A 2021 Online Workshop for the Review of Two Modules on Methodology for Using English as a Medium of Instruction in Rwanda: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan in China and its rapid spread around the globe, people's life and work styles have changed. Governments have installed and implemented lockdowns, social distancing, and stay home preventive measures that have forced most people to work from their homes. Research units and higher learning institutions were not spared as well. International conferences that were to take place in 2020 were turned into virtual presentations and until recently nothing has changed. To handle the crisis, the University of Rwanda also thought of transforming its work ethos. In this regard a two-phase online workshop was held in January and February 2021 to review two modules produced during a face-to face workshop in October 2021. These were modules on methodologies to help pre-primary, primary and lower secondary school teachers to effectively deliver their subject content through English, the medium of instruction, and promote learners' proficiency in this language. As this online review was the first virtual workshop experience of the kind for most participants, the researchers decided to investigate the opportunities it offered them and the challenges faced. Theories on online work and of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms were used. The research tools were a questionnaire and observations. Graphs were utilised and emerging themes grouped into typologies for data presentation and analysis. The research findings revealed a number of opportunities and challenges. The findings also showed the respondents' potential solutions to these challenges. The proposed resolutions were supplemented by the researchers' recommendations.

1. Introduction

The outbreak and rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world has affected life styles and work-life balance since 2019 (Cancello, Soranna, Zambra, Zambon, & Invitti, 2020; United Nations Development Programme, 2020; United Nations Rwanda, 2020). Due to governments' lockdowns and stay home preventive policies, many private and public servants have been compelled to work from home. Research units and higher learning institutions

around the world were not spared as well. Many international conferences that were to take place in 2020 were turned into virtual presentations and until recently nothing has changed.

In Rwanda, things have not been different. Since the outburst of the disease, many activities have been carried on from home. However, in October 2020, after the alleviation of precautionary measures against this pandemic, some collaborative activities requiring face-to-face encounters were resumed. In a similar vein, the University of Rwanda, through its College of Education, organised a 15 day-workshop from 16th to 30th October, 2020 in Rwamagana District located in the Eastern Province of the country. The workshop aimed at developing two modules on methodologies for using English as a medium of instruction. One module was designed for teachers of Sciences, Mathematics and ICT subjects and the other for teachers of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities subjects. It is assumed that these modules will guide pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary school teachers on how to effectively deliver their subjects content through the medium of English while at the same time catering for their learners' needs in this language. The modules development involved lecturers from the University of Rwanda (UR), pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary school teachers. It was also comprised of officials from Rwanda Education Board, experts from Building Learning Foundations (BLF), and development partners. It was planned that shortly after the modules were developed, they were to be reviewed and amended. However, the second breakout of COVID-19 made it impossible to plan out face-to-face workshops.

To handle the crisis, like anywhere else in the world, the workshop organising team turned the COVID-19 disruptive time into an opportunity for online collaboration. They thought of transforming their work ethos (Corbera, Anguelovski, Honey-Rosés, & Ruiz-Mallén, 2020) thus held a two-phase online workshop with the aim to review the modules produced during the October 2020 in-person workshop. The first phase ran from 27th January to 2nd February, 2021 and the second from 5th to 12th February, 2021. In each phase, all the participants worked at reviewing the module for six days, and for the last two days, three team members were assigned to fine-tune the work.

The above online workshop was the first of the kind to be hosted by the University of Rwanda right after the breaking out of the Covid-19 pandemic. The researchers in the current study (they were also participants in the workshop) then thought it worth carrying out a study to determine the possible benefits and challenges of this workshop to the participants. Benefits could be built on and challenges addressed to make prospective online workshops more successful.

2. Research Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of the study was to determine whether the participants benefitted from the January-February 2021 online workshop and to identify the possible challenges that they were faced with.

The secondary objectives consisted of (1) identifying skills and knowledge the respondents acquired from the workshop, (2) finding out problems the respondents encountered during the workshop and (3) proposing solutions for prospective virtual workshops to be improved.

