Challenges of Online English as a Second Language (ESL)Teachers in Teaching the English Language for Starter Students

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive-survey study examined the challenges and difficulties encountered by online English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers when teaching starter (zero-English-level) students. The study drew on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Zone of Proximal Development), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. Using non-probability convenience sampling with voluntary participation, data were gathered via a validated 4-point Likert scale questionnaire from N=67 online ESL teachers in the Philippines. Because the data are ordinal, the study used non-parametric statistical tests, including the Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Spearman Rank-Order Correlation (r_s). Findings revealed that teaching strategies/learning materials (M=3.24) and classroom management (M=3.16) represented the most prominent instructional challenges. Technological issues (M=3.37) and language barriers (M=3.36) posed the greatest difficulty. Non-parametric hypothesis testing showed no significant differences in challenges when respondents were grouped by sex ($p=0.941$), age ($p=0.295$), educational attainment ($p=0.490$), or years of experience ($p=0.740$), proving that instructional obstacles in virtual starter environments are systemic across demographics. However, a strong, significant positive relationship emerged between encountered challenges and perceived difficulty ($r_s=0.636, p=0.000$). This study bridges a critical gap in digital education literature by contextualizing the specific operational and pedagogical realities of teaching zero-English-level learners in virtual environments. It demonstrates that online ESL challenges for absolute beginners transcend demographic and experience boundaries, establishing that general teaching experience alone does not mitigate virtual instructional friction without specialized digital scaffolding. Educational platforms and institutions should provide targeted professional development centered on TPACK, develop level-appropriate interactive visual learning materials, implement robust technical support mechanisms, and adopt structured multi-modal assessment strategies tailored to absolute beginners.

Keywords: Online ESL Instruction, Starter Students, Language Barrier, Technological Issues, Non-parametric analysis

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly transformed the education landscape worldwide, particularly in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL). Online learning environments have become increasingly prominent, offering flexibility and accessibility for learners across diverse geographical contexts. However, despite these advantages, the shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to online modalities has introduced unique challenges for ESL teachers, especially when working with beginner or "starter" students who require foundational language support. Globally, ESL educators grapple with limited student engagement, technological constraints, lack of immediate feedback, and difficulty fostering communicative competence in virtual settings (Hampel & Stickler, 2012; Richards, 2015).

Worldwide, the effectiveness of online ESL instruction is closely tied to teachers' ability to adapt pedagogical strategies to digital platforms. Beginner learners, in particular, often struggle with comprehension, pronunciation, and language retention when they lack physical classroom interaction and real-time scaffolding

(Krashen, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers therefore face the dual burden of mastering digital tools while also addressing the linguistic needs of students with minimal prior English knowledge. Studies show that the absence of non-verbal cues and fewer opportunities for natural interaction can hinder language acquisition, making it harder for teachers to assess learners' progress and provide appropriate interventions (Chapelle, 2001).

In the ASEAN region, English as a lingua franca further intensifies the importance of effective ESL instruction. Countries within Southeast Asia have recognized English proficiency as a critical skill for economic integration and global competitiveness (Kirkpatrick, 2010). However, disparities in technological infrastructure, teacher training, and access to resources pose significant barriers to implementing online ESL programs successfully. In many ASEAN countries, teachers struggle to maintain student motivation and participation in virtual classrooms, particularly among young learners and beginners who require structured, interactive learning environments (Littlewood, 2007). Additionally, cultural factors such as learners' reluctance to speak and fear of making mistakes further complicate online language teaching.

Within the Philippine context, English holds a unique status as both an official language and a medium of instruction in education. Despite this advantage, Filipino ESL teachers—especially those teaching beginners—face substantial challenges in online teaching environments. The abrupt transition to remote learning during recent global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed gaps in digital readiness, pedagogical adaptability, and access to reliable internet connectivity (Tria, 2020). Teachers often report difficulties in engaging students, managing classroom behavior virtually, and delivering lessons that effectively build foundational language skills. Furthermore, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack access to devices or a stable internet connection, exacerbating inequities in learning outcomes.

This study draws on several theoretical frameworks that inform understanding of language acquisition and online teaching challenges. First, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language learning, suggesting that learners acquire language when they are exposed to input slightly above their current level of competence (i+1). In online settings, providing such input becomes more complex due to limited interaction and feedback mechanisms.

Second, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) highlights the role of social interaction and scaffolding in cognitive development. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) underscores the importance of guided support from teachers and peers, which is often diminished in virtual classrooms, particularly for beginner learners who rely heavily on direct assistance.

Third, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as articulated by Hymes (1972) and further developed by Richards (2006), stresses meaningful communication in language learning. Online ESL teachers face challenges in implementing CLT principles because they lack the means to facilitate authentic interaction and collaborative activities. Finally, the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) provides a lens for understanding how teachers integrate technology with pedagogy and content knowledge. ESL teachers must possess not only linguistic expertise but also the ability to use digital tools effectively to enhance learning, which can be particularly demanding in online environments.

To connect these frameworks directly to the study variables, each theoretical construct was mapped to the questionnaire dimensions through which it is observed (see the table below). Comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) is represented by the Students' Comprehension and Learning Pace and Language Barrier dimensions and by the items on level-appropriate materials, because these capture whether starter learners can understand what teachers say and whether teachers can pitch input just beyond learners' current level (i + 1). Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) are represented by the Teaching Strategies and Learning Materials dimension (adapting, simplifying, and sequencing support), the classroom-management items on monitoring understanding, and the Feedback and Assessment dimension, which reflect the teacher's capacity to detect learners' current level and provide timely guided support. Interaction, as emphasized in Communicative Language Teaching (Hymes, 1972; Richards, 2006), is captured by the participation and involvement items, and learner engagement is operationalized through the Student Engagement and Motivati-

on dimension. Finally, TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) underpins the Technological Issues and Time Management dimensions, since connectivity, platform use, and technology-related delays determine whether sound pedagogy can actually be delivered through digital tools.

Under this alignment, the two hypotheses carry a theoretical expectation. Challenges and level of difficulty are expected to rise together (H02) because limited comprehensible input, reduced scaffolding and interaction, and technological constraints compound one another in virtual classrooms. Differences by teacher profile (H01) are expected to be small if these constraints arise mainly from the online, starter-level context rather than from teachers' personal characteristics.

Alignment of Theoretical Constructs with Study Variables and Questionnaire Items

Theoretical construct	Core idea	Study dimension(s)	Questionnaire items
Comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982)	Acquisition occurs when input is understandable and slightly above the learner's level (i + 1)	Comprehension and Learning Pace; Language Barriers; Teaching Strategies and Learning Materials (level-appropriate materials)	Challenges A1, A3, A4, C2, C4; Difficulty A1–A4
Scaffolding / ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978)	Guided, adjustable support from teacher or peers enables performance beyond independent level	Teaching Strategies and Learning Materials; Classroom Management (monitoring understanding); Feedback and Assessment	Challenges C1, C3, D3; Difficulty D1–D4
Interaction (CLT: Hymes, 1972; Richards, 2006)	Language is learned through meaningful communication and participation	Classroom Management (participation, routines); Engagement and Motivation (participation, involvement)	Challenges B3, B4, D2, D4
Learner engagement	Sustained attention, motivation, and active involvement in lessons	Student Engagement and Motivation	Challenges B1–B4
TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006)	Effective teaching integrates technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge	Technological Issues; Time Management	Difficulty B1–B4, C1–C4

While numerous studies have explored online learning and ESL instruction independently, a significant research gap remains in studies that specifically address the challenges faced by online ESL teachers working with beginner-level students. Existing literature often focuses on intermediate or advanced learners or examines general online teaching practices without considering the unique needs of starter students (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). Moreover, localized research in the Philippine context that captures ESL teachers' lived experiences in online settings, particularly in public education systems, remains limited.

