform. Therefore, it is implied that one cause of the participants' anxiety was the online instruction. Russel (2020) found out that overall, anxiety and stress were high among the EFL participants of their online class due to COVID-19 pandemic. The results the researchers obtained indicated that other than the stress and anxiety of participating in online classes, students were anxious because of the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic which directly impacted their performance in their online classes. Thus, it is suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the predominant reasons of anxiety in the participants of this study as well.

Although the results of the study indicate that participants of the study demonstrated different levels of anxiety in completing online reading class because of various reasons such as foreign reading anxiety, being a novice to online platforms, and predominantly due to the stress of COVID-19 pandemic, findings of the study also suggest that students were equally motivated to participate in the online reading class as well. About 65.42% ($M=52.34$) of the participants were motivated to participate in the online reading class. Al Seghayer (2013)^[3] believes that students demonstrate a high level of interest in participating in online reading classes. According to him, when learners are placed in online classes, they put cautious and sustainable effort in participating in the online class resulting from high level of motivation from them. Therefore, the results of the current study are aligned with the findings of Al Seghayer (2013)^[3].

This study indicates that there is a very weak positive correlation between reading anxiety and reading motivation; it also shows that this correlation is not statistically significant. The findings of this study are aligned with the studies conducted before. Carreira (2006)^[7] investigated the relationship between reading anxiety and reading motivation, and he found out there is a very weak positive correlation between the two variables.

Moreover, Zarei (2014) [33] also found out a very low positive correlation between reading anxiety and reading motivation. The study participants were preparing for the university entrance exam; they were highly motivated to be accepted in the exam. On the other hand, there was a high level of anxiety among the participants as well. Similarly, in the current study, learners were highly motivated to participate in the reading classes; however, the participants were also anxious and stressed because of the growing threads of COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, their anxiety was evident in the results obtained from the online reading class.

Online classes in their nature require accessibility and connectivity for successful interaction with the instructor, other learners, and the learning material. According to the findings of the World Bank, 90% of the population live below the poverty line in developing countries like Afghanistan; therefore, having access to the internet or having personal devices and gadgets is a scarce possibility. Even though participants of the study were highly motivated to participate in the online reading classes, the limited resources might have created anxiety among the participants. Therefore, both the levels of anxiety and motivation were high among participants, and there was a low positive correlation between the two variables in this study.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this research have some pedagogical implications for teachers. As it is found that both anxiety and motivation are the major contributors to having a flawed or successful outcome in the learning process, it is vital to maintain students' motivation in the learning process. Providing positive reinforcement in extrinsic motivation or giving students a vision to build intrinsic motivation will result in a positive outcome. Moreover, as language instructors, it is essential to create a friendly and anxiety-free learning environment for learners to aid the learning process. The less anxious learners are, the better learning outcomes are expected. Moreover, this study also revealed that under critical circumstances such as a pandemic, it is very important to build a rapport with the learners and understand their psychic conditions. On the other hand, the instructor needs to incorporate activities and exercises to keep the learners engaged and guarantee maximum interaction among learners and the instructor to release the anxiety and boost the learners' motivation level.

It is recommended to study the given variables from different perspectives in the future. The researchers can look at the reading anxiety, reading motivation, and the relationship between them in normal circumstances to have a better understanding of the interaction of the variables. Moreover, adding more participants and having a larger sample size can comprehensively understand the research subject in quantitative studies.

Conclusion, Limitation, and Future Research

This study was conducted to determine the effects of the online reading class on reading anxiety, reading motivation, and the relationship between reading anxiety and reading motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study indicate that participants of the study had high level of anxiety and were statistically significant motivated to participate in the online reading class. However, the Pearson correlation results show that reading anxiety and reading motivation have a low positive correlation ($r=.300$). Since the online reading class was held during the COVID-19 pandemic, students were anxious because of the restrictions imposed, which negatively impacted the findings of the study as well, even though they were highly motivated to participate in the online reading class. Moreover, to conduct online classes, resources and internet connectivity are the essentials, but the limited resources increased the anxiety of the participants of the study. Therefore, it is implied that it is crucial for positive outcomes, to ensure access to resources and create a positive, friendly, and anxiety-free learning environment to keep the learners motivated and attain positive results from the class.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to the study. The first limitation was the number of participants in the study. For a quantitative study, the bigger the sample size, the more reliable the data is. In the current study, there were thirty-five students. It will be ideal if similar treatment is given to a larger population and a bigger sample size. The second limitation was that students had limited access to the internet, and they were not very familiar with the 'Schoology' platform used in this study. In the beginning, it took some time to familiarize the participants with the platform. Another limitation was that this class was online limited to one course in only one university in Afghanistan. Therefore, the results must be taken with caution and confirmed in future work. If the study is replicated in the future, students from different universities can be included to provide a comprehensive insight into the effectiveness of the online reading course. Moreover, the number of male participants was significantly smaller than the females. There were only nine male participants, while there were twenty-six female participants. It would be interesting to consider the gender aspect in future research studies, whether female participants are better than male participants in online settings or vice-versa.

Future Research

This research was designed and implemented in only one class in the western part of Afghanistan; it would be interesting to determine if similar data can be driven if this study is replicated in other contexts. The cultural background, opportunities to interact with peers, social or economic context, and gender issues may interfere with the outcome of the study; therefore, replicating this study in other parts of the country may provide different results and shed light on research from various angles. Moving towards urban parts of society, students get more liberty in interacting with their peers; however, the further away from the city participants are, the more

restricted they will be culturally and in terms of resources. Since this course was provided through the online platform, it is important to find the role of familiarity with technology in the online course outcomes. It is essential to determine if familiarity with computer and online platforms eases situations for those who are more equipped with computer skills. Moreover, there were limitations in recruiting male participants for the current study; if a similar study is replicated in the future, it will be noteworthy to consider the gender aspect for the study. Whether gender plays an important role in online studies or not; whether female participants function better in an online setting than male participants or the opposite is true; future studies can give insight on this aspect of the study.

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