3. Literature Review

3.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Promotion of Online Working

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the new Corona Virus is a novel infectious disease that has negatively impacted on all spheres of life in most countries of the world (Madianou, 2020). As a response to its fatal consequences, many governments have adopted preventive measures

such as spatial distancing and stay-home policies (Király, et al., 2020) that have given rise to online activities. According to Madianou (2020), the use of digital technology has been predominant since the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. He contends that, in this COVID era, many a people have been compelled to carry out their activities online to adapt to the situation.

Snoyer, O' Brien, and Rodriguez-Keyes (2020) maintain that the COVID-19 pandemic has led nations to rapid implementation of remote learning. According to UNESCO's estimates, around 90% of schools around the world have shut down (Boeren, Roumell, Roessger, 2020), and some, particularly those in developed countries, have switched to online teaching and learning pedagogy. In China, for example, online learning has replaced the traditional face-to-face teaching practice (Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020). In the United States of America, Snoyer et al. (2020) posit that Bachelor of Social Work America teachers and students had online teaching and learning for the first time during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. In India, where many cities have become phantom cities, there has been a shift to online mode from offline mode of pedagogy (Dhawan, 2020). For Dhawan, remote teaching and learning, as a panacea for the COVID-related crisis, would compel even institutions that were reluctant to change to resort to online teaching and learning pedagogy. Dhawan goes on to say that remote teaching and learning pedagogy enables teachers to teach several students at any time and in any part of the world.

In Rwanda, online teaching and learning has also been enhanced since the outbreak of COVID-19. One illustrative example is that of the University of Rwanda (the researchers' employer) where lecturers were requested to deliver their courses online and to upload learning materials on the institution's e-learning platform for students to consult during lockdowns. Even after the resuming of face-to-face classes, this mode of teaching and learning has prevailed. The institution has adopted blended teaching and learning, and lecturers and students are trying to adapt to the system. Other academic activities such as conferences on education-related issues have been held virtually, and online presentations of research projects have been equally given.

Nevertheless, Snoyer et al. (2020) are of the view that, even though students may gain knowledge through remote learning, this mode cannot fully promote interpersonal skills and relationships whereas such skills are of paramount importance in building social work students' sense of belonging, engagement and learning. Their findings indicate that remote learning led to frustration as it made the retention of course concepts low, and the relationships with teachers and peers quasi impossible. The findings also show that online learning prevents teachers from conducting synchronous discussions and students from asking their teachers questions about course content or assignments.

Online information has also been promoted in the health sector. In the United Kingdom, for instance, digital innovation has helped to mitigate health-related harms due to disasters (Madianou, 2020). In Italy, the University of Milan initiated a project known as "#StayHomeStayFit" that taught people strategies to manage weight and stress in time of need (Lucini et al., 2020). Lucini, et. al. argue that several professors at the University of Milan, along with experts from various areas of personal health and wellbeing of the same university, provided the Italian general population with useful and trustworthy information regarding nutrition, physical exercise and fitness activities. Similarly, the Rwandan Government has increasingly resorted to online communication to disseminate health-related issues (Karim et al., 2021; Musanabaganwa et al., 2020). For example, it has been easy to educate the population on ways to help contain the COVID-19 pandemic through online social media, considering that out of 10 million Rwandans own mobile phones (Rwanda Ministry of ICT and Innovation, 2020).

On economic grounds, more and more business transactions have been conducted online since the COVID-19 breakout. In Kenya, for example, the pandemic has increased Kenyan demands for online work as many companies have switched from on-site contracting to remote freelancing in most countries around the world (Banga, 2020). Banga reports that, in E-commerce, some E-commerce platforms such as GoBeba tripled their gross merchandise value three weeks only after the surge of COVID-19 in Kenya. Rwanda has also experienced a rise in digital payment (Carboni & Bester, 2020). Indeed, instead of paying in cash, most people prefer telephone transactions such as Mobile-Money (MoMo) banking, Tigo Cash, Airtime and Eazzy Banking that are made online so as to limit the spread of the New Coronavirus.