This gap underscores the need to conduct this study. Beginner learners represent a critical stage in language acquisition, where foundational skills develop, and deficiencies at this level may have long-term consequences for learners' proficiency. Understanding the specific challenges ESL teachers face in online environments will provide valuable insights to improve instructional strategies, inform policy decisions, and design targeted professional development programs.

Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on digital education by highlighting contextual realities in the ASEAN and Philippine settings. By identifying the barriers and opportunities in online ESL teaching, this research seeks to support educators in enhancing the quality of language instruction, ultimately promoting more effective and inclusive learning experiences for beginner students.

This study aimed to identify and examine the challenges of teaching English to starter (zero-English level) st-

udents. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, years of experience, and ESL certifications or professional training?

How may the challenges of online ESL teachers in teaching starter students in an online setting be described in terms of students' comprehension and learning pace, student engagement and motivation, teaching strategies and learning materials, and classroom management?

How may the level of difficulty encountered by online ESL teachers in teaching starter students in an online setting be described in terms of language barriers, technological issues, time management, and feedback and assessment?

Is there a significant difference in the challenges faced by online ESL teachers when grouped by respondent profile?

Is there a significant relationship between the challenges of online ESL Teachers and the level of difficulty they encounter when teaching starter students in an online setting?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the challenges experienced by online ESL teachers when grouped according to their profile variables.

H02: There is no significant relationship between the challenges of online ESL Teachers and the level of difficulty they encounter in teaching starter students in an online setting.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-survey research design using a quantitative approach. The descriptive method was appropriate because the study aimed to identify and describe the challenges and difficulties online ESL teachers encounter when teaching starter students in an online setting. It also examined whether significant differences existed across profile groups and whether a significant relationship existed among the identified variables. The quantitative approach enabled the researcher to collect measurable data using structured questionnaires, which were then analyzed using statistical methods such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, the Mann-Whitney U Test, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test, and the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation.

Respondents and Sampling Procedure

Respondents were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling with voluntary (self-selected) participation (Etikan et al., 2016). The survey link was shared with online ESL teachers, who were encouraged to take part, and participation was open to any teacher who received the invitation. This approach was appropriate because online ESL teachers form a geographically dispersed group for which no complete list exists, so a sampling frame was not available. Inclusion criteria were applied to the responses: only teachers who were (a) currently employed as online ESL teachers, (b) currently teaching starter-level (zero-English-level) learners, and (c) with prior online teaching experience were retained for analysis. We excluded teachers who did not meet all three criteria. Eligibility of the respondents was verified through screening questions on the first part of the survey questionnaire,

The respondents worked for only 1 online ESL teaching platform operating in Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Olongapo City, Philippines, offering online English classes mostly to foreign nationals based in South Korea, Japan, and China. We shared the survey link through social media groups. We collected data from March to April 2026. Because we distributed the form via an open link, we could not determine how many teachers saw the invitation; we received 80 responses, of which 67 met the inclusion criteria, were complete, and were

retained for analysis. We excluded responses that did not meet eligibility criteria or contained incomplete information necessary for the survey questionnaire.

Because the sample was non-probability, no sample-size computation was applicable; the sample size reflected the number of eligible teachers who responded during the data-collection period. A sensitivity analysis indicates that n = 67 gives 80% power ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed) to detect a correlation of about $|rs| \geq .34$, but only large differences between groups, particularly because some categories are small (e.g., nine male teachers and two teachers aged 50–59). The sample is therefore suited to describing this group of teachers' experiences, not to estimating population values for all online ESL teachers.

In this study, starter-level (zero-English-level) learners are learners with no or only isolated prior knowledge of English who cannot yet understand or produce basic sentences without extensive teacher support, corresponding to the lowest proficiency band (pre-A1/below A1) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020). Teacher respondents identified learners as placed and properly classified. The unit of analysis was the teacher's perception. The study did not collect learner and class characteristics—such as learners' age, first language, class size, and the quality of learners' internet access—so it could not statistically test their influence on teachers' experiences. The study treats them as contextual factors in the discussion and in the study's limitations.

Research Instrument

The researchers developed the main instrument as a structured questionnaire, adapted from related studies and literature on online ESL teaching challenges. It had two parts. Part I collected respondents' profile information: age, sex, educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and ESL certifications or training completed. Part II, titled Challenges and Level of Difficulty, examined teachers' perceptions through 32 items in two sections of 16 items each. The Challenges section covered students' comprehension and learning pace, student engagement and motivation, teaching strategies and learning materials, and classroom management (four items each). The Level of Difficulty section covered language barriers, technological issues, time management, and feedback and assessment (four items each). The complete questionnaire is appended.

Responses were given on a four-point Likert scale: 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. A neutral midpoint was intentionally omitted so that respondents had to take a position. Mean scores were interpreted as 3.26–4.00 (Strongly Agree), 2.51–3.25 (Agree), 1.76–2.50 (Disagree), and 1.00–1.75 (Strongly Disagree). For inferential analysis, each teacher's composite Challenges score was the mean of the 16 items in the Challenges section, and each teacher's composite Level of Difficulty score was the mean of the 16 items in the Level of Difficulty section (possible range 1.00–4.00 for both).

Validity and Reliability

Content validity. The draft questionnaire was reviewed by 4 experts: 2 with extensive backgrounds in English Language teaching and faculty in higher education institutions, and 2 with extensive backgrounds in educational research, measurement, and evaluation. The experts rated each item for relevance and clarity using a 4-point scale. The validators' comments were also incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items, and the questionnaire was reviewed by the research advisers before distribution. The revised questionnaire was pilot-tested with 5 online ESL teachers who were not part of the final sample. The researchers also incorporated their recommendations and suggestions before administering the final draft. Due to time constraints, the instrument did not undergo internal consistency analysis; therefore, the instrument's quality rests on expert validation and pilot testing.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers followed a systematic procedure to collect the research data. First, the researchers prepared and submitted a formal request to conduct the study to the appropriate individuals and online ESL communities. Upon approval, the researchers distributed the survey questionnaire through online platforms such as Google Forms and social media platforms commonly used by ESL teachers. The researcher briefed

respondents on the study's purpose and assured them that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary. After collecting the completed questionnaires, the researcher checked, tabulated, and organized the responses for statistical analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher followed proper ethical procedures, ensuring voluntary participation and obtaining informed consent from all respondents before data collection. The study ensured that respondents' identities were not disclosed and that all collected information was kept strictly confidential. Data were used solely for academic purposes, and participants were advised they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Data Analysis

Data were encoded and analyzed using SPSS 26 software version 26. Frequencies and percentages described the respondents' profile. Means and standard deviations described the challenges and levels of difficulty at the item, dimension, and composite levels, using the interpretation scale above. For H01, the composite Challenges score was compared by sex using the Mann-Whitney U test, and by age group, educational attainment, and years of teaching experience using the Kruskal-Wallis H test (df = 3 in each case, as each variable had four categories). Post hoc comparisons were not planned because they are warranted only after a significant omnibus result. For H02, Spearman's rank-order correlation (rs) was computed between the composite Challenges score and the composite Level of Difficulty score across all 67 respondents.