According to Boeren et al. (2020), however, lots of people are working from home offices whereas their usual offices are vacant. They argue that one of the consequences of online working is that classrooms remain unoccupied, thus, universities pay cleaners and hire security workers when they are not generating income as they used to. Companies are paying rent, yet buildings are generally nearly empty. The outcomes of COVID-19 also include the cancellation of face-to-face international conferences and other important professional events across the world, a situation that yields risks and opportunities (Boeren et al., 2020).

In Rwanda, like anywhere else in the world, many civil and private servants have been working from home since the outbreak of COVID-19. People are encouraged to hold online meetings, seminars and workshops which might all have both opportunities and challenges.

3.2. Virtual Workshops and Benefits

For long, there has been a trend to move from in-person workshops/conferences to virtual meetings for a good number of reasons (Suduc, Bizoi, & Filip, 2009). The virtual world environment is useful in that it provides new opportunities for collaboration among employees, customers, trainees and trainers to achieve common goals. Workshop members from different locations and different backgrounds have opportunities for engagement and interaction (Eschenbrenner, Nah, & Siau, 2008) without travelling and meeting one another at a specific venue (Suduc et al., 2009).

In education, online writing workshops allow people to interact with others and to acquire new experiences (Eschenbrenner et al., 2008). In time of need, for example throughout the stay home and lockdown period, virtual workshops and conferences made it possible to carry on already planned activities that would not have otherwise taken place (Peters & Tomas, 2021). Online workshops allow to move beyond the conventional in-person approaches and are likely to be sustainable in terms of calamities, time, and money (Ekstrom, Lewis, Waldenström, & Westlund, 2020). As an instance, Peters and Tomas (2021) state that the shift they had from a three-day in-person workshop to a virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed them to increase participation and diversity. They explain that they had a space limitation of 65 in-person workshop, but the virtual workshop helped them in solving this issue and in increasing the number of participants to 205 as well as community engagement.

According to Suduc et al. (2009), a virtual team in given organisations "offers unprecedented levels of flexibility and responsiveness and has the potential to revolutionize the workplace" (p.6). They continue to say that virtual teams help in crossing time, distance and organisational boundaries, and that some allow members "to hold meetings online, and combine voice and video communication with shared computer applications'' (p.7) such as shared whiteboards, and desktop application sharing. In virtual peer review, for example, members exchange documents and feedback online and improve one another's writing that way. During group online peer review, group members think collaboratively, discuss the weaknesses of a work and construct common knowledge faster; they also manage to take control of technologies

(Breuch, 2012). Hence, online workshops may help in improving work quality, information and ideas sharing the feeling of belonging and being in the same place (Suduc et al., 2009). In addition, they are flexible as they can be a mix of asynchronous and synchronous activities (Calongne, 2008).

As far as this study is concerned, in-person workshops were not possible because of the confinement, so the online workshop was the ultimate resort for the fulfillment of the assigned tasks.

3.3. Online Workshop and Challenges

Although online workshops have undisputed advantages, their drawbacks cannot be ignored. According to Peters and Thomas (2021), virtual workshop experience external interferences such distractions or needs and or responsibilities at home and are more tiring than in-person meetings, thus requiring plenty of breaks and attention. Another thing is that not all participants in a virtual workshop have the same digital literacy skills to effectively engage in tasks, nor can they have reliable access to an internet connection (Boeren et al., 2020; Breuch, 2012) or decent working spaces (Corbera et al., 2020). In the academia, online workshops may prevent some students from reaching their goals due to lack of computers and computer-related accessories and this might reinforce the divide between the haves and haves not since vulnerable people do not always have easy access to reliable internet (Boeren et al., 2020; Corbera et al., 2020).