Effect sizes were reported alongside p-values because a non-significant result in a small sample says little about the size of a difference (Tomczak & Tomczak, 2014). For the Mann-Whitney U test, $r = |Z|/\sqrt{N}$ was used, interpreted as .10 small, .30 medium, and .50 large (Cohen, 1988). For the Kruskal-Wallis H test, epsilon-squared ($\varepsilon^2 = H/(N - 1)$) was used, interpreted as roughly .01 small, .06 medium, and .14 large. For Spearman's rs, the coefficient itself was interpreted against the same .10/.30/.50 benchmarks, with the 95% confidence interval obtained through the Fisher z transformation using the Bonett and Wright (2000) standard error, and the shared rank variance (rs^2) reported. All tests were two-tailed, with the significance level set at $\alpha = .05$; exact p-values are reported, and $p < .001$ is used for smaller values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most respondents are in the 30–39-year-old age bracket (62.69%), indicating that participants are primarily mid-career professionals. This age group is often associated with increased professional stability, stronger classroom management skills, and greater adaptability to instructional demands. In ESL teaching, educators at this stage are generally considered able to balance pedagogical knowledge with practical teaching experience. Recent studies emphasize that age and professional maturity significantly influence teaching competence and instructional effectiveness in ESL education. Mid-career teachers are often associated with greater pedagogical confidence, reflective practice, and classroom adaptability.

Profile of the Respondents According to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
30–39 years old	42	62.69
40–49 years old	14	20.9
20–29 years old	9	13.43
50–59 years old	2	2.99
TOTAL	**67**	**100**

A study by TESOL researchers on novice and experienced ESL teachers found that experienced educators have a stronger professional identity and more developed pedagogical knowledge than beginning teachers. Experienced teachers were also better able to adapt instructional strategies and manage classroom challenges

effectively (Pham, 2026). Similarly, research on teacher professional learning programs reported that language teachers who actively engage in professional development demonstrate stronger professional growth and classroom effectiveness as they progress in their careers (Mohamed, 2023).

Results reveal a significant gender disparity, with females comprising 86.57% of the respondents and males only 13.43%. This suggests that the ESL teaching profession in the sampled population is female-dominated, which is consistent with trends observed in both local and international educational settings. Studies at higher education institutions found that women comprise the majority of educators in the ESL and English Language Teaching (ELT) professions because cultural perceptions link teaching to communication and nurturing roles.

Profile of the Respondents According to Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Female	58	86.57
Male	9	13.43
TOTAL	**67**	**100**

A Philippine-based study by Tarrayo et. al. (2021) explored gender perspectives in ELT and found that female teachers remain highly represented in English teaching professions across Philippine higher education institutions. The study further emphasized that gender influences teachers' experiences, participation, and professional opportunities within ESL environments. Moreover, Mashhadlou & Izadpanah's (2021) study examining Iranian EFL teachers found that gender and teaching experience significantly influenced educational performance and professional practices.

Profile of the Respondents According to Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
College Level (Undergraduate)	21	31.34
Bachelor's Degree (Non-Education Major)	19	28.36
Bachelor's Degree (Education Major)	13	19.4
Vocational/Technical Course	6	8.96
Master's Degree	4	5.97
Other Combinations*	4	5.97
TOTAL	**67**	**100**

The table shows that respondents have diverse educational backgrounds. The largest proportion consists of college undergraduates (31.34%), followed by non-education bachelor's degree holders (28.36%), while education graduates account for 19.40% of the sample. This diversity suggests that ESL teaching attracts individuals from various academic disciplines, not exclusively those formally trained in education.

Studies on teacher professional development emphasize that non-education graduates often pursue alternative certification programs such as TEFL and TESOL to gain the pedagogical competencies needed in language teaching. These certifications provide training in communicative teaching methods, classroom management, lesson planning, and learner-centered instruction (Mohamed, 2023). Additionally, contemporary literature highlights that continuous training and professional learning programs help bridge the gap between formal educational attainment and actual teaching practice in ESL contexts (Flores, 2026).

Profile of the Respondents According to Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
More than 10 years	27	40.3
4–6 years	16	23.88

7–10 years	16	23.88
1–3 years	8	11.94
TOTAL	**67**	**100**

A substantial proportion of respondents are highly experienced educators, with 40.30% having more than 10 years of teaching experience. Combined with those with 4–10 years of experience, nearly 88% of participants can be classified as seasoned teachers. This result suggests a mature and professionally experienced workforce. Literature on teacher effectiveness consistently highlights that years of teaching experience contribute to improved instructional practices, classroom management, learner engagement, and pedagogical decision-making. Experienced ESL teachers are generally more adept at addressing diverse learner needs, managing multicultural classrooms, and adapting teaching strategies to varying language proficiency levels (Ulla, 2024). Similarly, studies on language teacher identity development found that years of experience contribute positively to teachers' confidence, professional identity, and instructional decision-making. Experienced educators are often better equipped to implement effective learner-centered approaches and manage multicultural learning environments (Pham, 2026).

Profile of the Respondents According to ESL Training / Certifications

ESL Training / Certification	Frequency	Percentage
ESL Workshops/Seminars	28	41.79%
TEFL Certification	28	41.79%
TESOL Certification	17	25.37%
Teaching License	8	11.94%
Others (IELTS/EF SET)	2	2.98%
Respondents (N)	**67**	—

The professional certification and continuous training remain essential components of ESL teacher development. Recent literature strongly supports the importance of TEFL, TESOL, workshops, and seminars in improving instructional competence and teaching quality. A study by Mohamed (2023) on teacher mentors' perspectives regarding professional development emphasized that educational initiatives and continuous training significantly contribute to teachers' professional growth, instructional effectiveness, and positive teaching attitudes. Research also indicates that ESL teachers who participate in seminars and certification programs are better prepared to implement communicative teaching approaches, integrate technology into instruction, and address diverse learner needs effectively (Zhi & Yang, 2024). Recent systematic reviews also highlight that professional development programs enhance teacher identity, autonomy, reflective practice, and learner-centered instruction in ESL education (Flores, Sánchez, et. al., 2026).

Challenges Of Online ESL Teachers In Teaching Starter Students In Terms Of Students' Comprehension And Learning Pace

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation	Rank
Starter students find it challenging to understand online lessons	3.31	0.66	Strongly Agree	2
Students' progress slowly in learning basic English skills	2.9	0.76	Agree	3
Students have difficulty following instructions during lessons	2.87	0.83	Agree	4
Students require more time and repetition to grasp new concepts	3.52	0.56	Strongly Agree	1
Average Weighted Mean	**3.15**	**0.7**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table presents the challenges online ESL teachers face when teaching starter students online, particularly regarding students' comprehension and learning pace. The statement "Students require more time and repetition to grasp new concepts" received the highest mean (3.52) and a standard deviation of 0.56, indicating "Strongly Agree." This means that teachers believe beginner ESL students need repeated explanations and more time to understand lessons. The low standard deviation indicates that most respondents shared this view. This finding suggests that repetition is crucial for helping starter students learn English online. Recent studies support this, explaining that repetition helps beginner learners improve understanding and language processing. Research by Shi and Révész (2025) stated that repeated activities and explanations improve learners' comprehension and language learning in online classes.

The statement "Starter students find it challenging to understand online lessons" had a mean of 3.31 and a standard deviation of 0.66, interpreted as "Strongly Agree." This suggests that teachers generally believe beginner students struggle to understand online lessons because of limited vocabulary and a lack of face-to-face interaction. This supports Hanifa et al. (2025), which found that beginner ESL learners often struggle to understand online lessons because of unfamiliar vocabulary and limited English proficiency. The statement "Students progress slowly in learning basic English skills" had a mean of 2.90 and a standard deviation of 0.76, indicating "Agree." This suggests that teachers observe slow learning progress among starter-level students. Beginner learners usually need more practice and guidance before mastering basic English skills. Related studies show that language learning takes time because students must gradually develop vocabulary, listening, speaking, and comprehension skills (Li et. al 2025).

Meanwhile, the statement "Students have difficulty following instructions during lessons" had a mean of 2.87 and a standard deviation of 0.83, interpreted as "Agree." This means that students sometimes struggle to understand teachers' directions during online classes. The slightly higher standard deviation indicates that respondents had somewhat different experiences, though their responses remained generally similar. Studies on online ESL learning show that beginner learners often struggle to follow instructions due to language barriers and limited interaction in virtual classrooms (Sun & Zhang, 2024). Overall, the results show that respondents agree that comprehension and the pace of learning are major challenges in teaching starter-level ESL students online. The standard deviation values indicate that respondents had similar experiences regarding these challenges. The findings support recent literature stating that beginner ESL learners need repetition, simple instruction, additional practice, and more learning time to improve their English skills effectively (Shi and Révész, 2025).

Challenges Of Online ESL Teachers In Teaching Starter Students In Terms Of Engagement And Motivation

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation	Rank
Keeping students motivated in online ESL classes is challenging	3.22	0.67	Agree	1
Students easily lose focus during online lessons	3.04	0.66	Agree	2
Students show limited participation during online activities	2.6	0.63	Agree	4
It is difficult to maintain students' active involvement	2.69	0.7	Agree	3
Average Weighted Mean	**2.89**	**0.67**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table presents respondents' assessments of the challenges online ESL teachers face when teaching starter students, particularly regarding student engagement and motivation in online learning. The statement "Keeping

students motivated in online ESL classes is challenging" had the highest mean (3.22) and a standard deviation of 0.67, indicating "Agree." This means that teachers generally find it difficult to keep beginner students motivated during online classes. Beginner learners may quickly lose interest because of short attention spans and limited understanding of the lessons.

Barrot et al. (2021) support this finding, finding that maintaining student motivation and engagement is a major challenge in online English language teaching. The researchers explained that limited interaction and the absence of physical classroom presence affect learners' motivation and participation. The statement "Students easily lose focus during online lessons" had a mean of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 0.66, indicating "Agree." This suggests that teachers observe that starter students are easily distracted during online instruction. This supports Mahyoob's (2021) findings, which reported that online learners often experience reduced concentration due to distractions at home, unstable internet connections, and prolonged screen exposure.

Meanwhile, the statement "It is difficult to maintain students' active involvement" had a mean of 2.69 and a standard deviation of 0.70, while "Students show limited participation during online activities" had the lowest mean of 2.60 and a standard deviation of 0.63; both were interpreted as "Agree." These findings indicate that participation and involvement remain challenges, though they are considered less difficult than motivation and focus. This aligns with Bond and Bedenlier's (2020) study, which found that instructional strategies, teacher presence, and interaction quality influence student engagement in online learning. They emphasized that without strong engagement strategies, students tend to become passive and less involved in online activities. Overall, the results show that teachers agree that maintaining motivation, focus, and engagement is an important challenge in online ESL teaching for starter students. The standard deviation values indicate that respondents had similar experiences regarding these concerns.

Challenges Of Online ESL Teachers In Teaching Starter Students In Terms Of Teaching Strategies And Learning Materials

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation	Rank
Designing effective online activities for beginners is challenging	3	0.7	Agree	3
Available materials are not always suitable for starter students	2.94	0.69	Agree	4
Adapting teaching strategies requires extra time and effort	3.49	0.59	Strongly Agree	2
Need for more interactive and level-appropriate materials	3.52	0.59	Strongly Agree	1
Average Weighted Mean	**3.24**	**0.64**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table presents respondents' assessments of the challenges related to teaching strategies and learning materials for teaching starter-level ESL students online. The statement "Need for more interactive and level-appropriate materials" received the highest mean (3.52) and standard deviation (0.59), indicating "Strongly Agree." This suggests that teachers strongly believe beginner ESL students need more suitable and engaging learning materials. This supports Hassan and Hashim (2021), who found that interactive online tools and engaging learning materials help beginner ESL learners improve vocabulary acquisition, participation, and motivation. The study emphasized that visual and interactive materials effectively maintain students' attention and support language comprehension among young and beginner learners.

The statement "Adapting teaching strategies requires extra time and effort" had a mean of 3.49 and a standard deviation of 0.59, indicating "Strongly Agree." This suggests teachers spend extra time adjusting lessons, activities, and teaching methods to meet the needs of beginner learners. This supports MacIntyre et al. (2021), who reported that online ESL teachers experienced increased workload because they needed to redesign lessons, simplify instructions, and create learner-centered strategies for virtual learning environments.

Meanwhile, the statement "Designing effective online activities for beginners is challenging" had a mean of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.70, indicating "Agree." This means that teachers struggle to prepare online activities that are understandable and engaging for beginner learners. The statement "Available materials are not always suitable for starter students" had a mean of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 0.69, indicating "Agree." This suggests that some available ESL materials may not fully meet beginner students' learning needs.

This finding is supported by Cancino and Avila (2021), who found that online ESL teaching requires teachers to carefully select and adapt learning materials because not all available resources match learners' proficiency levels. The study emphasized that teachers often need to modify materials to ensure clarity, simplicity, and learner understanding in fully online environments. Overall, the results reveal that teachers agree that teaching strategies and instructional materials are major challenges in online ESL instruction for beginner learners. The standard deviation values show relatively consistent responses among respondents, indicating shared experiences regarding the need for better teaching materials and adapted instructional strategies.

Challenges Of Online ESL Teachers In Teaching Starter Students In Terms Of Classroom Management

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation	Rank
Managing student behavior during online classes is challenging	3.3	0.58	Strongly Agree	2
Encouraging active participation online requires extra effort	3.45	0.53	Strongly Agree	1
Monitoring students' understanding is more difficult online	3.07	0.74	Agree	3
Establishing clear guidelines and routines is difficult	2.81	0.68	Agree	4
Average Weighted Mean	**3.16**	**0.63**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table presents respondents' assessments of classroom management challenges when teaching starter-level ESL students in an online setting. The overall mean of 3.16, with a standard deviation of 0.63, indicates that respondents generally agree that classroom management is a challenge in online ESL teaching. This suggests that teachers experience noticeable difficulties in managing behavior, participation, and the flow of learning during online classes.

The statement "Encouraging active participation online requires extra effort" had the highest mean of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 0.53, indicating Strongly Agree. This suggests that teachers find it challenging to get beginner students to participate actively in online lessons. The low standard deviation shows that respondents have similar experiences. The study "Motivation and Engagement in Language Learning" by Iwaniec and Khaled (2024) relates to the finding because it explains that student participation and engagement in language learning depend heavily on motivation, teacher support, and interactive learning environments. Learners are more likely to participate actively when teachers provide encouragement, meaningful interaction, and engaging classroom activities. In online language classes, maintaining engagement is harder because students may feel disconnected, shy, or less motivated to communicate.

The statement "Managing student behavior during online classes is challenging" had a mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 0.58, indicating "Strongly Agree." This suggests that teachers struggle to monitor student behavior in virtual classrooms, where direct supervision is limited. A related study by (González-Lloret, 2021) found that online language teachers struggled with classroom management due to limited visual cues, delayed responses, and students' tendency to disengage during virtual lessons. The study emphasized that managing learner behavior online requires additional teacher effort and structured classroom routines.