Online workshops, such as virtual peer reviews give rise to a number of complexities including the difficulty in identifying and resolving conflicts online as well as that of managing interaction dynamics (Breuch, 2012). By the same token, Suduc et al. (2009) state that the success of virtual conferences/workshops may be impaired by miscommunication problems, increased conflicts, low cohesion, and noncontributing behavior. Suduc et al. have also identified other shortcomings such as human misuse of web devices; for example, the microphone might be kept on and its background noise might affect the workshop presentations.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Research Site and Participants

The present study involved pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary school teachers, university lecturers and experts from Rwanda Education Board (REB) who participated in the workshop for reviewing the two modules on methodology for using English as a medium of instruction in Rwanda. The researchers also took part in the workshop. As the workshop was virtual, the research participants (N=17) were working from either their homes or workplaces countrywide. To maintain confidentiality, the respondents were labelled R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15, R16, R17.

4.2. Data Collection Procedures

The present study made use of two research techniques: observations and a questionnaire. Observations were made throughout the online workshop from January 27 to February 2 and from February 5 to February 10, 2021. The researchers were participant observers as they were members of the online workshop. They generated data from workshop members' behaviour, all the activities that were conducted, google meet chats and WhatsApp exchanges from a group specifically created for the workshop participants. The questionnaire consisted of three yes/no questions followed by a probing question that required the participants to provide explanations

for their answers. The remaining two questions were open-ended. Participants were given a one-week timeline for providing feedback to the researchers.

Whereas yes/no questions generated quantifiable data, the explanatory part and the open-ended questions helped in gathering qualitative data. Observations provided both quantifiable and qualitative data. The gathered data were inductively analysed.

With regard to ethical considerations, the researchers informed the participants of the rationale for the study and requested their consent by the end of the last plenary. Consent was obtained verbally and confidentiality was guaranteed to the participants shortly after their approval to take part in this study.

5. Results and Discussion

Research findings revealed the benefits that the participants gained from the January-February 2021 online workshop and the challenges they faced. The findings also showed areas of improvements that the respondents highlighted as well as related solutions.

5.1. Online Workshop Benefits

Most of the participants claimed the January-February 2021 online workshop proved to be advantageous. They explained that the workshop equipped them with new skills and knowledge and provided them with other benefits.

Skills and Knowledge the Respondents Acquired. Skills and knowledge are pre-requisites to performing effectively at work. In a virtual setting, team members are also required to own some specific skills and knowledge (Schulze & Krumm, 2017) to produce quality work. In the current study, most of the research respondents lacked or had limited competencies to efficiently participate in the January-February 2021 online workshop. However, findings show that the participants gained some knowledge and skills from other team members as indicated in Figure 1 below.
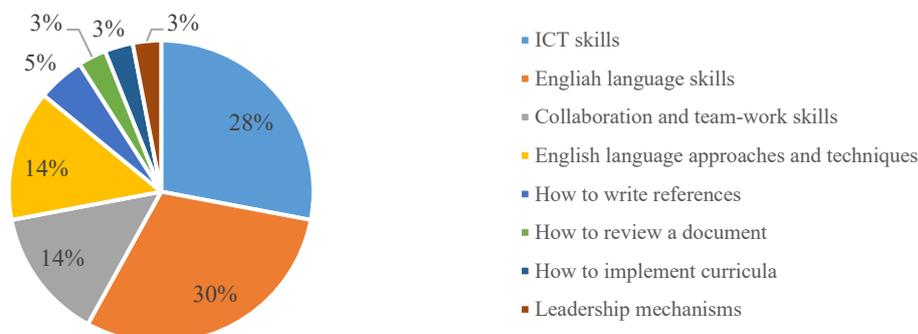

Figure 1. Skills and knowledge that the respondents acquired

As indicated in Figure 1 above, 30% of the respondents (N=11) affirmed that the online workshop enabled them to develop their English language skills. They improved either the four macro-language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) or the English language subskills, namely vocabulary and pronunciation. Findings from the questionnaire reveal, for example, that university teachers gained knowledge of technical terms used at lower levels of education in Rwanda. Evidently, the online workshop enabled team members who were actively engaged in the activity to boost their English proficiency as they were tasked to read the provided modules, to review them, share their observations in plenaries and jointly address their comments. Banditvilai (2016) and Drucker and Fleischhauer (2021) contend that online practice helps in developing the four language skills.