The statement "Monitoring students' understanding is more difficult online" received a mean of 3.07 and a standard deviation of 0.74, indicating agreement. This suggests that teachers find it harder to check whether students fully understand lessons online. This relates to a study by Özüdoğru (2021), which found that teachers had difficulty monitoring students' understanding in online classes because they could not easily observe students' reactions, facial expressions, and learning behaviors during lessons. The study found that limited interaction in virtual classrooms impairs teachers' ability to assess whether students understand the discussion immediately. Lastly, the statement "Establishing clear guidelines and routines is difficult" had the lowest mean of 2.81 and a standard deviation of 0.68, indicating agreement. This means that, while still a challenge, it is less difficult than participation and behavior management.

This finding is supported by Almahasees et al. (2021), who found that teachers struggled to establish classroom routines and enforce rules in online learning because students attended classes from different home environments with varying levels of supervision. The study emphasized that virtual classrooms require clearer instructions and more structured management strategies to maintain order and consistency. Overall, the results show that classroom management is a significant challenge in online ESL teaching. Teachers particularly struggle to encourage participation, manage student behavior, and monitor understanding. The standard deviation values indicate relatively consistent responses among participants. These findings are supported by recent studies emphasizing that online classroom management requires a stronger teacher presence, interactive strategies, and a clear instructional structure to maintain effective learning.

Summary of the Challenges of Online ESL Teachers in Teaching Starter Students

Variables	**AWM**	**SD**	**Descriptive Interpretation**	**Rank**
Students' Comprehension and Learning Pace	3.15	0.7	Agree	3
Student Engagement and Motivation	2.89	0.67	Agree	4
Teaching Strategies and Learning Materials	3.24	0.64	Agree	1
Classroom Management	3.16	0.63	Agree	2
Composite Mean	**3.11**	**0.66**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The table summarizes respondents' assessments of the challenges encountered in teaching starter-level ESL students online, including students' comprehension and learning pace, student engagement and motivation, teaching strategies and learning materials, and classroom management. The results revealed that Students' Comprehension and Learning Pace had a mean score of 3.15 and a standard deviation of 0.70, indicating "Agree." This suggests that respondents generally viewed comprehension difficulties and differences in students' learning pace as notable challenges when teaching starter-level ESL students online. The relatively moderate standard deviation suggests respondents shared similar perceptions of this concern, reflecting consistency in their responses. The finding further implies that teachers often need to adjust instructional pacing and provide additional explanations to accommodate learners' varying levels of understanding.

For Student Engagement and Motivation, the computed mean was 2.89 with a standard deviation of 0.67, indicating "Agree." This suggests that respondents acknowledged engagement and motivation as challenges in online ESL instruction, although they were the least prominent among the four indicators. The standard deviation indicates a relatively tight clustering of responses, suggesting agreement among participants. The result implies that while maintaining learners' attention and participation remains difficult in an online setting, respondents considered other instructional concerns more significant.

In contrast, the indicator Teaching Strategies and Learning Materials received the highest mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 0.64, verbally interpreted as "Agree." This finding indicates that respondents agreed that adapting teaching strategies and preparing suitable learning materials are the most challenging aspects of teaching starter-level ESL students online. The relatively low standard deviation reflects consistency

in the respondents' answers. The result highlights the importance of developing effective instructional approaches and appropriate learning resources that match the needs and language proficiency levels of beginner ESL learners.

Meanwhile, Classroom Management recorded a mean score of 3.16 with a standard deviation of 0.63, interpreted as "Agree." This suggests that respondents generally experienced challenges in managing online ESL classes, including maintaining discipline, monitoring participation, and ensuring active involvement during lessons. The low standard deviation indicates that the respondents had similar perceptions regarding this issue. The finding implies that effective classroom management remains essential in creating a productive online learning environment for starter-level ESL students.

Overall, the computed Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 3.11 indicates that the respondents generally agreed that they encounter various challenges in teaching starter-level ESL students online. Among the identified indicators, Teaching Strategies and Learning Materials ranked first, suggesting that instructional adaptation and material preparation are ESL teachers' most pressing concerns. In contrast, Student Engagement and Motivation had the lowest mean score, indicating that although it remains a challenge, it is considered less problematic than the other factors. Furthermore, the standard deviation values of 0.63 to 0.70 indicate a relatively high level of consistency in responses, suggesting that the respondents shared common experiences and perspectives regarding the challenges of online ESL teaching. These findings emphasize the need for enhanced instructional resources, flexible teaching strategies, and effective classroom management practices to improve the quality of online ESL instruction for beginner learners.

Level of Difficulty Encountered by Online ESL Teachers in terms of Language Barrier

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation	Rank
Explaining basic concepts to zero-level students is difficult	3.45	0.63	Strongly Agree	2
Giving clear instructions to beginner learners is difficult	3.28	0.71	Strongly Agree	3
Students struggle to understand explanations in English	3.22	0.62	Agree	4
Communicating with very limited proficiency students is challenging	3.49	0.5	Strongly Agree	1
Average Weighted Mean	**3.36**	**0.62**	**Strongly Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table shows the level of difficulty online ESL teachers encounter when teaching starter students in an online setting, particularly regarding language barriers. The results showed a mean of 3.36 and a standard deviation of 0.62, verbally interpreted as "Strongly Agree." This indicates that respondents generally perceived language barriers as a major difficulty in teaching beginner ESL learners online. Among the indicators, the statement "Communicating with very limited proficiency students is challenging" had the highest mean, 3.49 (SD = 0.50), indicating that teachers experience significant difficulty communicating with students with very limited English proficiency. Similarly, the statement "Explaining basic concepts to zero-level students is difficult" garnered a mean of 3.45 and an SD of 0.63, suggesting that simplifying lessons and ensuring understanding among beginner learners remain challenging for teachers.

In contrast, "Giving clear instructions to beginner learners is difficult" had a mean of 3.28 and an SD of 0.71, while "Students struggle to understand explanations in English" had a mean of 3.22 and an SD of 0.62. These findings suggest that comprehension and instructional delivery remain concerns in online ESL teaching. Furthermore, the standard deviation values indicate that the respondents had relatively consistent perceptions regarding these challenges. The findings support Stephen Krashen's theory, particularly the Input Hypothesis, which explains that language learners acquire language more effectively when they are exposed to

comprehensible input suited to their level of understanding. According to Krashen, beginner learners often struggle when input is beyond their comprehension, making communication and instruction more difficult for teachers (Luo, 2024).

Level of Difficulty Encountered by Online ESL Teachers in terms of Technological Issues

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation	Rank
Internet connectivity problems make online teaching difficult	3.48	0.64	Strongly Agree	1
Technical issues disrupt the flow of online classes	3.46	0.61	Strongly Agree	2
Using online teaching platforms can be challenging (software)	3.19	0.7	Agree	4
Troubleshooting technology problems takes away valuable time	3.34	0.62	Strongly Agree	3
Average Weighted Mean	**3.37**	**0.64**	**Strongly Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table highlights the level of difficulty online ESL teachers encounter when teaching starter students, particularly regarding technological issues. The results revealed an Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 0.64, which were verbally interpreted as "Strongly Agree." This indicates that the respondents strongly perceived technological issues as a major challenge in conducting online ESL classes for starter students.