Figure 1 also shows that 28% of the respondents (N=10) improved their ICT skills such as PowerPoint use, screen sharing, and skills needed for Google meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Webex. This aligns with Kanchai's (2021) study that revealed teachers' improvement of computer literacy during online teaching. In a similar vein, Deka and Jena (2017) are of the view that online teaching and learning provides learners with techniques to connect internet, browse online Wikipedia and run the YouTube to acquire knowledge. Nevertheless, although the participants in the current study mentioned different applications, it is only Google Meet that was used throughout the workshop. The researchers wonder, thus, when and how skills in the other applications were developed.

In addition, Figure 1 specifies that 14% of the respondents (N=5) acquired collaboration and teamwork skills. The researchers believe that if all the respondents had been actively involved in the workshop, they would all have been equipped with the same skills. Virtual practices promote participant's collaboration, cooperation and interaction (Deka & Jena, 2017) and teamwork (Kemp, 2006). However, the researchers noted that some respondents pretended to be participating while they were busy doing other things, others left before the due time, and others simply dodged the plenaries.

The chart shows that another 14% of the respondents (N=5) learnt novel English language teaching techniques and approaches, specifically the use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach. In his study, Graham (2019) also noted that collaborating online with experienced colleagues enabled teachers to integrate "new emerging pedagogical strategies" (p.157). The researchers observed that the workshop participants were excited to discover that it was possible to deliver content and at the same time cater for the students' English language needs. The researchers are of the view that if the CLIL approach was well-implemented in schools in Rwanda, it would help remove English language learning barriers that Rwandan learners face, which would promote quality education. In fact, research has shown that Rwandan students have limited English language proficiency that negatively affects their academic achievements (Kagwesage, 2013; Mugirase, 2020; Ndimurugero, 2015; Samuelsson & Freedman; 2010) as well as their performance at work once they have graduated from university (Mugirase & Ndimurugero, 2020).

The figure also indicates that 5% of the respondents (N=2) learnt how to write references and 3% (N=1), how to review a document. It is a fact that some of the teachers who did not do university studies lacked the opportunity to write theses or research papers, so they could not know how to review documents, cite sources and write references. Therefore, the online workshop was a godsend occasion for them to learn all these things as it was research based.

3% of the respondents (N=1) asserted they learnt mechanisms of leadership like conducting a disciplined and productive virtual turn-taking discussion and decision making. FHKPS et al.'s (2021) research findings revealed that online teaching was a good technique that could promote university students' leadership skills. The researchers in the present study assume that, if students can acquire leadership skills through online learning, the same may also be true for participants in an online workshop. For most of the participants, it was their first time to attend an online research-based workshop, so they could learn these skills from the chairs and moderators.

Another 3% of the respondents (N=1) stated that they were informed on how curricula are implemented in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education. In fact, university lecturers who participated in the workshop learnt from pre-primary, primary and lower secondary teachers who elaborated lesson plans and model lessons that were included in the modules. This implies that they could use this acquired knowledge to inform education policy makers on best ways to improve and implement national curricula.

Other benefits. Apart from the above-mentioned knowledge and skills, there are some other benefits that the respondents gained. For instance, R2 and R7 contended that online working enabled team members to save time. As a matter of fact, the online workshop did not require participants to spend hours travelling to bus stops and queueing for buses or being trapped in traffic jams. Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, and Hansen (2021) also hold that online work reduces employees' commuting time. Nevertheless, findings from observations informed the researchers that time was not respected as plenaries often began ten to fifteen minutes late waiting for the quorum to be reached, which caused the meetings to go beyond the planned schedule.

R14 stated that, as the workshop participants could work from home, they were not compelled to travel to their workplaces or to internet cafes looking for internet connection, which kept them safe from contracting the new coronavirus that was spread in the country. Cirrincione et al. (2020) and Erfani et al. (2020) explain that online practices have helped in decreasing the COVID-19 spread. Working from home was also cost reducing for both the workshop organisers and participants. According to Ahn et al. (2021) and Marble, Fulcher, and Toman (2016), online technologies can create cost-effective opportunities. Actually, the organisers did not spend any money on participants' accommodation, transportation and food. They also did not need to rent a meeting room as it used to be the case in normal conditions. Moreover, the participants did not spend any transport fees.

Another advantage is that the respondents enjoyed working from home as they could participate in the online workshop and at the same time address some family issues that necessitated their presence. For Andrade (2021) and Lodovici (2021), telework may allow people to balance between work time and home time. Lodovici adds, however, that online users can be overloaded and fail to set limits between the two.

R6 found the online workshop flexible. With regard to this, findings from observations showed that the time for reviewing the modules was not controlled and participants could work at their own pace and convenient time. Findings also revealed that those who did not manage to finish the allocated tasks were given extra time before the start of the plenaries. Online work offers people flexibility as it allows them to perform their activities at any time and from any place (Al Rawashdeh, Mohammed, Al Arab, Alara, & Al-Rawashdeh, 2021; Songkram, Khlaisang, Puthaseranee, & Likhitdamrongkiat, 2015; Weinhandl, Thrainer, Lavicza, Houghton, & Hohenwarter, 2021).

5.2. Online Workshop Challenges

Although the January-February 2021 online workshop provided the respondents with some opportunities, the research findings disclose that they, but one (R3), also faced a number of challenges that prevented them from fully participating in the activities (see Figure 2).
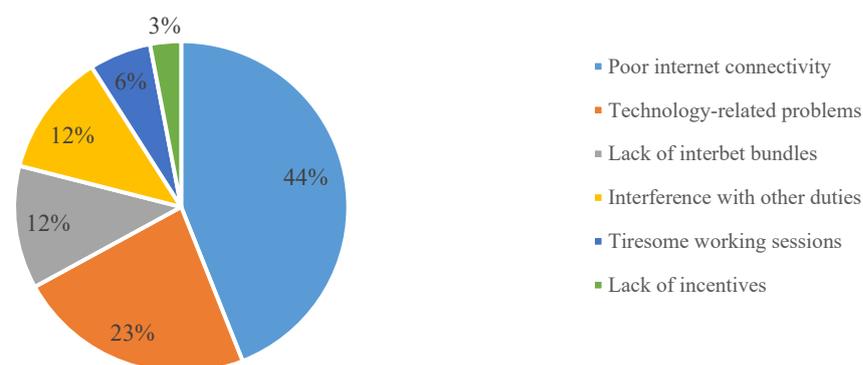

Figure 2. Challenges that the respondents faced

From Figure 2 above, it can be seen that 44% of the respondents (N=15) faced poor internet connectivity. The researchers also observed that the Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) that many participants used was weak in many areas of the country and that the situation was worsened by heavy rains, and regular electricity outage. This constituted a major hindrance to the good running of the workshop. Naik, Deshpande, Shivananda, Ajey, and Manjunath Patel (2021) share the opinion that slow internet connection is a barrier to conducting an online activity effectively. As for Aboagye, Yawson, and Appiah (2021) and Richter et al. (2021), they affirm that having a stable internet connection is problematical in developing countries, and Rwanda is no exception.

Figure 2 also shows that 23% of the respondents (N=7) had technology-related problems. For example, R7 confessed that he failed to manipulate his laptop microphone, so he could not follow other members' comments or give his own insights, and R14's laptop was stuck. Naik et al. (2021) recognise that technological difficulties may hamper quality work. However, R7 deplored the fact that some participants pretended to have technical issues so dodged participation. This concern was shared with the researchers. Other respondents such as R13, R14, and R15 had difficulties entering the meeting room and had to seek guidance from technology-literate team members. Findings from observations equally showed that many participants in the workshop were struggling with technology and there were no IT supporting staff to assist as team members were working from different locations. In fact, it was practically impossible to assign an IT official to each workshop team member. Nevertheless, Baltaci-Goktalay and Ocak (2006) affirm that online users may also resist engaging in activities for fear of looking unskillful.