Among the indicators, "Internet connectivity problems make online teaching difficult" had the highest mean of 3.48 (SD = 0.64), indicating "Strongly Agree." This suggests that an unstable internet connection significantly affects online instruction and communication between teachers and students. Similarly, "Technical issues disrupt the flow of online classes" recorded a mean of 3.46 and an SD of 0.61, indicating that technical interruptions negatively impact the continuity and effectiveness of lessons. Meanwhile, "Troubleshooting technology problems takes away valuable time" garnered a mean of 3.34 with an SD of 0.62, also interpreted as "Strongly Agree." This implies that teachers spend considerable time resolving technical issues rather than focusing on instruction. In contrast, "Using online teaching platforms can be challenging" had the lowest mean (3.19) and an SD of 0.70, indicating "Agree." Although still considered difficult, respondents viewed platform use as a less significant concern than internet connectivity and technical disruptions.

The standard deviation values of 0.61 to 0.70 indicate that the respondents had relatively similar perceptions of the technological challenges encountered in online ESL teaching. Overall, the findings suggest that technological limitations significantly affect the quality of online instruction and may hinder effective teaching and learning among novice ESL students. Moreover, technological issues are among the major difficulties experienced in online ESL teaching. According to the study of Yingxin et.al. (2024) internet connectivity problems, limited technical skills, and lack of technological resources were identified as common barriers in online language learning environments. The study further emphasized that unstable internet connections and technical disruptions undermine the continuity of online classes and reduce the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Level of Difficulty Encountered by Online ESL Teachers in terms of Time Management

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation	Rank
Completing lessons within the allotted time is difficult	2.58	0.84	Agree	4
Time constraints affect the quality of	2.81	0.76	Agree	3

online teaching				
Preparing online lessons requires more time than expected	2.96	0.73	Agree	2
Delays (technical/student-related) make it hard to finish on time	3.21	0.71	Agree	1
AWM	**2.89**	**0.76**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table presents the level of difficulty online ESL teachers encounter in teaching starter students in an online setting, specifically in time management. The results revealed an Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 2.89, with a standard deviation of 0.76, which was verbally interpreted as "Agree." This indicates that respondents generally agreed that time management is a challenge in online ESL teaching. Among the indicators, "Delays (technical/student-related) make it hard to finish on time" had the highest mean (3.21; SD = 0.71), interpreted as "Agree." This suggests that technical interruptions and student-related delays greatly affect teachers' ability to complete lessons within the scheduled class period. Similarly, "Preparing online lessons requires more time than expected" recorded a mean of 2.96 and an SD of 0.73, indicating that online lesson preparation demands additional effort and time from teachers.

Meanwhile, "Time constraints affect the quality of online teaching" had a mean of 2.81 and an SD of 0.76, while "Completing lessons within the allotted time is difficult" had the lowest mean of 2.58 and an SD of 0.84. Although these indicators received lower mean scores than the other statements, the findings still suggest that respondents experience challenges managing instructional time effectively during online classes. The standard deviation values range from 0.71 to 0.84, indicating moderate consistency in responses and suggesting that respondents generally shared similar perceptions of time management difficulties. Overall, the findings suggest that online ESL teaching requires additional preparation time and flexibility because unexpected delays and technical issues may affect lesson delivery.

Muthi'ah et al. (2021) support these findings, revealing that online EFL teachers experienced difficulties with time and class management during virtual instruction. The study emphasized that online teaching requires teachers to spend more time preparing lessons, adjusting instructional materials, and handling classroom interruptions.

Level of Difficulty Encountered by Online ESL Teachers in terms of Feedback and Assessment

Variables	**Average Weighted Mean**	**SD**	**Descriptive Interpretation**	**Rank**
Assessing language skills is difficult online	2.45	0.68	Disagree	4
Online assessment requires more effort than face-to-face	2.78	0.76	Agree	3
Designing accurate assessments for beginners is challenging	3.03	0.63	Agree	2
Technical issues affect the accuracy of student evaluation	3.09	0.69	Agree	1
AWM	**2.84**	**0.69**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table indicates the level of difficulty online ESL teachers encounter when teaching starter students in an online setting, specifically regarding feedback and assessment. The results revealed an Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 2.84 with a standard deviation of 0.69, verbally interpreted as "Agree." This indicates that the respondents generally agreed that feedback and assessment are among the challenges experienced in online

ESL teaching. Among the indicators, "Technical issues affect the accuracy of student evaluation" had the highest mean of 3.09 (SD = 0.69), interpreted as "Agree." This suggests that internet connectivity issues and

technical disruptions may interfere with teachers' ability to accurately evaluate students during online classes. Similarly, "Designing accurate assessments for beginners is challenging" had a mean of 3.03 and an SD of 0.63, indicating that teachers find it difficult to prepare suitable assessment tools for starter-level learners.

Meanwhile, "Online assessment requires more effort than face-to-face" received a mean of 2.78 (SD = 0.76), indicating "Agree." This implies that respondents perceive online assessment as more demanding in terms of preparation, monitoring, and evaluation. In contrast, "Assessing language skills is difficult online" had the lowest mean (2.45; SD = 0.68), verbally interpreted as "Disagree." This indicates that although teachers face some assessment challenges, they generally do not perceive online language-skill assessment as particularly difficult.

The standard deviation values range from 0.63 to 0.76, indicating a relatively consistent pattern of responses among participants. Overall, the findings imply that technological concerns and the development of appropriate beginner-level assessments remain important challenges in online ESL instruction. Consistent with Wannas and AbdelMohsen (2025), although online assessment offers flexibility and learner autonomy, teachers still face challenges related to technology, pedagogy, and student participation. The researchers emphasized that technical disruptions and assessment design issues remain major concerns in online language education.

Summary of Difficulty Encountered by Online ESL Teachers

Variables	**Average Weighted Mean**	**SD**	**Descriptive Interpretation**	**Rank**
Language Barrier	3.36	0.62	Strongly Agree	2
Technological Issues	3.37	0.64	Strongly Agree	1
Time Management	2.89	0.76	Agree	3
Feedback And Assessment	2.84	0.69	Agree	4
Composite Mean	**3.11**	**0.66**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.26 - 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.25 Agree, 1.76 - 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 - 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The Table above shows that respondents generally experienced significant challenges in conducting online ESL classes for starter-level students, as reflected in the Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 3.11, which is verbally interpreted as "Agree." This indicates that the identified factors substantially affected the effectiveness of online ESL instruction. Among the variables, Technological Issues had the highest mean score (M = 3.37, SD = 0.64), indicating "Strongly Agree." This suggests that technological concerns, particularly unstable internet connectivity and limited access to reliable digital tools, were the most serious obstacles respondents encountered. The relatively low standard deviation further indicates that the respondents shared similar experiences regarding these difficulties.

Similarly, Language Barrier ranked second, with a mean score of 3.36 (SD = 0.62), indicating "Strongly Agree." This implies that communication difficulties between teachers and zero-proficiency learners significantly affected the teaching and learning process. The similar mean scores for technological issues and language barriers show that both factors are equally critical challenges in the online ESL environment. In contrast, Time Management received a mean score of 2.89 (SD = 0.76), interpreted as "Agree." This indicates that respondents experienced moderate difficulties balancing lesson delivery, class preparation, and student engagement within limited instructional time. The higher standard deviation suggests slightly varied perceptions among the respondents regarding this challenge.