From Figure 2, it can also be noted that 12 % of the respondents (N=4) had difficulties securing internet bundles. To support this view, 3% of the respondents (N=1) contended that there were financial problems that could not be ignored, so workshop members should have been given some incentives to enable them to reach daily deliverables effectively. Not having sufficient internet data package is an obstacle to carrying out online work successfully (Naik et al., 2021). In line with this, the researchers believe that the workshop organisers should have provided the participants with the necessary internet bundles prior to the start of the workshop rather than issuing them days after the workshop was over.

Figure 2 also indicates that another 12 % of the respondents (N=4) claimed that the workshop coincided with their other duties. For example, one respondent (R11) explicated that the time for reviewing the documents was sometimes too short as he had to attend to other activities. Findings corroborates the claim that the 2021 January-February workshop was organised at a wrong time. In fact, apart from people residing in Kigali who were in total lockdown and could fully participate, other workshop members were busy with their teaching duties. R14 stated that he had to receive visitors and take care of his spouse and children, but the researchers think that this is not a major hindrance that could have prevented him from wholly engaging in the workshop. Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt (2021) suggest that online users may be distracted by other responsibilities, which may hamper performance and reduce productivity.

Lastly, Figure 2 reveals that 6% of the respondents (N=2) found the working sessions tiresome. For instance, R15 complained that he was sitting down the whole day concentrating on the documents to review. He along with R2 denounced the fact that there were no breaks between sessions. Bailenson (2021) and Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt (2021) corroborate the fact workers may experience fatigue resulting from lengthy online sessions. Indeed, there was huge amount of text to read on a daily basis and participants were expected to have reviewed between thirty and forty pages before the plenaries started. Findings from observations also showed that the last two days were very hectic as the plenaries lasted a whole day. People worked under

pressure with the risk of being exhausted and not being performant. Nonetheless, even though the workshop participants were given freedom to review the modules at their own pace and convenient time, it is only those who were committed that faced this challenge.

5.3. Areas to Be Improved and Possible Solutions

The respondents pointed out things that should be improved and proposed possible solutions in order for prospective online workshops to be more successful. These areas of improvements are displayed in Figure 3 below.
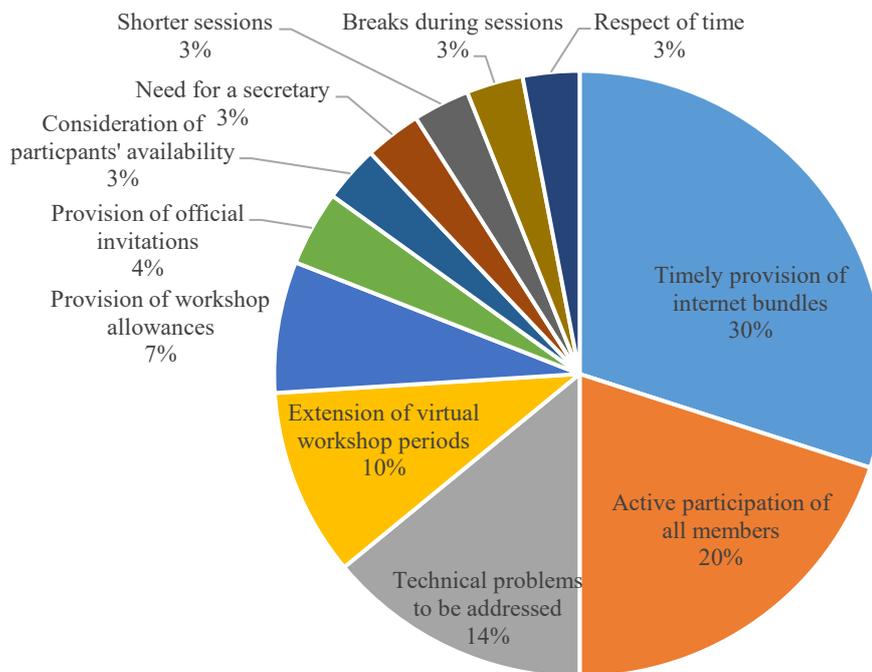