Meanwhile, Feedback and Assessment received the lowest mean score, 2.84 (SD = 0.69), although it was still interpreted as "Agree." This finding suggests that respondents faced challenges monitoring student progress, providing immediate feedback, and assessing learners' comprehension in an online setting. Despite ranking lowest, the result still confirms that assessment-related concerns remain evident in virtual ESL instruction. Overall, the results indicate that technological limitations and language barriers are the primary challenges ESL teachers face when teaching starter-level learners online, while time management and feedback

mechanisms remain secondary but notable concerns. These findings emphasize the need for improved technological support, effective communication strategies, and enhanced online assessment practices to strengthen the quality of online ESL education.

Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Theoretical Framework

Read against the study's framework, the descriptive results align closely with its constructs. For comprehensible input, the highest-rated comprehension indicator was that students require more time and repetition to grasp new concepts (M = 3.52), and the most difficult language-barrier items were communicating with students of very limited proficiency (M = 3.49) and explaining basic concepts to zero-level students (M = 3.45). This aligns with Krashen's (1982) argument that input must be understandable at an appropriate level, and it shows how difficult that calibration is when learners have almost no English and little visual or physical support online.

For scaffolding and interaction, teachers' strongest agreement in the strategies dimension concerned the need for more interactive, level-appropriate materials (M = 3.52) and the extra effort needed to adapt strategies (M = 3.49), while encouraging active participation (M = 3.45) and monitoring students' understanding (M = 3.07) were also rated as demanding. These results suggest that the guided support described by Vygotsky (1978), and the real-time interaction that Communicative Language Teaching assumes (Hymes, 1972; Richards, 2006), require more deliberate planning in the virtual classroom. Learner engagement had the lowest challenge mean (AWM = 2.89), yet keeping students motivated (M = 3.22) and focused (M = 3.04) remained the leading engagement concerns.

For TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), technological issues were among the most difficult concerns (AWM = 3.37), led by internet connectivity problems (M = 3.48) and technical disruptions to class flow (M = 3.46). The same disruptions were the most common source of time and assessment difficulty (delays, M = 3.21; technical effects on evaluation accuracy, M = 3.09), which illustrates how pedagogical solutions depend on technology working reliably. Taken together with the significant association between challenges and difficulty reported below, these patterns support the view that limited comprehensible input, reduced scaffolding and interaction, and technological constraints compound one another for teachers of starter-level learners online.

Significant Difference in the Challenges Encountered by Online ESL Teachers in Teaching Starter Students When Grouped According to Respondents' Profiles

Profile	Group	Mean	Mean Rank	Test Stat (U/H)	Effect size	p-value	Decision on H_0	Interpretation
Sex	Female (n = 58)	3.11	33.92	U = 256.5	r ≈ .01 (negligible)	0.941	Accept	Not Significant
	Male (n = 9)	3.1	34.5					
Age	20–29 (n = 9)	3.23	41.44	H(3) = 3.705	ε^2 = .06 (small–medium)	0.295	Accept	Not Significant
	30–39 (n = 42)	3.08	32.77					
	40–49 (n = 14)	3.17	35.75					
	50–59 (n = 2)	2.75	14					
Educational Qualifications	Bachelor's	3.15	36.69	H(3) = 2.418	ε^2 = .04 (small)	0.49	Accept	Not Significant
	College Level	3.05	30.33					
	Master's	2.96	26					
	Vocational	3.2	38.17					

Experience	1–3 years (n = 8)	3.11	34.31	H(3) = 1.253	ε^2 = .02 (small)	0.74	Accept	Not Significant
	4–6 years (n = 16)	3.08	32.53					
	7–10 years (n = 16)	3.2	38.59					
	>10 years (n = 27)	3.08	32.06					

According to the Mann-Whitney U test, male (n = 9) and female (n = 58) teachers did not differ significantly in the challenges encountered when teaching starter students online, U = 256.5, p = .941, r ≈ .01 (negligible effect). Because the p-value exceeded the 0.05 level of significance, the researchers accepted the null hypothesis. Both groups had nearly identical mean scores (female M = 3.11; male M = 3.10) and mean ranks (33.92 and 34.50), suggesting similar difficulties in managing online classes for starter learners. With only nine male respondents, however, this comparison has low statistical power; it indicates that no difference was detected, not that the groups are demonstrably equivalent. This finding aligns with Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura (1977), which emphasizes that instructional strategies and environmental factors, rather than gender differences, shape teaching effectiveness and classroom challenges.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed no statistically significant difference in the challenges experienced across the four age groups, H(3) = 3.705, p = .295, ε^2 = .06 (small-to-medium effect). Although teachers aged 20–29 (n = 9) had the highest mean rank (41.44), the differences among age groups were not significant, and the lowest mean rank (14.00) belonged to the very small 50–59 group (n = 2), which is too small to support reliable comparison. Teachers across age groups therefore reported similar challenges in handling online ESL classes, and the null hypothesis was accepted. Correspondingly, Undar et al. (2021) found no significant relationship between age and online teaching readiness, suggesting that educators can adapt to online instruction regardless of age when sufficient support and training are provided.

The findings revealed no significant difference in teachers' perceived challenges across educational attainment groups, H(3) = 2.418, p = .490, ε^2 = .04 (small effect), which is higher than the 0.05 level of significance. This means that the null hypothesis was accepted. Although teachers with vocational backgrounds obtained the highest mean score (M = 3.20), followed by those with bachelor's degrees (M = 3.15), college-level (M = 3.05), and master's degree holders (M = 2.96), these variations were not statistically significant. The result suggests that educational attainment does not significantly influence how teachers perceive the challenges they face in this context, although the master's (n = 4) and vocational (n = 6) groups are small. Regardless of their academic qualifications, teachers tend to experience and perceive difficulties similarly.

The findings support Darling-Hammond's (2021) claim that although higher educational attainment may enhance teaching competence and pedagogical knowledge, it does not necessarily reduce the challenges teachers experience in their profession. External factors, such as insufficient resources, heavy workloads, student behavior, and administrative responsibilities, continue to affect teachers regardless of educational background. Therefore, the study suggests providing equal professional support, training opportunities, and institutional assistance to all teachers to help them manage workplace challenges effectively.

The findings revealed no significant difference in teachers' perceived challenges across years of teaching experience, H(3) = 1.253, p = .740, ε^2 = .02 (small effect), which is higher than the 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. Teachers with 7–10 years of experience obtained the highest mean score (M = 3.20), while teachers with 1–3 years (M = 3.11), 4–6 years (M = 3.08), and more than 10 years of experience (M = 3.08) showed relatively similar mean scores. This indicates that, regardless of teaching experience, teachers perceived similar levels of challenge in the online teaching environment.

The findings also suggest that the difficulties encountered by teachers, such as technological concerns, communication barriers, classroom engagement, and handling beginner-level students, are not solely dependent on teaching experience. Instead, these challenges appear to be inherent to online instruction itself.

Even highly experienced teachers continue to encounter difficulties similar to those of novice teachers when adapting to digital teaching platforms and managing online classroom dynamics. This finding is supported by Trust and Whalen (2021), who found that both novice and experienced teachers faced comparable challenges in online teaching, particularly in integrating technology, engaging students, and communicating during remote learning.

Furthermore, the study aligns with Koehler and Mishra's (2013) findings on the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which emphasizes that effective online teaching requires not only teaching experience but also technological competence and adaptability. This implies that years of teaching experience alone may not guarantee ease in handling online instruction. Therefore, continuous professional development, technological training, and institutional support remain essential for teachers at all experience levels to meet the demands of online teaching effectively.