Figure 3. Areas respondents wished should be improved

Figure 3 highlights a number of features. 9 respondents (R1, R4, R5, R8, R10, R12, R14, R15, R17) wished the organisers should avail data bundles before the start of the workshop. 2 respondents (R8, R15) respectively suggested that participants should be given incentives before the start of the workshop to facilitate its smooth run, or else, by the end of the workshop.

According to 6 respondents (R2, R5, R6, R7, R 10, R16), workshop organisers should ensure full participation of all workshop members. 4 respondents (R6, R7, R10, R14) proposed that technical problems should be addressed. R7 believed that installing systems to monitor technical problems pertaining to online communication would make the online workshop more fruitful. R10 wished people with insufficient ICT skills should be assisted.

2 respondents (R11, R16) suggested that more time should be allotted to independent review before plenary sessions. Subsequently, 3 respondents recommended that meetings should not last more than two hours R14), that they should start on time (R9), and that there should be pauses between sessions to allow workshop participants to breathe (R2). In addition, 2 respondents (R4, R15) proposed that a secretary should be appointed to take minutes of inputs from plenaries and provide reports in case participants miss discussions or parts of them due to internet connectivity problems or any other hindrances. 1 respondent (R3) also contended that workshop organisers have to provide official invitations to inform employers so as to avoid conflicts, and another respondent (R12) requested that organisers think of how teachers can participate in the workshop and perform their teaching duties at the same time.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study investigated the benefits and challenges of the January-February 2021online workshop for the review of two modules on methodology for using English as a medium of instruction. These modules were developed in October 2020. Findings indicated that the research participants gained a lot from the workshop and that they were also faced with some challenges.

With regard to opportunities, findings revealed that some research participants gained knowledge and skills such as the four language skills and language subskills whereas others, notably university teachers, got awareness of technical terminologies used in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary school levels. Findings also indicated that some research participants' ICT skills, collaboration and team-work skills were developed, and language teaching techniques and approaches acquired. Furthermore, findings showed that a few research participants got exposure to ways of elaborating lesson plans, reviewing a document and listing references and that other few claimed they acquired leadership mechanisms and time management skills. Findings disclosed other benefits such as the latitude to work at one's own pace and convenient time and the creation of cost-effective opportunities for both workshop organisers and participants.

Concerning challenges, findings indicated that the research participants faced a number of challenges such as weak or poor internet connectivity and regular electricity outage that either interrupted or obstructed the smooth running of the online workshop. Findings also showed that some research participants had limited computer skills that prevented them from manipulating their computers effectively or from joining others in the meeting room as no IT supporting staff had been availed. Findings revealed other challenges that include lack of provision and difficulties in securing internet bundles, the concurrence of the online workshop with some members' usual teaching duties, and tiresome plenary sessions that would affect members' state of health.

Not only did the findings show the opportunities that the online workshop offered and the challenges members faced, but they also revealed areas of improvement. According to findings, some respondents claimed for the availability of data bundles and /or incentives prior to workshops or by their end to ensure members' full participation. Others wished there ought to be monitoring of technical problems related to online communication and support to people with limited ICT skills. Furthermore, the respondents suggested the allocation of more time for independent review, pauses between plenary sessions, minutes taking to update workshop members who could not attend plenaries due to connectivity issues or other impediments, official invitation letters prior to workshops, and the consideration of teachers' timetable. Regarding the evoked problems, the researchers also recommend workshop organisers to train their prospective participants and equip them with necessary computer-skills prior to workshops, inquire about the type of internet bundles the participants need and provide them right at the beginning of workshops.

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