The findings revealed no significant differences in the challenges encountered by online ESL teachers when teaching starter students across sex, age, educational attainment, and years of experience. Because all computed p-values exceeded the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (H01) was accepted in all categories, and the associated effect sizes ranged from negligible to small-to-medium ($r \approx .01$; $\varepsilon^2 = .02–.06$). This indicates that online ESL teachers in this sample face similar challenges regardless of their demographic profile. Because several subgroups were small, these results should be read as an absence of detectable differences rather than proof that no differences exist. The results further suggest that difficulties related to online teaching, such as language barriers, technological issues, classroom management, and instructional strategies, are broadly experienced among teachers handling starter-level ESL students in an online setting.

Significant Relationship Between Challenges and Level of Difficulty

Variables	N	Spearman r_s	95% CI	p-value	r_s^2	Decision on H_0	Interpretation
Composite Challenges (16 items) vs. composite Level of Difficulty (16 items)	67	0.636	[.45, .77]	< .001	0.4	Reject H_0	Significant; large positive relationship

Note. Spearman's rank-order correlation, two-tailed, df = 65. The 95% CI was computed with the Fisher z transformation (Bonett & Wright, 2000). Interpretation follows Cohen's (1988) benchmarks (.10 small, .30 medium, .50 large).

To test H02, Spearman's rank-order correlation was computed between each teacher's composite Challenges score (the mean of the 16 items on students' comprehension and learning pace, engagement and motivation, teaching strategies and learning materials, and classroom management) and composite Level of Difficulty score (the mean of the 16 items on language barriers, technological issues, time management, and feedback and assessment) for all 67 respondents. The two variables were significantly and positively related, $r_s(65) = .64$, 95% CI [.45, .77], $p < .001$, so the null hypothesis was rejected. By Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, this is a large effect: the shared rank variance ($r_s^2 = .40$) indicates that about 40% of the variation in the ranking of teachers on one composite is associated with the other. Teachers who reported more challenges therefore also reported greater difficulty in teaching starter students online. Because the correlation is bivariate and both measures came from the same respondents at the same time, it does not show that challenges cause difficulty, and shared-method effects may inflate the association. The relationship was tested only at the composite level; relationships between individual dimensions (for example, technological issues and classroom management) were not examined and could be explored in future research.

Limitations of the Study

First, the sample was small (N = 67) and was a self-selected convenience sample of online ESL teachers work-

ing on platforms operating in the Philippines, reached through shared links and online groups. Because the sample is not a probability sample, teachers who were more active online, or more affected by the issues studied, may have been more likely to respond. Second, all data were teachers' self-reported perceptions on a four-point scale, without observational or learner-outcome data. Item means were mostly high with narrow standard deviations (0.50–0.84), which may have limited variability. The questionnaire was newly developed for this study, and its validity evidence is limited to expert content validation and pilot testing. The authors did not compute internal consistency because of time constraints, and they did not examine construct validity. Third, the study did not measure learner and class characteristics that could influence teachers' experiences, namely learners' age, first language, class size, and the quality of learners' internet access. Younger learners, for example, may require different engagement strategies than adult learners; learners who share a first language may be easier to support than mixed-language classes; larger classes may increase classroom-management demands; and unstable internet on either the teacher's or the learner's side would affect the reported technological difficulties. Because the technology items did not distinguish teacher-side from learner-side problems, the source of connectivity difficulties cannot be determined. These variables should be recorded in future studies and, where possible, included in multivariate analyses.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges online ESL teachers face when teaching starter-level students online. The findings showed that most respondents were female, in the 30–39 age group, had several years of teaching experience, and held ESL-related certifications such as TEFL and TESOL. The results suggest that the participants were experienced educators from diverse academic backgrounds who continuously engage in professional development and training. The study revealed that online ESL teachers generally experience several challenges when teaching beginner learners. Among the identified areas, teaching strategies and learning materials emerged as the most difficult concerns. Teachers found it challenging to prepare interactive, level-appropriate, and engaging materials that suit the needs of starter students. Classroom management, students' comprehension and learning pace, and student engagement and motivation were also identified as major concerns. Teachers observed that beginner learners often require repetition, simplified instructions, additional guidance, and more time to fully understand lessons. In terms of difficulty, teachers saw language barriers and technological issues as the most challenging aspects of online ESL teaching. Teachers struggled to communicate with students with very limited English proficiency, while internet connectivity issues and technical disruptions disrupted the flow and effectiveness of online classes. Teachers also found time management, feedback, and assessment challenging, particularly because online instruction requires additional preparation, flexibility, and adjustment.

The findings also revealed no significant differences in the challenges teachers encountered across sex, age, educational attainment, and years of experience, with negligible to small-to-medium effect sizes. This means that, in this sample, the challenges experienced in online ESL teaching are common among teachers regardless of their demographic profile. Whether novice or experienced, male or female, teachers generally faced similar difficulties in handling online classes for starter-level learners, although the small size of some subgroups limits how firmly this can be stated. Moreover, the study found a strong, significant positive relationship between the challenges encountered and the level of difficulty teachers experienced ($r_s = .64$, $p < .001$). This suggests that as challenges in online ESL teaching increase, teachers tend to find it harder to deliver effective instruction, although the correlational design does not establish causation. The findings are based on a modest, self-selected convenience sample and should be generalized with caution. Overall, the study highlights the realities online ESL teachers face when working with beginner learners. The findings emphasize the importance of continuous professional development, improved instructional materials, technological support, and effective teaching strategies to help teachers better manage the demands of online ESL instruction.

Based on this study, the authors describe online teaching of starter-level learners as a distinct context with a consistent challenge profile. This profile did not vary by teachers' sex, age, educational attainment, or experience, suggesting that the difficulties may arise from the instructional and technological conditions of online starter-level teaching rather than from teacher characteristics. Support should therefore address not only individual training but also platform-level provision of level-appropriate materials and reliable technical

support. By aligning comprehensible input, scaffolding, interaction, learner engagement, and TPACK with measurable dimensions of teachers' experience, the study offers a preliminary framework for future research to test and refine, including through psychometric validation of the instrument. Furthermore, the strong association between challenges and difficulty (rs=.64) leaves roughly 60% of the shared variance unexplained, pointing to moderating and mediating factors such as platform support, material quality, class size, and learner characteristics that future studies should examine.

Future research should use a mixed-methods approach to provide a fuller picture of online ESL teaching for beginner learners. In this way, surveys with larger groups of students can help measure patterns in learning outcomes, engagement, and overall effectiveness, while interviews, classroom observations, and group discussions with both teachers and students can provide deeper insights into their lived experiences and challenges. Future studies should also include a larger, more diverse sample of participants, ideally drawn from many platforms using probability or quota-based sampling, and should record learner and class characteristics (learners' age, first language, class size, and internet access) so that their influence on teachers' experiences can be tested, for example through ordinal regression. This could involve learners and teachers from different types of schools (public and private) and from both rural and urban areas. Including a broader range of settings would make the findings more reliable and better reflect the actual conditions of online ESL instruction in different contexts.

Researchers may also examine more closely the coping strategies teachers use to address common issues such as low student participation, limited English interaction, and technical difficulties during online classes. At the same time, it would be useful to compare different online teaching methods, such as live video lessons, self-paced modules, and interactive multimedia activities, to determine which approaches work best for beginner ESL learners. Lastly, conducting longer-term studies spanning several months or school terms could help show how online learning affects students over time, particularly in language improvement, motivation, and continued engagement. Online ESL platform operators and training providers are encouraged to adopt starter-level specific resources, such as visually supported, level-calibrated lesson materials and routines for supporting learners with little or no English, together with technical contingency protocols for connectivity disruptions. Future researchers should validate and extend the instrument and test the moderating role of platform support and learner characteristics.

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